

Gratitude Journaling

© 2010 by Neil F. Neimark, M.D.

www.TheBodySoulConnection.com

Keeping a gratitude journal helps us change perceptions and overcome natural inclinations toward the negative in our lives. Focusing each day on that for which we are grateful strengthens and empowers our “positivity” muscle.

Gratitude increases as we give it away.

Gratitude is one of those special forces in life that increases as we give it away. Most things in life diminish as we give them up. For instance, if we have a cherry pie and give away a quarter of it, we are obviously left with less than our original whole. Gratitude, though, is different.

Gratitude is an energy of the spiritual realm, similar to the flame of a candle. As we “give away” our flame by lighting other candles, the amount of light—or gratitude—we experience increases. In fact, with our single flame we can light an unlimited number of candles, helping illuminate the world around us. The more for which we are grateful—that is, the more we “give away” our flame—the

greater the light we have to see the many wondrous miracles in our lives.



Once upon a time, two farmers, both poor, were walking along an old country road when they passed by their beloved Master.

To the first farmer, the Master endearingly said, “Times are tough, my dear friend. How are you doing?” “Awful,” replied the farmer. “The economy is bad. I barely have food for my family. And it looks like the rains will never arrive. Life is lousy.”

Now God happened to be eavesdropping on this conversation and thought to himself, “Lousy, eh? You think your life is lousy now. I’ll show you what lousy is!”

The Master then asked the second farmer, “So, my friend, how are you doing in these difficult times?” “Great, Master! Things couldn’t be better. Every day brings new joy and blessings with my friends and family. I’m so grateful for the gift that each day brings, for I know, rain or shine, all will unfold as God, in his infinite greatness, knows best.”

The man’s deep gratitude soared into the celestial spheres to resonate with the harmony of the heavenly hosts. God, hearing the farmer’s gracious response, smiled with delight, “Good? You think your life is good now? I’ll show you what good is!”

*(This story is adapted from *The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude* by Sarah Ban*



We express our gratitude in words and deeds.

We express our gratitude—light another’s candle—in two ways: through words and through deeds. Gentle and encouraging words of thanks, praise or appreciation touch the heart of another, igniting their flame, enlightening their life. Charitable deeds and acts of loving kindness, through the fire of their intent, also light another’s candle.

The esteemed author and Chassidic teacher Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, in his book *In The Garden of the Torah* (p. 133), teaches this Talmudic passage:

“A person who gives a coin to a poor person is granted six blessings; one who gratifies him is blessed elevenfold.”

(Talmud: Bava Basra 9b)

What we mean by “gratifies” is giving a person a positive feeling about themselves—showing that we truly care about them as fellow human beings. Though giving charity to the poor is an admirable expression of gratitude, conveying a deep sense of appreciation

and love for another displays a form of gratitude that returns even greater blessings.

We must show gratitude through both *deeds*: giving to the poor and needy, helping the elderly cross the street, visiting the sick in the hospital; and through *words*: telling others we love them, expressing our appreciation to friends and speaking kindly toward others. We may also express our gratitude to God through both deeds: following His commandments, studying his word, practicing kindness and charity toward others; and through words: praising God through prayer and meditation for all the goodness he bestows upon us.

In the Old Testament there is a ritual called the “offering of the first fruits.” (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) This ritual was instituted to show gratitude for the good that God has granted us—not only material good, but also the goodness of his love and care. At the first harvest, people would gather a portion of their fruits as an offering to be made at the holy temple, making a long and arduous journey to express their thanks to God. This ritual symbolizes that gratitude is expressed not only through words of praise, but also through deeds requiring physical movement or exertion. How would our lives be if we instilled this kind of gratitude into our daily routine?

In commenting on this ritual, Rabbi Schneerson says, “Every aspect of our

lives can become an offering of first fruits, an expression of thanks to God for His goodness.” He further says that “feelings of gratitude are enhanced by our prayerful, conscious meditation on the manifold blessings we enjoy.”



Once upon a time, a great Master was given the opportunity to visit God in the heavenly spheres. When he arrived, he was shown a large room filled with great treasures and jewels. “What is this for?” inquired the Master. “This,” replied God, “is one of my heavenly storehouses of Divine Reward. This particular one is for those who study my word in the Bible.” The Master was then taken to another room, filled with even more treasures than the one before. “Who is this one for?” asked the Master. “This one,” said God, “is for those who perform acts of loving kindness.” Then, the Master was taken to an enormous room, overflowing with the most magnificent treasures he had ever seen. With a great sense of wonder, he inquired, “Dear God, who is this immense storehouse of Divine Reward for.” “This room,” God lovingly replied, “is for those who lack merit. It is free for all those who ask.”

In commenting upon this story, the sages explain that those who base their claim to Divine Reward on their merits alone unnecessarily limit their entitlement. In truth, all our good deeds and kindnesses are insignificant in comparison to the undeserved favors God bestows upon us each and every day. When we come to God with our entreaties for undeserved gifts, we draw upon the largest storehouse of all. It is not limited by our own merits, but is dispensed according to God’s beneficent

will. Gratitude costs us nothing, but enriches us beyond measure.

(This story adapted from *Pirke Avot: The Wisdom of Our Fathers*, Mesorah Publications, Ltd.; the Master is Moses.)



True wealth is gratitude.

In speaking of gratitude as an expression of the richness of life, the Sages of the Talmud ask, “Who is rich? He who is happy with what he has.” (Pirke Avot 4:1)

When we consider that our appetites and needs are endless and insatiable, we realize the profound truth of equating wealth with being happy with what we have—that is, being grateful for what we have. Our desires spring from an eternal well, as deep as the thirst for life itself. If we base our happiness on what we may one day achieve, acquire, conquer, master or tame, we will never know fulfillment in the present moment. Inner peace is only available when we realize the absurdity of waiting for the next job, the next car, the next promotion or the next relationship to be happy. True wealth is gratitude. Our ability to appreciate all the gifts we have is essential for emotional and spiritual peace.

Make a list of all you have to be grateful for.

Keeping a gratitude journal is simple. Just start listing all the things you

have to be grateful for. Here are some examples:

A hot shower in the morning, fresh water to drink, air conditioning on hot days, friends and family that love me, a good laugh, an inspiring movie, a car that gets me from here to there, a lesson learned or a great book to read.

This list is like a financial statement in the spiritual world. It is an accounting of our spiritual net worth. Amazingly, we can increase our spiritual riches by the mere act of appreciating what we have. If you could, by placing your appreciation on a twenty-dollar bill, cause it to multiply into two twenty-dollar bills, would you do it? Of course you would! In the spiritual world, such wealth is possible. By focusing our appreciation on what we already have, our wealth multiplies.

Here are some questions to help you focus on what you have to be grateful for.

In addition to listing the things you have to be grateful for, when you are facing difficult times and emotional setbacks, try answering the following questions to help you focus on the wonderful things you have to be grateful for. As you focus on what you already have, watch your spiritual wealth multiply.

- ◆ What can I learn from this?
- ◆ How can I grow from this?
- ◆ What is the blessing in this?
- ◆ What can I take from this that empowers me?
- ◆ What is the opportunity for me in this?
- ◆ What possibilities does this open up for me?
- ◆ What is the most loving thing to do in this situation?
- ◆ What am I grateful for?

Investing five minutes a day writing in your gratitude journal will bring you treasures far beyond any 401K or retirement plan.

Gratitude transforms the simple into the sacred. Gratitude gives us more even when we have less than we want. Multiply your spiritual and emotional wealth now by starting your gratitude journal.