

**RELIGION  
OUTSIDE  
THE BOX**

**RELIGION OUTSIDE THE BOX PRESENTS**

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**MEANINGFUL  
TALKS  
ON TOPICS THAT  
MATTER**

**RABBI BRIAN'S**

# **Gratitude**

**Religion-Outside-The-Box  
Rabbi Brian Zachary Mayer**

# Introduction

These are 'notes' from the **Religion-Outside-The-Box** teleseminar that was held on October 22, 2011 there was a gathering by telephone and computer to talk about gratitude.

This is not a transcript. These notes touch upon the ideas discussed in the call, and have been edited so you could enjoy them and put them to use in your everyday life.

## ***A few things to know:***

1. A list of quotes follows this introduction. Please do not skip them. Read them. Read them slowly. See which one (or ones) resonate with, inform, or upset you
2. The style of these notes is chatty, informal. Punctuation marks are used, but not as I was taught to use them – instead, they're used to reflect the way I talk.
3. I've included a few exercises that will help you deepen your understanding and application of gratitude. I **beg** of you to do them. If I ask you a question, go ahead and answer it aloud. (Sure, you might feel self-conscious in doing so, but being self-conscious is actually a most excellent thing – a good, observing ego is the route to enlightenment and consciousness.) The real reason to do these exercises is to learn something. As with most endeavors in life, “the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.”

With love,

-Rabbi Brian

# Quotes

## Definitions of Gratitude

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.  
Cicero

Gratitude is one of the least articulate of the emotions, especially when it is deep.  
Felix Frankfurter

The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude.  
Friedrich Nietzsche

Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse.  
Henry Van Dyke

Gratitude is the most exquisite form of courtesy.  
Jacques Maritain

Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul.  
Henry Ward Beecher

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.  
Carl Jung

Gratitude is one of those things that cannot be bought. It must be born with men, or else all the obligations in the world will not create it.  
Edward F. Halifax

Gratitude is a duty which ought to be paid, but which none have a right to expect.  
Jean Jacques Rousseau

## **Types of Gratitude**

Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.

Karl Barth

Silent gratitude isn't very much to anyone.

Gertrude Stein

Alas, how quickly the gratitude owed to the dead flows off, how quick to be proved a deceiver.

Sophocles

Friendship based solely upon gratitude is like a photograph; with time it fades.

Carmen Sylva

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

Albert Schweitzer

## **Who has Gratitude**

Gratitude is a fruit of great cultivation; you do not find it among gross people.

Samuel Johnson

The public have neither shame or gratitude.

William Hazlitt

It's a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with moderation.

Roberto Benigni

Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.

Aesop

You can tell the people who God has blessed – they walk with a smile on their face.

Dan-the-God-Man

No one is as capable of gratitude as one who has emerged from the kingdom of night.

Elie Wiesel

## **What Gratitude does**

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.

Melody Beattie

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Melody Beattie

Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.

Margaret Cousins

Gratitude among friends is like credit among tradesmen: it keeps business up, and maintains commerce. And we pay not because it is just to discharge our debts, but that we might the more easily find lenders on another occasion.

François, Duc De La Rochefoucauld

Gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Gratitude helps you to grow and expand; gratitude brings joy and laughter into your life and into the lives of all those around you.

Eileen Caddy

Gratitude to gratitude always gives birth.

Sophocles

## **Bad Gratitude**

Gratitude ... is a sickness suffered by dogs.

Stalin

Next to ingratitude the most painful thing to bear is gratitude.

Henry Ward Beecher

Maybe the only thing worse than having to give gratitude constantly is having to accept it.

William Faulkner

Gratitude is a burden upon our imperfect nature, and we are but too willing to ease ourselves of it, or at least to lighten it as much as we can.

Philip Dormer Stanhope

When the gratitude that many owe to one discards all modesty, then there is fame.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Gratitude—the meanest and most snivelling attribute in the world.

Dorothy Parker

Charity never humiliated him who profited from it, nor ever bound him by the chains of gratitude, since it was not to him but to God that the gift was made.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Conservatism makes no poetry, breathes no prayer, has no invention; it is all memory. Reform has no gratitude, no prudence, no husbandry.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Power takes as ingratitude the writhing of its victims.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **How to have Gratitude**

Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful.

Buddha

# Gratitude

## Welcome

We began our discussion on gratitude by exploring an idea that seemed unrelated – but as you’ll see, it *is* related.

We started by talking about what it means to feel **welcomed**. How do you feel when you are welcomed into a group? Is it the responsibility of the person leading the group to make us feel welcomed? Or is “feeling welcomed” something internal that we could bring with us to any situation? Feeling welcomed has to do with feeling like we belong.

So what does this have to do with gratitude? Simply this: after we say, “Thank you” to somebody the usual response is “you’re welcome.” If we feel properly thanked, whether we understand what it is we’re saying or not, we ‘welcome’ the other... making them feel like they belong.

*Spiritual-Religious Idea:*

**See if you can’t figure out how to bring a sense of “welcome” with you wherever you go.**

## The word itself

**GRAT•I•TUDE** [Middle English, from Old French, probably from Late Latin grtitd, from Latin grtus, *pleasing*.] The state of being grateful; warm and friendly feeling toward a benefactor; kindness awakened by a favor received; thankfulness.

### Similar words

- ❖ Gratis
- ❖ Gratuitous
- ❖ Gratuity
- ❖ Ingrate
- ❖ Congratulate

Is gratitude the state of being grateful? Is it *only* the warm and friendly feeling towards a benefactor? Sometimes it may be difficult to identify when gratitude is actually there.

The word “gratitude” contains the root word that is common to the following words: “Gratis,” “Gratuitous,” “Gratuity,” “Ingrate,” and “Congratulate.” Interesting, huh? Gratis means “without charge or cost.” Gratuitous means “something not needed.” Gratuity is a small gift in exchange for something, usually a service. An ingrate is a person “without gratitude.” And the prefix “con” means “with” – so “to congratulate” someone literally means “with thanks.” (Who knew?)



# When do we have gratitude?

## *Attitude + Circumstances*

Do you have gratitude when someone commands you to be grateful? No, gratitude cannot be commanded... “Be grateful” is hardly an order that is well received. For it to be real (and not just a perfunctory “thanks”), gratitude must originate from one’s attitude. (More on this later.)

We have gratitude, obviously, when we feel thankful for something... but are there times that we tend to have more gratitude than others?

For some, mornings are filled with more gratitude. For others, evenings – when people were looking back on their day at bedtime – are times of greater thanks. (Take a look at the Buddha quote again.)

But how about overall? Are there life circumstances that give us a sense of more thankfulness than others?

On a whole, experiencing a rough time gives us more of a sense of gratitude. Having just survived something traumatic helped us to put our priorities in better order and helped us to feel gratitude for even the simplest things.

After a tragedy, after surviving an accident or an illness, after seeing demolition, death, war... we usually felt more grateful.

We also found that the misfortune of others gave us gratitude. There’s an old saying: **I was sorry that I didn’t have new shoes until I saw the man with no feet.**

## *When we see people with more...*

The exact opposite of gratitude is also possible. The fortune of others can create envy in us. It’s when we see people having things that we want. Seeing

people who have more than what we have, tends to arouse that childlike (and very human) voice inside that says, “Hey, I want that!” Advertisements for cars, medications, tropical destinations, and even fast food fill us up with the false notion that we do not have enough, that we are not enough... and this keeps us from feeling content or grateful.

## **A bit of a tangent about wanting...**

We want stuff because it gives us a temporary sense of being filled up. We want stuff because we have this notion in our head that “we are what we have.” We want stuff, because *sitting with not wanting* is really, really hard.

This next section is a bit of a tangent away from gratitude and more of an apology for our very human desire to acquire stuff, which keeps us from expressing gratitude for what we already have.

We’re all miserable because life is hard, and because someday we’ll die and lose our precious sense of self. Really. For the most part, we don’t want this to be true. American consumerism offers a promise that things can be better with stuff. (Or stuff can be better with things.)

And, so, wanting to fill the voids, the empty holes in our lives, we ‘buy-in’ to this philosophy. The only problem is when you realize, “Hey, this is bullshit! This doesn’t work.”

Much of the time, “Hey this is bullshit” is followed by a round of “What was I thinking?” and “I would feel better not to think about this” and “I feel terrible now, and a bit alone.”

So what do we do to feel better? Like drug addicts, the only answer seems to be more of the drug... Buy more, want more...

What's the other option? Sitting with that bad feeling. Sitting with it, and not shopping it away. Just being present with it. (This is much harder, but probably the right path.)

## **Gratitude lists**

Do you know what a gratitude list is? It's a very simple thing. Every day for the next week, list 10 things you're thankful for. (Rules: there are no rules. If you want to do this in the morning, go for it. If you want to do it at night, awesome. It doesn't matter. But please, either say each thing out loud or write it down... just thinking about it doesn't work as well. Really.)

Judaism suggests that people say 100 blessings a day... which isn't a bad idea. Watch this...

Notice how you're feeling right this moment...

Now, list out five (5) things for which you are grateful.

- ❖ 1.
- ❖ 2.
- ❖ 3.
- ❖ 4.
- ❖ 5.

Really, do this. (These little experiences don't work if you don't have the experience.)

Now notice how you feel. Gratitude is a bit contagious. If you start listing out what you feel grateful for, you will begin to feel grateful.

## ***Magitude™***

I hired a PR guy at one time to promote ROTB. It didn't work out so great. But I did learn a great trick from him that I now call **magitude**. It's a portmanteau (combining) of the words "magic" and "attitude." Here's how you do it. Think of the thing that is most annoying in your life right now. One thing. Now, state aloud, "I am grateful that ...." and fill in the blank with the thing you had been resentful about. Try it. See if that **magitude** doesn't instantly transform the annoying thing into something less troubling... at least for a moment.

## ***Homework on when to have gratitude***

I'm usually reluctant to tell you what to do. I'm making an exception here. For the next week, I want you to come up with 70 things for which you are thankful. 10 things a day for 7 days. Here's how: Let's go with 2 things from the time you get up until you put on clothes, 3 things to be grateful for at lunch, and another 3 at dinner. That's 8. Now, 2 others when you're in the bathroom. (Hey, if you don't think your body's ability to work with fluids in, fluids out / solids in, solids out, is something to be grateful for, you'd better rethink that.) That's 10. See how it goes. Let me know.

## ***The other side... making resentment lists***

In business there's a saying: "You can't manage what you don't measure." From this comes the idea of the *opposite* of a gratitude list – resentment lists. This relates to the notion of magitude, but it's a little different. Now we aren't going to "reframe" our annoyances as blessings. This time we are just going to list out our annoyances and resentments in order to get them out of our heads and onto a piece of paper so that we no longer need to carry them around with us in our minds. So, give it a whirl...

List out five (5) things about which you are resentful.

- ❖ 1.
- ❖ 2.
- ❖ 3.
- ❖ 4.
- ❖ 5.

How does it feel to take an inventory of these things you resent? Now that you're aware of them, you can begin working on them.

## **What determines gratitude?** (answer: Attitude)

As we've learned above, we can feel more gratitude by looking at people who have less than we do (as opposed to more), or by practicing being thankful on a daily basis.

Aren't those things in our control? Can we not control our environment or learn to do so?

What makes us look at the glass as half-filled as opposed to half-empty? It's the same glass... so what's different? The simple answer here is this – *and while it might seem cliché*, **our gratitude is dependent on our attitude.**

That's it. Our *attitude* is what determines how much gratitude we experience.

NOTE: the word "attitude" has its roots in the word, APTITUDE. Isn't that awesome? We have an inherent ability to choose the way we think about and view our world. We are capable of changing our attitude, and thus our gratitude...

**Watch this --->**

Our **happiness** (gratitude / equanimity / peace / whatever you want to call it) can be defined as **reality minus expectations**.

I've just snuck in the notion that gratitude and happiness are synonymous.

Can you think of a situation where someone is happy but not grateful? Or grateful but not happy? It's rare, if not impossible.

This substitution of happiness for gratitude, leads me to this:

$$\diamond \text{ HAPPINESS} = \text{REALITY} - \text{EXPECTATIONS}$$

A simple mathematical formula:  $H = R - E$ . Happiness = Reality – Expectations.

Note: negative expectations do eventually become positives. What I mean is that if you expect things to be negative, and those expectations are not met, that's a good thing, right? [Note: I don't recommend living a life filled with negative expectations. You might end up being proven right.]

Here's the really cool part of this... all parts are determined on our attitude... something over which we have at least a modicum of control.

$$\text{perceived HAPPINESS} = \text{perceived REALITY} - \text{perceived EXPECTATIONS}$$

Our perceived happiness (after all, happiness is only what we perceive) is defined by how we perceive reality to which we subtract our perceived expectations. Moreover, the goal of gaining wisdom is to learn to accept reality as it is and to lose our expectations...)

***Polly and Pangloss –☺– the delusional, shadow-less, happy people***

There are people who take happiness too far, so I must caution you to be careful.

There are some people who pretend they ought to have gratitude at all times... and many of us (all right, I'm talking mainly about myself here) buy into a belief that *we should* be able to look at any bad situation and focus so strongly on the silver lining that the "bad" part disappears. Pollyannas (invariably and unrealistically optimistic women – based on the 1913 novel of the same name) and Panglosses (invariably and unrealistically optimistic men – from Voltaire's satirical novella, *Candide*) are people who refuse to accept that there is anything but that for which gratitude is appropriate. "People without shadows," as my darling Jane calls them – "watch out for them."

Let me give a personal example. One day I was stuck in terrible traffic. The delay afforded me the opportunity to see a terrific tree which I usually, at 40-60 miles per hour, never noticed... but I found that I was trying too hard to 'turn the situation around,' telling myself I oughtn't be angry when in fact I was very angry. In the past I've written about and spoken about this problem. I call this type of denial "spiritual self-violence." Accentuating the positive is one thing. Pretending that nothing else exists is another.

## **Other Thoughts**

### ***Love ≠ Gratitude***

Loving someone or something is not the same as having gratitude for them. The two are not synonymous.

### ***Conclusion***

I am very grateful that you have taken the time to read these notes. And, let me leave you with a charge. Please, please, take one idea that you liked – one thought about gratitude that you want to muse about – and talk to someone about it. My contention is that people don't want to do more small talk – they

want to talk about these big ideas. And, the more people who are talking meaning about topics that matter, the better.

If you liked these notes and aren't already a member of rotb.org, let me encourage you to go to [www.rotb.org](http://www.rotb.org) and sign-up for the absolutely FREE newsletter.

Feel free to share your responses or questions with me at [rabbi\\_brian@rotb.org](mailto:rabbi_brian@rotb.org).

I do hope that you might be able to join us on the next of our monthly teleseminars: **Meaning Talks on Topics That Matter.**

With love,

Rabbi Brian