

Biblical Stress Management Times

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"I am grateful to You, living, enduring King, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure."

- Siddur Sim Shalom (Prayer book)

"Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion."

- Pirkei Avot 4:1

Dear Readers,

With Thanksgiving coming up on Thursday, I wanted to highlight the Biblical Stress Management technique called Gratitude. In Judaism, "giving thanks" is an important concept. We recite the "Modeh Ani" every morning when we wake up. The prayer goes:

"I am grateful to You, living, enduring King, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure."

We say blessings of gratitude and thanks for everything we do, from waking to sleeping and everything in between, especially eating!

In Biblical times, the ancient Israelites would bring a portion of their fall harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem as a sacrifice, and then gather with their families in booths (commemoration of their forty years of wandering in the desert before entering the Land of Israel) to feast on their portion of the harvest. This celebration of Gratitude known as Sukkot has been celebrated for over 3,000 years.

There are many people who believe that the original Thanksgiving meal of the Pilgrims of New Salem, Massachusetts in 1621 was a copy of the Sukkot festival celebrated by the ancient Israelites of Jerusalem. It is known that the Pilgrims were so moved by the stories of the ancient Israelites that they thought of America as their Zion and New Salem as their Jerusalem.

But how is gratitude a part of stress management? Many of us get all stressed out when comparing ourselves to others. We elevate other people and their accomplishments and devalue our own. It is an unfortunate part of the human condition but it is a part we can conquer. One of my favorite sayings from Pirkei Avot – Sayings of the Sages, is "Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion." (Mishna Avot 4:1). Many stress educators tell their students to simplify their lives. In many ways, the more that you own, the more it owns you. When we are able to see that each person has been created in the image of the divine presence and that keeping up with /comparing ourselves to the Jones' and Schwartzes' is counter productive to happiness, then we can truly look at our lives and be thankful for everything in it.

What are you grateful for? Write down a list and keep it with you. Refer to it when you start to feel stressed and notice the positive changes that happen to your body, your emotions, and your outlook when you feel gratitude. At the Thanksgiving table this year, ask your friends and family what they are grateful for. It might just surprise you. I know I'm grateful for all the people in my life. If I haven't told you lately...thank you!

Definition:

Gratitude is defined as "The state of being grateful; thankfulness." Etymology: Middle English, from Old French, probably from Late Latin gr̄itid, from Latin gr̄tus, pleasing. American Heritage Dictionary

Quotes:

- ◆ 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. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. – Melody Beattie
- ◆ A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves. - Henry Ward Beecher
- ◆ There is a calmness to a life lived in Gratitude, a quiet joy. – Ralph H. Blum

- ◆ Because gratification of a desire leads to the temporary stilling of the mind and the experience of the peaceful, joyful Self it's no wonder that we get hooked on thinking that happiness comes from the satisfaction of desires. This is the meaning of the old adage, "Joy is not in things, it is in us." - Joan Borysenko
- ◆ Both abundance and lack exist simultaneously in our lives, as parallel realities. It is always our conscious choice which secret garden we will tend... when we choose not to focus on what is missing from our lives but are grateful for the abundance that's present -- love, health, family, friends, work, the joys of nature and personal pursuits that bring us pleasure -- the wasteland of illusion falls away and we experience Heaven on earth. - Sarah Ban Breathnach
- ◆ I don't like it when people on the street say "smile" or "cheer up." It's a real cheap line. I'm feeling good. I'm feeling real grateful for everything. It's a solid time in my life. When people say I look sad, they're wrong. - Nicolas Cage
- ◆ Remember that not to be happy is not to be grateful. - Elizabeth Carter
- ◆ Feeling grateful or appreciative of someone or something in your life actually attracts more of the things that you appreciate and value into your life. - Northrup Christiane
- ◆ Most people return small favors, acknowledge medium ones and repay greater ones -- with ingratitude. - Benjamin Franklin
- ◆ To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live gratitude is to touch Heaven. - Johannes A. Gaertner
- ◆ True thanksgiving means that we need to thank God for what He has done for us, and not to tell Him what we have done for Him. - George R. Hendrick
- ◆ For today and its blessings, I owe the world an attitude of gratitude. - Clarence E. Hodges
- ◆ One can never pay in gratitude; one can only pay "in kind" somewhere else in life. - Anne Morrow Lindbergh
- ◆ Nothing purchased can come close to the renewed sense of gratitude for having family and friends. - Courtland Milloy
- ◆ Two kinds of gratitude: The sudden kind we feel for what we take; the larger kind we feel for what we give. - Edwin Arlington Robinson
- ◆ It is another's fault if he be ungrateful, but it is mine if I do not give. To find one thankful man, I will oblige a great many that are not so. - Seneca
- ◆ Gratitude is a sickness suffered by dogs. - Joseph Stalin
- ◆ Gratitude is our most direct line to God and the angels. If we take the time, no matter how crazy and troubled we feel, we can find something to be thankful for. The more we seek gratitude, the more reason the angels will give us for gratitude and joy to exist in our lives. - Terry Lynn Taylor
- ◆ God has two dwellings; one in heaven, and the other in a meek and thankful heart. - Izaak Walton
- ◆ LORD, Let me want what I have. - Anonymous
- ◆ Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a gift and not giving it. - Anonymous
- ◆ Thank God for what you have. Trust God for what you need. - - Anonymous
- ◆ We take for granted the things for which we should be giving thanks. - - Anonymous
- ◆ The worst moment for the atheist is when he feels thankful and has no one to thank. - Anonymous
- ◆ Thank God for nothing, there's nothing to worry about. - Anonymous
- ◆ If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough. -Meister Eckhardt
- ◆ Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others. - Cicero

Thank you to everyone who has purchased a "Breath of Life" relaxation CD for family and friends at this holiday season. I am grateful to be able to share this powerful technique that is benefiting so many people. I am also grateful to Florida Atlantic University (FAU) for asking me to present my Biblical Stress Management Workshop to its students on December 4th.

With joy and appreciation,
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