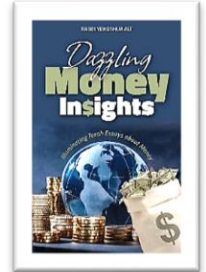
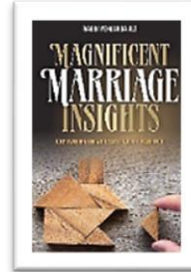
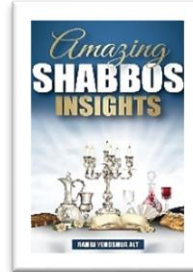
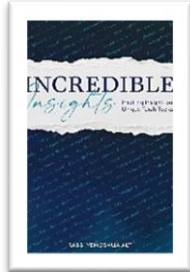
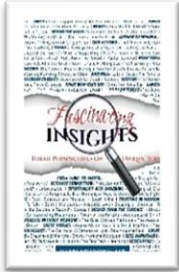


Fascinating INSIGHTS

ז' תשרי תשפ"ד
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Grateful and Greatness

We are called יהודי, from the term הודאה, to be grateful for all we have.¹ Indeed, this is the attitude we begin our day with Modeh Ani, thanking Hashem.² As someone once put it, "We thank before we think" (referring to Modeh Ani as we say this immediately when we awake).³

We should constantly ask ourselves, "What am I grateful for now?" We always have what to be grateful for at any given moment.⁴ Our health, food, beautiful weather, just being alive... is not something to be taken

for granted.⁵ There is a saying, "It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful."

People may complain about the expense of a car along with its concomitants (the price of gas, insurance, maintenance, etc.). Think about how it used to be until recent history. They never had a car. If you were lucky, you had a horse. The horse needed to eat and sleep. Sometimes the horse was obdurate and obstinate, and wouldn't want to move. Sometimes the horse got sick and died.⁶ Nowadays you just fill up your comfortable, smooth and beautiful car and pay some money for its

¹ Sefas Emes, Vayigash, 5631, s.v. Vayigash.

² The author of Modeh Ani is R' Moshe ben Machir, who passed away in 1605. He founded a yeshiva in the village of Ein Zeitoun, near Tzefas. Unlike other nearby scholarly circles like R' Shlomo Alkebatz, the Arizal, R' Chaim Vital, his yeshiva focused on traditional study of gemara and halacha rather than mystical secrets. The yeshiva had ten rules. One was that there would be shifts so that Torah would be studied in the yeshiva at all hours of day and night. Another specified regular visits to the grave of R' Yehuda Bar Ilai to pray for the Jewish people. He authored the sefer Seder Hayom, which is a halachic-kabbalistic work that describes, "the order one should follow in his days and nights, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, the order of the entire year when sitting at home and walking on the way, when retiring and rising" (Introduction to Seder Hayom). He also wrote in the Introduction: "This is why every man should push himself, day and night, at all times and at every instant, not to lose even a single moment of time with the vanities and charms of this world. From the time he rises in the morning until he goes to bed at night, a man should manage his time in such a way that he seeks only to accomplish G-d's will. As for his own desires, they should be the same as Heaven's: Correct and pure."

³ A wise man once said, "A woman who wants to be thanked for the Challa she makes has to thank her husband for the dough (money) he brings home."

⁴ It has been said that about 90% of our lives are good and about 10% are bothersome. Count your blessings, not your troubles.

⁵ It was known that R' Moshe Feinstein did not want an air conditioner. He explained the reason: "What happens if it breaks? Then I can't learn because I became accustomed to it."



⁶ The Mishna (Avos 3:9) says that one who walks on the road while learning Torah and interrupts his learning and exclaims, "How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!" the pasuk considers this as if he bears guilt for his soul. How are we to understand this? One explanation is that there is no continuum between Torah and the celebration of nature. He makes it as if it is two divergent worlds — the world of Torah and the world of nature. In essence it is all one.

maintenance!⁷ There is an expression, “The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our own blessings.”

R' Simcha Wasserman would recall his reaction when he saw his host change into Shabbos clothes, when he stayed in Mezerich for Shabbos. “I couldn't believe my eyes. Before going to shul the man went to his closet, took out a Shabbos suit and changed. I couldn't imagine that a man could have two suits. I came from Russia, a communist country. There we had nothing, there was no fabric. I had a suit made from flour sacks. And he had a suit to change into!”

The son of R' Yaakov Kamenetsky once related that his family was so poor when he was growing up that his suit for his bar mitzvah was his father's old suit. For the honor of the bar mitzvah his father inverted the suit.

R' Ovadia Yosef⁸ said that nowadays even when things are tight, everyone is wealthy compared to the way he lived when he was a child. He wrote, “I never had a suit. My father bought my Shabbos clothing secondhand.⁹ I had a long jacket that probably had been worn by twenty people before me. At that time, the bus company Mekasher provided transportation from Beis Yisrael to the Old City¹⁰ for a half-grush (currency). I didn't want to waste the coin, so I walked — rain or snow. All the half-grush coins that I saved funded my wedding. When we were young, we took dry desiccated bread and water to school every day, often with a tomato, which we rubbed into the bread. That's all we took for an entire school day, to hold us over until dinnertime. If someone was eating bread with an egg, we thought he was a millionaire. I once brought cream, which they sold in a small container, and that day was a holiday. For dessert, we were often given a teaspoon of coffee grains with sugar.”¹¹ A smart man was wont to say, “I'm thankful for what I have and grateful for what I don't have.”



⁷ Someone once said, “Be happy with what you have while working for what you want.”

⁸ Neighbors of R' Ovadia Yosef often saw him, in his younger years, rocking a stroller outside on the porch, with a sefer propped above the stroller. Sometimes though, his intense concentration got the better of him. As he drifted deeper into the words of Torah before him, he was liable to lose awareness of his little child, and his wife had to come to the aid of a crying baby who R' Ovadia was rocking but had not heard.

⁹ The Yaavetz writes in a letter (Printed in Kerem Shlomo of Chasidei Bobov, Choveres 110): It is not a wonder that a garment can last for over 40 years because it is not uncommon (referring to the Jews who were in the desert for 40 years about whom it says *שמלתך לא בלטה מעליך*, your garment did not wear out upon you [Devarim 8:4]). I had a garment from wool that I inherited from my father, the Chochom Tzvi, and we wore it for over 50 years. I went many years every day even to distant places where I wore this and still it didn't wither or deteriorate, if not for the fact that I would have guarded it more from dust. If not for that, it would still be in use. A while after I got a new garment, I put the old one on a hook and only wore that old one on Tisha B'av — for mourning. The wonder with the Jews in the desert was that it didn't wear out and also it grew with them! (Otzar Plaos Hatorah, Devarim, pp. 340-1)

¹⁰ In the year 1837 the sultan of Kosta (Constantinople) issued a decree that the Arabs may no longer harass the Jews concerning their claims over the *Churvah* (ruined shul) of R' Yehuda Hachasid, and the Jews received a permit to rebuild the ruins of the old Beis Midrash in the courtyard of the *Churvah*, called Menachem Tzion. At that time all the great and important people of Yerushalayim rushed to personally engage in the rebuilding of the destroyed Beis Midrash. Some mixed cement or chiseled stones; some lifted the stones onto the rows, and they kissed each stone before placing it in the structure. With the sounds of song and the chanting of Hallel, they rebuilt the ruins (Sefer Eretz Yisrael, 27:7).

During the period of inflation in 2022, someone wrote about the gratitude he has to Hashem for it. “Thank You Hashem for giving us the opportunity to overcome our nature and stoic! Thank You Hashem that we now will get more Olam Haba for giving away money to tzedakah! Thank You Hashem that we now will get more reward for buying food to feed our families! Thank You for the opportunity to continue showing You how much we love You by continuing to buy happily for Shabbos! And of course, thank You that the prices were so low for so many years!”¹²

The story is told of someone who asked a soldier who tragically lost both of his legs in battle, “How are you so positive without your legs’?” His reply: “How are you so negative with yours’?” Many times it's the ones that are happy in the good times that are also happy in the negative times. Let's ask ourselves how are we when life is smooth and we are not going through rough times. Do we constantly complain?

Here is one recommendation that we should practice: keep a gratitude journal and at the end of each day write what you are grateful for from that day.

Let us conclude with the following saying: “A grateful life is a great full life.”

Lofty Level

The gemara¹³ says that fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and 49 were given to Moshe Rabbeinu (which made him Moshe otherworldly). Obviously, receiving 49 of the 50 gates is beyond our current level of comprehension.

Before his death, Moshe merited the 50th gate of understanding. This is hinted in the name of the location where Moshe was buried — הר נבו, Har Nevo.¹⁴ The word נבו is a contraction of נב, meaning that he was imbued (נב, in him) with the 50th level (The letter נ has a gematria of 50). On Har Nevo, Moshe received the 50th gate of understanding.¹⁵

The Zohar teaches that in the future, Moshiach will reveal the *שער המישים*, 50th gate of understanding. This is alluded to in the name *משיה יגלה שער המישים* as it is an acronym for *משיה יגלה שער המישים*, Moshiach will reveal the 50th gate of understanding.

Rabbi Alt mentored to learn under the tutelage of R' Mendel Friedman zt"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zelman Nechemiah Goldberg zt"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released *Dazzling Money Insights*. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearon (where the Aron was for 20 years [Dmeul 4, 71a]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹¹ See Ma'adanei Hamelech, volume 1, p. 22 and p. 25.

¹² R' Yitzchak Zilberstein once helped a beleaguered man to reframe his troubles by telling him the following story. Napoleon (1769–1821) was with one of his aides when in a clandestine operation snuck into a city the French emperor was besieging. After they obtained the crucial information they sought, the two disguised spies attempted to leave the city when Napoleon was recognized. Their lives were in danger and so Napoleon's attendant slapped him in the face knocking him to the ground. He beat him relentlessly until everyone said “That can't be Napoleon. His aide wouldn't treat him with such disdain.” In the confusion, the two just managed to escape. Although Napoleon was wounded, he thanked his attendant for saving his life, as indeed only the blows saved him. R' Zilberstein turned to his visitor and said, “I feel your pain but you too have probably been saved from much worse or even death itself by your suffering. Don't despair. Have emunah that Hashem will deliver you from all harm.”



¹³ Rosh Hashana 21b.

¹⁴ Devarim 34:1.

¹⁵ The word נבו can also be understood as an amalgam of נב, meaning the letter נ entered his name *משה*. When the two combine, we get the word *נשמה*, the third highest level of soul that we can access at this time (See the Shela in Vaeschanan, 12). That is to say, when he was infused with the 50th gate, he was able to access this level of soul at the optimum.