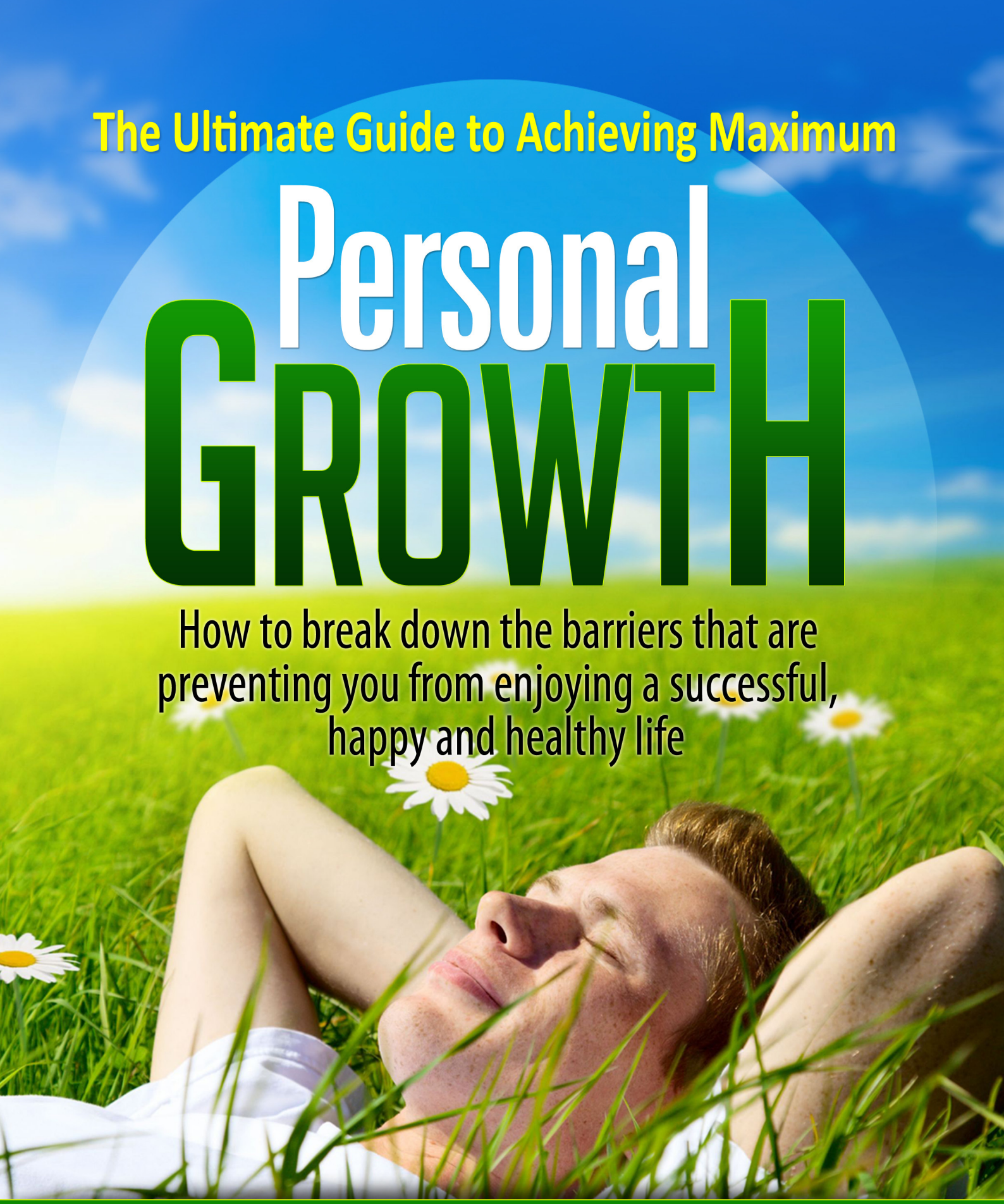
The Ultimate Guide to Achieving Maximum

Personal GROWTH

How to break down the barriers that are preventing you from enjoying a successful, happy and healthy life



By Dr. David Pelcovitz, Ph.D.

Introduction

Psychological studies show that people who are happy are less selfish. They seldom lose their tempers and are rarely perceived as hostile or abusive. The envy of many, the people who seem to be perpetually encased in an aura of happiness enjoy healthier, more fulfilling lives than those who are constantly grappling with anger, depression, anxiety and dissatisfaction.

Happy people are also more loving, forgiving, trusting, energetic, decisive, creative, helpful…the list of positive attributes goes on. When you combine all of these qualities, it almost sounds like I'm overstating the case, doesn't it? Well consider this: when you're in a bad mood, or going through a period of sustained sadness, you're not your best self, are you? You're run down, preoccupied and stressed out. How can you possibly operate at an optimal level? You can't.

In fact, your best self emerges when you get in touch with your inner core and light that spark of happiness that lies within. What's that you say – you haven't been able to find your inner spark for years, or even decades? Well that's exactly why you selected this course, isn't it? You were looking for inspiration and a clear path to personal growth, and I'm here to help you achieve those goals.

By approaching the quest for personal growth from various angles, I've made it easy for you, the reader, to use the wisdom gleaned from both perspectives to create your own path. You'll learn how to bring happiness into your life, and the role that gratitude, forgiveness, shame and humility play in the personal growth process. This book also covers sensitive subjects like how to control anger, the pros and cons of exuberance and the roots of spirituality.

By reading this book and absorbing the information and knowledge between its pages, you'll come away from the experience well equipped to create a better life for yourself, and for those around you. You'll know how to recognize and extinguish the negatives that can chip away at your own happiness; you'll know the role that spirituality can play on your path to personal growth; and you'll gain keen insights into the Jewish views on forgiveness, gratitude, happiness and humility.

Ready to start your journey to maximum personal growth and happiness? Great, because it starts on the next page…

Breaking Down the Barriers to Personal Growth

Let's start by discussing why you feel the need to be happy in the first place. After all, it doesn't take more than a quick glance around you to see that most people these days are stressed out, rushed, overscheduled and miserable. Credit modern day society and conveniences like cell phones and laptop computers with helping to create some of the agony, or as your 80-year-old grandmother would say, "Life was so much simpler when we were young!"

But does that mean happiness is out of reach for most people? Hardly. In fact, happiness and personal fulfillment is within everyone's grasp – or, at least everyone who takes the time to find it and cultivate it.

The journey starts with an understanding of happiness and how it can bring positive emotional states to our daily lives, thus transforming the very quality of our lives. The definition of happiness isn't set in stone, as illustrated by these two stories that address both the general secular view, and the Jewish view.

The first story came from one of the best selling non-fiction books of all time by Dr. Viktor Frankl, and entitled Man's Search for Meaning. The book discusses the author's experiences as a psychiatrist and as an inmate in a concentration camp, where he discovered that people who held onto a sense of meaning and purpose were most likely to live through the internment.

Dr. Frankl includes a remarkable, but very confusing, story in his book. He talks about a young woman who is barely out of adolescence and in the typhus ward (where he was assigned). She is literally in the last minutes of her life. She calls Dr. Frankl over, motions to him and says, "Doctor, I just want to tell you something. My life was pretty frivolous until I came here. I wasn't very interested in anything that was important. My concern was for mundane and silly, and really not based on what is really important.

But now at this moment as I look through the crack in the ceiling and see God's beautiful sky and the branches of this tree outside, I think I understand what life is all about. I am truly happy." Then she closed her eyes and passed on.

How do you make sense out of a woman in the final moments of an all too short life, somehow squeezing a sense of beauty and happiness in the darkest of all places? That's enigma number one.

Enigma number two is a more personal story. I was a psychologist at a retreat for families of children with cancer. I'd participated in the annual retreat for two decades, and had volunteered to work with families from all corners of the United States to basically strengthen each other through an organization called Chai Lifeline, which works with families whose children have cancer or another serious illness.

The day was ebbing on the second day of the retreat and a bearded Chassid is sharing some of his thoughts as the sun is setting. "You know something?" he asks, "This last Rosh Hashanah, this last Jewish New Year, I took my son to the hospital and we were very worried about him and he received a diagnosis of having acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He had cancer. Now he says the strangest thing happened, 10 short days later on Yom Kippur I was sitting down in Synagogue, surrounded by my family, friends and religion, and a wave of happiness washed over me like I've never experienced in my entire life."

I'm listening to him recount the story several years later at the retreat, and I couldn't get what he was trying to say. I was shocked by the other parents' reaction as they sat around him in a circle, tears in their eyes and nodding in agreement.

Here's the enigma that I want you ponder: How does one understand that in both stories, and at what should have been a low point in a person's life, they describe happiness – an emotion that we assume should be associated with joy, great feelings and fun.

My point here is that by understanding some of the insights of the Jewish community and the Jewish thinking about happiness, we can all come to a better understanding of how to bring happiness into our lives.

The Root of the Word "Happiness"

I'm not sure if anyone knows the etymology of the English word for happiness, but the word has its roots in the Latin or Greek root for "hap." Consider the words in the English language with the word "hap" in them: haphazard, happenstance and happy, for example.

What do these words have in common? They all have to do with chance. In other words, if one is lucky enough to "happen" upon good fortune, then happiness will ensue. A bit later in this section I'll compare the word "happiness" to the Hebrew word for happiness (which is "simcha"), but first I want to cover what happiness is (and isn't) through the prism of psychological research.

Anyone who has lived a life with any kind of insight, and any kind of introspection, learned pretty quickly that the connection between money and happiness, or material things and happiness, is ephemeral or short-lived. Psychological literature proves this point. Research clearly shows that a new car will make you happy, but that the feeling doesn't last. Lexus once used a magazine advertisement that I loved. In it there was a picture of a Lexus with the following ad copy: "Anybody who says money can't buy happiness hasn't spent their money right."

What that ad was saying is that a Lexus provides sustained happiness. We all know better, right? We get excited about the new car, house or computer, but the joy is fleeting. The new kitchen hardly ever makes us as happy for as long as we imagine. And in fact, research conducted by psychologist Dr. Gilbert, who specializes in this area, came up with a word of his own: miss-wanting. Dr. Gilbert defined the new word as "mistakes we make in choosing what gives us pleasure."

On average Dr. Gilbert finds that the bad events in life often prove less intense and more passing than one would predict. And good events prove less intense and bring us briefer periods of happiness than one would think. He also feels that the Rolling Stones said it best with their famous lyrics, "You can't always get what you want." In fact, Dr. Gilbert says that actually it would be wiser to say "you can't always know what you want," because we often wish for the wrong thing. We wish for something that will bring us happiness and it's rarely the answer to true happiness.

The Money-Happiness Connection

Now let's get back to the money-happiness connection that I mentioned earlier in this chapter. You're not going to be surprised by what I have to say here, since most of it is common sense that you learn not longer after earning your first dollar. While you can obviously be very poor and unhappy, once your basic needs are met (clothing, shelter and food), research reveals no sustained difference between the ongoing happiness levels of a rich person versus someone in the lower-middle class.

In other words, possessions do not buy us sustained happiness. Many people – particularly those who live in the United States – would vehemently disagree with this statement. Ask the average American what would make him or her happier, and you'll probably get an answer like "If I could just make a little bit more money, I would be happier." Such answers are predictable, but hold very little merit.

Still not convinced? Consider the fact that the standard of living has doubled over the last few decades in the U.S. (corrected for inflation). During the same period, rates of depression, suicide, anxiety and substance abuse have nearly tripled. Clearly the money-happiness connection is unreliable. The more money that you make, the more you want to make, yet even when you achieve the "want to make" goal, a concept that psychologists call "relevant deprivation" kicks in. Here's how it works:

- You may assume that if you could only make $20,000 or $30,000 more per year, that you'd be a happier person. But once you make those additional funds, you start comparing yourself to the next guy. Take the client who came into my office suffering from clinical depression. It was February, and he'd been depressed since December. He was an investment banker back in the go-go days of investment banking, and he'd received a $10,000 bonus. I asked him why he was depressed, and he said, "Because the guy in the office next to me – who is no better than me – received a $200,000 bonus, and I can't get it out of my mind."

I'll wrap up this section on the money-happiness connection with my favorite story about money and happiness. It's the story of Robert Frank, the well-known economist who has a comfortable lifestyle.

An idealistic young man who graduated college and then volunteered for the Peace Corp, Frank's first stint was to serve a 2-volunteer term as a teacher in Nepal. When he arrived in Nepal, the Peace Corp picked him up, drove him out to the middle of nowhere, dropped him off and told him they'd be back to get him in two years.

Frank's Nepal house was a one-room shack with no running water or electricity. When he learned of his fate, Frank stood in a state of horror, wondering how in the world he was going to survive the next two years in those living conditions. But then he noticed that everyone else was living the same way. He amazed himself by quickly acclimatizing to that standard of living, which was no different than anyone else's.

Then the story gets interesting. Frank received his first $40, monthly paycheck and again reverted to a state of despair. "How can I possibly survive on $40 a month?" he said to himself. He got his answer when he learned that no one in that region of Nepal made over $30 a month, which put him $10 ahead of the rest of the neighborhood. Frank goes on to write that he never felt wealthier in his life than he did living in Nepal on $40 a month in a one room hut with no water and no electricity.

Here's the takeaway from the Robert Frank story: the money-happiness connection is a lot weaker than we think. We know that there are both wealthy and poor people who are happy. There are also wealthy individuals who, in spite of their riches, are never satisfied with what they have. As King Solomon says, "ohev kesef, lo yisba kesef," which is translated as "he who loves money will never be satisfied with the money that he has." If modern day society is any indication, Solomon was right on the money.

Going a step further, research shows that when money becomes the center of one's very existence, that person is much less likely to be satisfied with life. He or she will want more money, be less apt to share, be dissatisfied with both job and pay, and even have low energy levels. This is what positive psychology tells us about happiness and money, and it's something to seriously consider as you pave your own path to personal growth.

The Family-Friends Connection

So you've learned that "funds" are not part of the 3 Fs (family, friends and faith) that well-known psychologist Dr. Minor says are associated with ongoing happiness, and you know that even though many Americans spend their lives chasing the almighty dollar, it doesn't bring them happiness.

Now let's look at the family-friends connection, which is basically our connection to others. For starters, we know that this connection to others is associated with better health, and that people who reside in "connected" communities are healthier and happier than those who are isolated and alone.

The Harvard School of Public Health conducted a national study and found that states with "low social capital," where residents don't trust one other and lacks connections to the overall community, human health is actually impaired. In fact, an individual's chances of contracting an illness rise to 70 percent (versus 30 percent in high social capital states). The study also found that relocating to a high social capital state equates to quitting smoking.

Digging a bit deeper into the concept of low versus high social capital, let's look at Roseto, Pennsylvania. This was an area that was known for its extremely low rate of early death. It was almost unheard of to die a premature death from, let's say from a heart attack, in Roseto. Medical researchers were baffled, particularly because the adjusted rate of heart attack risk in the town was less than half of that of its neighbors.

Eager to learn more, medical researchers looked into the phenomenon. They thought maybe Roseto residents exercised more, or perhaps their health habits were better. The researchers moved in and intensively studied the town from every possible angle. But relative to other, similar Pennsylvania communities, they found no marked differences in dietary habits, exercise volume or body weight. They didn't even find any differences in genetic predisposition, or cigarette smoking rates. (If anything, Roseto's citizens were slightly higher than their counterparts for some of the risk factors.)

Then a light bulb went on above the researchers' heads. They figured out what gave Roseto the edge. It turns out its citizens' basic values were very different to those of similar towns in that region of Pennsylvania. Roseto was settled by a group of Italian immigrants in the late-1800s. Most of those settlers hailed from the same village in Southern Italy, and therefore retained an incredibly strong sense of community. They shared belief in religious values and in helping one another out and volunteering.

Odd as it may seem, the elderly people in Roseto who sat on their front porches, minding the business of everyone around them, were actually an incredibly positive force in their community. The teenager who was foolish enough to cut school in Roseto was grabbed by the ear and dragged down to the principal's office. The thief who was unlucky enough to break into a car under the watchful eye of a neighbor received similar treatment, only this time he was delivered to the sheriff.

Like many other towns across the U.S., Roseto started to change in the 1980s, when the younger generation rejected the close lifestyle infused into the town by the Italian immigrants. The new generation even altered the architecture of the houses to no longer include front porches, and in doing so eliminated a natural gathering and socializing place. Automatic garage door openers soon followed, allowing one to live and die in Roseto without having the slightest bit of contact with neighbors.

I don't want to bore you with a million statistics, but study after study finds that individuals who place a value on family, community and friendship have a much higher happiness rate. This is a worldwide trend, and Roseto is a perfect example of it. Today, the heart attack rate in Roseto is actually higher than that of neighboring towns. While the story doesn't have the happiest ending, it is an amazing tale that enforces the fact that strong family values and community connections are tied to health and happiness.

It's also important to note that people with strong intrinsic faith tend to have higher happiness levels. In fact, every day of every week that someone attends religious services, his or her happiness levels increase. Psychological research shows that actively religious people have fewer issues with delinquency, drugs, alcohol, and sustained depression.

The Double Enigma Revisited

The double enigma I refer to earlier in this chapter can be answered by the difference between the English word happiness, again based on one becoming happy just by having a lot of money or winning the lottery, as opposed to the Hebrew word simcha.

Simcha can be broken down into two Hebrew words, sham and moach, which translate into "where your head is at." Happiness comes from a connection to that which is greater than us. As a great Jewish Rabbi the Chazon Ish once said, "for he who knows the light of truth there is no sadness in the world."

How does that answer the enigma? Consider the experience of that young woman in the last minute of her life. She was feeling deeply connected to something beyond herself. She was feeling deeply connected to looking up at the beautiful sky and at nature and at a sense of belonging to something greater than herself. She was connected to the transcendent. That's sham moach, or where your head is at. When your head is that connection to that which matters, you'll be enveloped by happiness.

This also applies to the retreat for the families of children with cancer, where a feeling of happiness enveloped the Chassid just 10 days after his son was diagnosed with cancer. Why was he happy? Because the things that mattered most to him surrounded him: his faith, family and friends.

Happiness Filtered Through the Jewish Prism

Now let's look at happiness based on perspectives that are filtered through the prism of Jewish thought. I'll start by discussing some of my personal experiences at a hospital where I worked for many years. I remember coming back to work after taking a few days off for Rosh Hashanah, for the Jewish New Year, and having my non-Jewish friends pat me on the back and say, "So, you are really hung over, huh?" and "How was your New Year?"

That's when I realized how different the day after New Year's Eve is from the day after the Jewish New Year. Most people celebrate New Year's Eve by drinking and socializing with friends and family, and usually end up pretty hung over the next day. They stay up late celebrating, and then walk around tired and complaining of a headache in the morning.

The Jewish New Year is a completely different experience when kept with the tradition of self-examination and immersion, and surrounding yourself with your family, friends, and faith (which I identified as the core ingredients of happiness in a previous chapter).

Rabbi Pam, another brilliant thinker of the previous generation, once said that the key difference between happiness and simcha is how you feel the morning after. If the morning after finds you hung over and feeling a little guilty about your behavior the night before, then you probably engaged in "happy-making behavior" that's very different from simcha, or the happiness you experience when you engage in meaningful activities connected to "where your head is at."

Now let's look more closely at the connection between happiness and the Jewish faith. Maimonides actually has put this into his code of Jewish Law, where he discusses the celebration of holidays. Here's a loose translation of that section of what Maimonides says:

- "When you are celebrating on a Jewish holiday obviously you have to enjoy yourself and you need to surround yourself with good wine and good food, and good company. But inextricably intertwined with that experience of celebrating the holiday is our obligation to feed those less fortunate than ourselves, for us to feed those who do not have the family, or do not have the means through which to celebrate. The opposite of this example is the person who keeps the door of his home locked, and the courtyard of his home closed and eats and drinks and makes merry alone with only the members of his or her household and does not make an effort to share the joy of the holiday with those less fortunate than himself or herself. That is not happiness, that is a way of making ones stomach happy, but not making one's soul happy."

This is a beautiful way to summarize the aspect of happiness from the perspective of Jewish thought.

That leads me into another personal experience that took place at the same retreat that I mentioned in the last chapter. It was about 20 years ago, and I was sitting with a group of teenagers all of whom were in different stages of treatment for various kinds of cancer. There was a 15-year-old boy in a wheelchair whose leg had been amputated about six months earlier as a result of his treatment for Ewing sarcoma. (A side note: I've kept in touch with this boy and his family and he's happily married, cancer-free and doing great.)

The boy was seated in a circle of fellow teens that were also facing the challenge of being treated for various types of cancer. He said (and I thought it was crazy at the time), "You know, it was worth my leg." I asked him what he meant, and he answered, "You know something? If I look at my life before I had cancer and after I had cancer, I actually think that my life is happier and more connected since I have had the cancer."

So I'm looking at him, wondering if he's lost it! But he goes on to explain that he did not have much of a family life before he got sick. He wasn't close to his brothers or sisters, his father was always at work and his mother was always stressed with the demands of raising a large family.

"Since I lost my leg, everything in our family has shifted," the boy explained. "My father is home spending time with me and my siblings much more. My mother's focus is on us. So you know what? It was worth the leg."

I found the boy's rationalization strange at the time; I didn't buy it. In the years since that exchange I've worked with a lot of children in similar situations, and I've studied the related psychological research. One study, for example, included over 270 adolescents who were facing cancer. More than 70 percent of these adolescents said that if they had to do it over again (just like the boy I was telling you about), the experience would be more positive than negative. They even found an element of happiness or simcha in the experience. It's not happiness as we think of it, but anything that serves as a connection to meaning, family, friends, and faith will inevitably lead to an increase in simcha, or happiness.

I have one more anecdote to share with you. A few years ago I was conducting a study covering the adjustments that parents deal with when they have a child who is being treated for various kinds of cancer. With the help of a grant and research assistants, I was able to cover various sites during the research phase. I was proud of the research protocol – the various ways we were looking at this problem – until I started getting calls from almost all the research assistants yelling at me saying that people who they were interviewing were angry. "Why are they angry, I thought it was a pretty good study," I asked. They said, "They are angry because you did not ask a single question about what good came from the experience of having a child with cancer."

I thought about that for a minute, and said, "That's crazy, it would be the epitome of arrogance to even think of asking parents of a child facing a life threatening illness, what good came from the experience." The assistants convinced me otherwise by saying, "Virtually everybody that we are interviewing is insisting that these kinds of questions be added."

So I added the questions, and they turned into the most valuable part of the study. In fact, the answers to those queries were filled with different depth levels, and garnered insights that captured the essence of this view of simcha, or happiness.

Take the mother who told us that before her son was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most important thing in her life was perfecting her tennis serve. It wasn't really terribly important for her to do very much, and she had few challenges in life. That changed after her son's diagnosis. "My son was in the hospital having spent the night in the hospital with my husband, who was spending the evening keeping my son company," she explained. "There was a terrible winter storm that night and the wind was howling and my doorbell rings at 6am, right when I'm getting up to get ready for a trip to the hospital to be with my son. It is my next-door neighbor and she's crying hysterically. It turns out that a tree that was between my house and her house was blown down by intense storm. The tree had totaled her car and she was beside herself."

The mother continued her story, "I sat her down I got her a cup of coffee and I went into problem-solving-mode. We called the insurance adjuster to arrange for someone to come and assess her car and get the wheels rolling towards getting it repaired. I then gave her a lift to her work. Later, as she was walking into her office and I was driving to the hospital, I started laughing. I thought about how I would have reacted to the situation a year earlier. I would have been totally devastated by the loss of my car. But let's say the winds had been blowing in the other direction that night and the tree had fallen on my car and it totally destroyed my car. I would have looked and I would have not thought a second about it. I would have picked up the phone and I would have called a cab to take me to my son's hospital bed."

And she goes on to write, "That's because now, unlike a year ago, I know what is important in life. I know that what is important is not the car it is not the material thing, what is important in life is to see my husband after a long sleepless night at my son's bedside. What is important in life is to be with my son. To keep him company during this active phase of treatment. That is what matters." And that is simcha. That is, again, connection to what matters, connection to meaning.

The Geometry of Happiness

Now let's look at the geometry of happiness from a Jewish standpoint. I'll start by talking about happiness as a straight line, and then as a circle. You're probably wondering, "What in the world is this guy talking about?" Let me explain happiness as a straight line first. It turns out that in many Jewish sources, happiness is compared to a straight line or path that's connected to meaning. There's a well-known passage that Jews recite on Yom Kippur night, the holiest night of the Jewish calendar (where everybody takes the Torah out and sings the passage) that basically says that those who have a straight heart will experience happiness "u'lyishrei lev simcha."

Happiness comes to those who are on a straight line. Interestingly, a fascinating psychological Hebrew saying that states that there is no greater happiness than the resolution of doubt. This is a profoundly deep insight that appears first in Jewish writing in relation to a passage in Proverbs. The commentator on a passage in Proverbs says, "the light of the eyes rejoices the heart." One of the commentaries on Proverbs says, lighting up one's eyes regarding a matter that you previously doubted will bring happiness to one's heart because, and here is the statement, there is no happiness in the world like the resolution of doubt.

Now, what does that mean? When you think about it, it gets right to the point that when happiness comes with connection to a feeling, you may be on the right path. Let me translate take this somewhat cryptic way of thinking, and connect it to the psychological concepts of flow. The psychological concept of flow is based on studies from the well-known psychologist of happiness, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi. This doctor has done dozens of studies showing that when we're connected to that which gives us meaning, when we are connected to something that totally absorbs us that is when happiness levels go up.

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi says that when we are in flow, and connected to the straight line of meaning and absorption, our happiness level goes up. In his study on flow, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi would actually give people pagers and then page them randomly at different times during the day to ask how happy they were at a certain point. Then he would ask them what they were doing, and connect their level of happiness to the activity.

It turns out that people are happiest when they are absorbed in a mindful challenge. People who are lucky enough to have jobs that truly absorb them – a true "calling" – often spend their days absorbed in happiness. And here is what Dr. Csikszentmihalyi: when you are in the zone and engaged in an enjoyable activity that challenges you, your happiness levels are at the peak.

You've all heard of the runner's high, or of someone who is a musician and totally absorbed in the task of playing music once they have really mastered their art. You may remember times in your life when you were totally absorbed in a hobby or in an activity that gave you meaning. You were in the flow and connected to the straight line. You were connected to happiness. There is actually a description given on this happiness straight-line connection about, again, that Hebrew saying ain b'olam simcha k'hatoras hasfekos (there is no happiness like a resolution of doubt).

Here's what Rabbi Sinclair says: happiness is what happens when you move in a straight line, and when every step in that line is a product of the one that precedes it. Every step carries the sum of where you were, and every moment in that straight line leads to the next step on that line. By its very nature, a straight line must go on forever.

Rabbi Sinclair goes on to write about what happens when the line leaves its straight path and wanders. He says a line that twists and turns must eventually falter and end; the line's deviance spells its eventual demise. For something that deviates to the side has lost its connection to what preceded it. It is no longer an expression of a continuum, and it expresses neither history nor purpose it is a cold, frozen moment. When the line meanders and twists, it has no connection to anything else.

"The world is random there is no purpose, no beginning, and no end," writes Rabbi Sinclair. He means that when we are connected and when we have experienced purpose we can experience the sense of belonging in continuity with the generations – continuity with the present. We can find examples of this in modern-day society, where the highest rates of suicide involve individuals who feel disconnected from a sense of purpose. For example, immigrants who move to a new country without mastering the language, and who have not mastered the culture, have the highest rates of depression and suicidal ideation.

Consider children of immigrants, for example. These first-generation immigrants often have a high rate of suicidal thoughts and a high rate of feelings of what has been termed animee or sense of alienation in lack of connection. I was once working with a child psychiatry fellow in a research project. She was assigned to an adolescent psychiatric in-patients unit at the hospital that I was connected to, and was handling admissions after adolescents tried to kill themselves. She discovered, while doing rotations, that nine of the 10 adolescents were first- generation Americans. Meaning that their parents were from another country and did not understand the culture. The adolescents felt like they did not belong to the American culture that their parents were trying to expose them to.

The adolescents felt unconnected to the "straight line" that I've been discussing throughout this course. The fellow went on to confirm this, and verify that the connection is tied to meaning, and directly related to happiness.

Happiness Found

I'd like to share another story from my personal experience. It's about a person who comes to see me in a state of disarray. He's disconnected from his family and from life in general. He's also depressed. I sit down with him for an emergency session that he requested. He tells me that he's in the middle of a terrible lawsuit involving family members over succession of the family business. His father had started a successful business and my patient and his two brothers were running the business. His father was getting ready to retire and the patient believed that his vision for the business would take it in the right direction in the future.

The problem is that the patient was on unsteady ground. His father seemed to support him, but the entire business was in disarray and falling apart quickly. The patient's two brothers would up suing one another in court. My patient was quite despondent when he came to see me. During our session we tried to figure out how to approach the problem. I was leaving for a 2-week business trip the next day, and wasn't able to see him while I was away.

Two weeks later I returned to a message from the client, canceling the second appointment. I called him to find out what happened, being that he was in such a crisis before I left. He decided to come in anyway, to fill me in on what happened. He tells me that a few days after our first session he received a phone call from his father, just before the case went to court.

"Son, I have given it a lot of thought and I decided that I am going to throw all of my support behind your brother, not you," the father says. "When it comes time to testify in the trial I am going to back him. Furthermore, I really do not like the way you have been taking the business and I like the way my other son has taken the business. And frankly, I would like you to find another way of making a living. I would like you to stop working for me."

And with that, my patient's depression was gone. Sure he was devastated and upset, but within a few weeks he was back to normal. "If anything," he says, "my relationships with my father and even my brother seem to be getting on track. And, I've explored some other business opportunities and my father is going to help set me up in some other businesses. I am starting a new chapter in my life and feeling much better than I did before."

It turns out that this man had previously taught classes in Jewish thinking and possessed a strong background in Jewish thought. I said to him, "Could it possibly be that you are experiencing ain b'olam simcha k'hatoras hasfeikos, or the ancient saying of, 'there is no greater joy than the resolution of doubt'?" And a big smile came across his face. "My whole life I never knew where I stood with my father, and I never really knew where I stood with my brother," he says. "I was always feeling like I was not standing in a place of connection or certainty. Now that I know where I stand, even though it is standing in a place that I always felt would be horrifying to me. I am actually experiencing happiness."

Interestingly, I have kept up with this patient. He went on to start quite a successful career and a new chapter in his life. Ever since his relationship with his father and brother gained that new footing, he knew that both of those family members actually loved him. They just did not love his business management. Ever since the man went from that place of uncertainty to a place of greater certainty, his life has been on track.

To review what you've learned in this chapter, the Jewish view of happiness has nothing to do with money. It has absolutely nothing to do with the short-term happiness that comes with alcohol or other substances. It has everything to do with connection to family, friends and faith.

Geometry of Happiness, Part II

Now let's look at part II of the geometry of happiness, which is another kind of thought that is shared in Jewish thinking about shapes and happiness. It's the idea that happiness is often connected to the straight line. A straight line is usually about our connection to the internal, to the individual, to meaning. But in Jewish thinking there is also often the idea of happiness being connected to circles. There is a saying in Psalms that says, where King David is praying, and he says hafachta mispedi l'mochol li. In his prayer, he is basically saying that "God has transformed my sadness to a place of forgiveness and happiness."

But interestingly, the word for forgiveness and happiness is the Hebrew word mochol, which means a circle and also forgiveness and happiness. It is about connection. Interestingly, in Jewish thought, Jews only are depicted as dancing in a circle. Circles are about connection not to yourself (which is what the line is about), but connection to the community. For example, at traditional Jewish weddings the bride circles the groom and guests dance around the bride and groom.

On certain holidays like Simchat Torah, we dance around the Torah, the source of meaning. And in the Talmud we are told that the righteous will form a circle around God in the coming world. So it is always a circle around the source of meaning, be it God, be it Torah, or be it the bride and the groom on the day of their wedding.

There is a fascinating insight from Dr. Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, who draws out this component of happiness and its connection to the circle. He says, "In order to find happiness we have to find meaning. And meaning requires an attachment to something larger than the lonely self, to the extent the young people find it hard to take seriously their relationship with God or to be part of a large and dividing family they will find it very difficult to find meaning in life."

I'd like to close out this chapter with a thought from Rabbi Dr. Akiva Tatz, who says that real happiness is what you experience when you are doing what you should be doing. When you are moving clearly along your own road, your unique path to your unique destination, you experience real happiness. When you are moving along the path that leads yourself to the deep discovery of who you really are, when you are building the essence of your own personality and creating yourself, a deep happiness swells up within you. The journey does not cause happiness; the journey is the happiness itself.

How We Bring Happiness Into Our Lives

In this chapter I'm going to focus on ways that you can bring happiness into your life, with a focus on practical recommendations. First, I'd like to say that many people think that a certain component of happiness cannot be cultivated, and that you have to be born with it. It's the component of happiness that is related to the almost biologically driven mindset to see the glass of water as half full as opposed to half empty. It's a sort of innate optimism.

We all know people who just seem to ooze optimism. They were born optimists right from the get-go, and the have the gift of always looking at the bright side of things. I remember hearing a prominent psychologist in the field lecture on this topic of innate optimism. He said that his mother was the kind of woman that was such an optimist that if she would walk into a pile of dog waste she would just grin and say, "Thank God I am wearing shoes."

I was giving a lecture on a related topic and one of the men in the audience shared with me a story that backed up his firm belief that optimism is something that some people just seem to have an almost genetic predisposition for. In fact, research shows that a certain level of optimistic gift does generate from predisposition, but you'll learn in this chapter that it can also be cultivated.

Back to the audience member who told the story about his mother, who was one of the youngest survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Somehow she managed to look a little bit older than her age. She was pre-adolescent when she went through the horrible experience of being among those lucky minority that were selected not to go to the gas chambers, but to go to the side of the camp where you would be subjected to horrible torture and work under worse than slave labor conditions.

His mother described that horrible day where she was selected to go into the work camp section of Auschwitz. She saw the scene that has been described many, many times of the tattoos being inscribed on concentration camp inmates' arms.

(I grew up in a neighborhood where my parents were friends with many concentration survivors. I remember thinking that the tattoos were almost the norm.) This young girl looked at the scene of the tattooing and she said to herself, "You know, I am going to live a very long life." She was somewhat vain, and said, "I want to have the best looking tattoo I possibly can."

After surveying the thousands of people waiting in various lines, she joined the longest line and said to herself, "If I am going to have this tattoo for my very long life, then the longest line probably has at the head of it the tattoo artist who is going to give the best looking, most meticulous kind of tattoo." The man went on to tell me that his mother is alive today, and promised to show me her tattoo if I ever have the chance to meet here. As it turns out, to this day she's proud of the tattoo for the careful work that the meticulous tattoo artist did on it.

Is that a bizarre story, or what? It shows how even in the shadow of death and while in one of the most horrible places in the history of humanity, a spark of optimism can get us through. In fact, there's all kind of interesting research and anecdotes that show the benefits of cultivating an optimistic style. In his book "Learned Optimism," for example, Dr. Seligman writes about cultivating a style of optimism. He tells the story about how he took a group of graduate students to the University of Pennsylvania, where they analyzed every victory speech given by the winner of both the Republican and Democratic presidential nominations over the prior 100 years.

Dr. Seligman stripped out the actual names so that the students would not know whose speech they were reading. He had them read the speeches, which were coded for how many optimistic and positive remarks were given versus how many negative remarks were given. It turns out that the number of optimistic, hopeful responses were more predictive of who would win the presidential election than the most trusted and reliable polls.

This makes sense because everyone wants to vote for an optimist. Positive people are fun to be around; they kind of energize you, right? And it turns out that optimism is the core ingredient of happiness, and a trait that you can cultivate. In his book, Dr. Seligman discusses how "believing that everything will work out," can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that predisposes you to constructive and productive actions.

Handling Life's Setbacks

If you believe that things will not work out, failure will likely ensue. On other hand, if you view every challenge as something that energizes you and propels you to action, then a successful result is much more likely. Research shows that people who handle life's setbacks and mistakes as challenges rather than threats can get through the biggest obstacles in a far more productive way. They also more effectively manage ongoing daily stresses – the little hassles that haunt us every day.

Research shows that people who cultivate an optimistic style are also more likely to persevere in the face of difficulty. They are more likely to handle daily stresses with active and more effective coping mechanisms, and they are even able to better handle life transitions and illness. Optimistic people also have more friends, and are more likely to be successful at work and in social settings.

The question is, how does one really change a predisposition if he or she is predisposed to viewing the glass of water as half empty? Start by catching yourself. Catch the negative thoughts and develop the habit of focusing on the positive. The exercise has also been proven to work with children. In Dr. Seligman's book, "The Optimistic Child," the author reveals that parents can cultivate optimism in children who are prone to pessimism and depression. Dr. Seligman showed in a series of studies in suburban Pennsylvania that he lowered the children's risk for depression and increased their chances of living happier, successful and optimistic lives.

The Power of Goal Setting

Psychologists have uncovered a deceptively simple psychological exercise known as goal setting, which actually raises happiness levels. Dr. King and other doctors asked people to spend 20 minutes a day for four consecutive days writing down a description of their best possible future selves. They asked the individuals to sit down, lock the door of the room and "imagine yourself in the future after everything has gone as well as it possibly could, you have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals and think of this as the realization of your life's dreams and of your own best potential."

Then, the individuals were asked to "visualize the best possible future for yourself and various areas of your life trying to imagine for yourself what your life would be like if all of your dreams came true. Also, what would happen if you actually got in touch in a very specific way that you could almost hold onto the reality of realizing your dreams."

The strangest thing happens when you complete this exercise for just 20 minutes a day for four days in a row. You get in touch with these goals, your happiness levels go up, your sense of physical kind of health increases. Even better, these feelings actually are sustained for several months. It doesn't permanently transform you, but it isn't just an ephemeral passing kind of feeling either.

I find these results fascinating because they really don't make sense. How could fantasizing about one's future and getting in touch with long-term goals and the best possible kind of self and outcome have this powerful effect? It goes back to the Jewish thinking standpoint discussed earlier in this course: When we are connected to the straight line of who we are and who we are supposed to be, and when we realize our potential in that way, then the natural outcome is going to be the simcha. This is the simcha of sham moach. When it occurs, we're connected to our true and authentic selves, not to false dreams that are not really based on the essence of who we really are.

There is a sense of purpose, structure, and control associated with setting goals. A colleague once pointed out that when you see a happy person walking down the street and you start talking to him or her, you almost certainly find the projects behind the happiness. Find the happy person and you will find the project. I sometimes do experiments when I see unusually happy people. I try to find out what keeps them going; what is the number on their "mattering mats?"

Oftentimes the answer to that question is a clear sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. They have goals. They may be writing a book or working on a charity project. It may also be some kind of connection to the three Fs of family, friends, and faith. Somehow when you have that magic combination of a practical focus on personal goals that connects someone to the three Fs of fun, friends, and faith, you begin to see a "glow." You can almost pick the person out of the crowd. He or she has a sense of purpose, and an organization and structure to life's true meaning.

Here's an important consideration when setting goals. You need to look at what kind of goal is most likely to be related to happiness. If your goal is some type of ephemeral, materialistic goal (like owning a brand new Ferrari by next week), it won't get you very far on that path to happiness. Earlier in this course I covered the fleeting connection between materialistic goals and long-term, happy outcomes. The happiness doesn't last when it's attached to material things.

The good news is that there are goal characteristics that are most likely to be related to happiness. This first characteristic comes when the goals emanate from our inner souls – from our inner sense of purpose. There is a fascinating passage in the Torah where Jacob is blessing his children and the use of language in the Torah in that section is: ish asher k'fi birchaso beirach osam, meaning each child was blessed in a unique way. The blessings are kind of strange, because they are actually dead-on descriptions of the personalities and essence of each of his children.

The Underpinnings of Happiness

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a well-known Rabbi of the 19th Century, said that the underpinnings of the essence of happiness are when a parent really gets and validates the essence of a child. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz expanded on this thought later, and said, "if, when a parent blesses a child, he or she is giving a blessing based on their own fantasies and their own dreams, and their own wishes about what they want, based on their needs not the needs of the child." He said it is as if one is taking a watering can and watering a patch of dirt that is totally fallow, that has no seeds in it. It is a total exercise in futility.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz continued, "In order for a blessing to take hold one has to have a match between the parent's dreams and the parent's aspirations, and the parent's wishes for his or her child and the child's internal potential. And what the child's wishes and goals and dreams are, that is an intrinsic goal." An intrinsic goal is the goal where we nourish and nurture in our children and in ourselves goals that are coming from our innermost being and our innermost wishes. These are the goals most likely to be related to happiness.

The second goal characteristic most highly aligned with happiness is the concept that your aspirations must emanate from inside, and not from the expectations placed on individuals by society. You have to follow your innermost dreams instead of chasing goals that are inflicted by familial or societal pressure.

The final characteristic involves viewing the challenge as just that – a challenge – and not a threat. Let us say you are trying to give up smoking. Your craving for a cigarette is viewed as a threat, and one that is associated with many previous, failed attempts to give up smoking. You see this goal as a huge mountain that you've tried unsuccessfully to climb. It's a threat, and not a challenge. Because of this you won't be as likely to reach that goal, which – as research shows – is not associated with happiness.

Some of the information you're reading right now came from a wonderful book that I recommend you read. It's probably the best book I have ever read on practical interventions to promote happiness. It is called "The How of Happiness," and was authored by prominent expert in positive psychology Dr. Lyubomirsky. In her book, and Dr. Lyubomirsky assembles a set of recommendations on "the how of happiness." There's an important section in her book on savoring life. This is an interesting concept because it's tied to the gratitude, which in turn is connected to happiness.

In her book, Dr. Lyubomirsky says that savoring life is nourishing the ability to intensify and prolong our enjoyments. She says people have a natural tendency to postpone happiness, and to say things like, "Well look, you know, our life at certain stages is about tomorrow and not about today." Our first priority is school and then reaching our goals in terms of getting whatever degree we need in order to work, or mastering our skills for our jobs. It is always the belief that our ultimate happiness lies in tomorrow. It lies in our retirement, or the day that will come when we can savor and appreciate life more.

It is difficult to live in the present and develop a sense of mindfulness. It is a muscle that we almost have to build up by consciously developing the habit of attention that I am going to talk about in relation to gratitude. Psychologists compare savoring to the feeling you have when an illness subsides. Say you have the flu and you feel miserable with a 104-degree temperature. You also have a headache, fever and the chills. It feels as if you are never going to feel "normal" again, and you almost forget what it feels like to be healthy.

When the illness disappears and your first really healthy day finally rears its head, the fever is down and the headache is gone and your energy has returned. There is usually a brief period where you almost can really savor what it feels like to be healthy again. Very often savoring is a dish best served when we are recovering from some of the setbacks in life. You lose something like a favorite object, pen or watch that was bestowed upon you as a gift when you were a child. Right when you've given up hope of ever finding it, you discover the object hidden under a shirt in your closet.

When the item is found, you develop a newfound appreciation for that it. You savor it again. But even that feeling has a brief shelf life. Research shows that happiness is increased when we learn to develop the capacity to savor, to just take a step back and really enjoy those special moments that are built into a portion of every day. By definition you cannot do it all day long – it's not the way we're built – but Dr. Lyubomirsky does discuss a few things that you can build into your life.

If you are used to taking a rushed shower, set the alarm clock for five minutes earlier and give yourself the gift of five minutes longer in the shower every morning. Use the extra time to savor that feeling of solitude and of relaxation that comes with that extra five minutes. It could be a walk on a nice spring or summer day. It could be just taking the extra 5 or 10 minutes to savor a meal.

During the extra time, focus on the pleasure of the experience rather than rushing through it. It is very hard to do in a society that focuses on speed and the age of the Blackberry, constant access, and the cell phone. One of the really nice recommendations Dr. Lyubomirsky makes is to take a camera where you go and take pictures of events that you are experiencing together with the family. Learn how to savor with the camera by bringing back those memories.

Dr. Gottman, an expert on marriages, has also done some fascinating research on this topic. One of his philosophies focuses on how we should nurture fondness and admiration for our spouses. Take just a minute or so as part of every day or at least three or four times a week and remember what it was we fell in love with, remember something nice they did for us.

In keeping with the theme of marriage, I recently had a therapy session with a wonderful woman who was having some life challenges. She talked very negatively about her husband. She probably raised some valid and legitimate points about all the ways that he was driving her crazy, but I reminded her about how during a session about a month earlier she'd praised her spouse for helping her through a particularly difficult time in her life. She was appreciative of how he stood by her side through a difficult diagnosis and treatment of an illness, and he'd also been patient with their son and seen him through a tough period.

My patient took a step back and said, "You know, I forgot about that." A smiled crossed her face, and I could almost see her savoring the fondness and admiration that she'd forgotten about in terms of her relationship with her husband. There's this saying that goes, "Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were big things." That's exactly what happened in this case.

Now I'd like to give you some specific recommendations from Dr. Lyubomirsky, who has conducted research on "positive reminiscing." Positive reminiscing is when you sit down and compile a list of happy and personal memories. You can even take out an old box of pictures, or boot up your computer and go through your digital photo collection. Now, let's say you are looking at the list of happy memories as you go through those pictures. You replay some of those life moments and savor them without analyzing. That's called positive reminiscing. It's about setting aside a part of a day, but not every day, to savor those moments captured on film.

Dr. Lyubomirsky says that when you complete these kinds of exercises once a week, the experience becomes even more powerful. She shows that when you systematically imagine, remember, replay and savor those happy memories through this process of positive reminiscing, your happiness levels increase. Again, all of these exercises are simple and actually enjoyable. They shouldn't be a chore, and should be treasured.

- ✪ Here's an actual script used by psychologist Dr. Bryant: First turn to your list of positive memories and choose one to reflect upon. Sit down take a deep breath, relax, close your eyes, and begin to think about the memory. Allow images related to the memory to come to mind.

Try to picture the events associated with this memory in your mind. Use your mind to imagine the memory. Let your mind wander freely through the details of the memory while you are imagining the memory.

It seems almost concrete and simplistic, but the art of nurturing happiness in your life really is actually quite simple in a sense that when we connect to the things that matter – such as friends, family, faith, and goals – we overcome the grinds and the hurried pace of life. We give ourselves the gift of stepping back and looking at what matters, reconnecting to our dreams and memories, and savoring what matters, while developing the habit of attention to what we are grateful for. When we do this, happiness is the natural outcome.

Gratitude's Role in the Process

Gratitude is a very important trait, and one that which deserves cultivation. From a Jewish standpoint, the word for "to be Jewish," which is yehudi, has as its root the word gratitude. Basically when Judah, who is the basis of the word yehudi, was born, his mother Leah said hapa'am odeh es Hashem, that she was grateful at the birth of her son Judah because it showed that she was having more than her fair share of children relative to her counterparts.

Leah named Judah after the concept of being grateful. So it is interesting when we call ourselves Jews that the reality is the root word is gratitude. In Jewish thought, in fact, being grateful to those who are our benefactors is viewed as a central trait. As you make your way through this chapter, the reasoning behind this will become clear, and will revolve around cultivating an attitude that includes gratitude as our core wellbeing.

Interestingly, research in positive psychology shows that when we express gratitude two important events take place. The first result is basic, if not Machiavellian: Our benefactor is more likely to do good for us in the future when they know that we are being grateful to them for what they did. We have all had the experience of helping somebody out, and if that person is appropriately grateful we just want to help them more in the future. But if they do not show gratitude, if they take an attitude towards us of "Well I had it coming to me," we don't want to help that person again in the future.

Positive psychology research reveals another, somewhat subtle, finding that may even surprise you: When we teach our children or ourselves to be grateful, the person expressing gratitude is more likely to pay it forward and be generous to others. Research also shows that those who are prone to build gratitude into their lives have a other positive personality traits. The people who are grateful also tend to be more likely to be forgiving. They are less likely to be self-centered. They are better able to control envy and they tend to be in general more agreeable.

As you progress through this chapter it will become clearer as to why all of those positive characteristics are present when gratitude turns into an almost automatic response when good things happen to us. Let's say you give a test measuring a person's capacity for gratitude. The individual who scores high on that test is likely to be the same person who would score high on a test of happiness. While we are showing gratitude to others, 95 out of 100 people have described having feelings of happiness wash over them. Perhaps even more interesting: more than 50 percent of people say that as they express gratitude, they feel extremely happy.

I have sometimes seen people who, as they express their gratitude for something that has been done for them, have tears well up in their eyes. "Those are tears of happiness," they will likely say, when asked about the feeling behind those tears.

There was an interesting set of studies done by a team of psychologists headed up by a Dr. Emmons, one of the leading experts on the positive psychology of gratitude. It was a simple, 10-week study, with people randomly assigned to one of three different groups. One group is asked to write about five things they were grateful for during the past week. Another group is asked to write about five things that upset them, five annoying things that happened in the past week. The third group was asked to write about five just things that happened – good or bad – and that had affected them during the previous week.

It turns out that of those three groups – the gratitude group, the hassle group, and the five major events group – individuals in the gratitude group reported interesting shifts in their general moods. They felt better about their lives as a whole during the 10 weeks spent getting in touch with the five things they were grateful for during the past week. They also viewed their lives differently, and became more optimistic and hopeful about the future. The group seemed to feel physically better, reporting fewer health complaints and even exercising more.

This is a pretty interesting phenomenon that illustrates how we have choices in life: We can either develop a capacity to consciously focus on what we have, or we can dwell on what we don't have. When we pick the first path, we cultivate optimistic and healthy feelings. When we dwell on what we don't have, we wind up with feelings of relative deprivation.

- Try this experiment: spend five minutes focusing on something that you're upset or jealous about. Zero in on an event in your life that you felt wasn't fair, or on someone who has "more" than you do. How does this make you feel? It's pretty interesting to see how quickly you can focus in on the negative things that you probably never even paid attention to before, isn't it?

Here's another interesting exercise developed by Dr. Greg Kretch, who takes us through a day that is destined for disaster from the start. Here's the scenario:

- Imagine that you are about to go to work on a Monday morning and your alarm clock fails you. It was supposed to go off at 6:30am, but the battery died and you overslept. Now it's 7:30am and you're behind the 8-ball and in trouble with your boss for being late. You're in an incredible rush to get to work – so much so that you get into a minor car accident.
- Talk about a chain reaction. Now instead of being an hour late to work, you are going to be three hours late. You finally get to your office, only to find the parking lot full. You can't find a spot anywhere. An hour later you rush into your office and get a tongue-lashing from your boss. You sit down at your desk in a totally miserable mood.
- Dr. Kretch now wants us to look at a Monday morning that comes with a more typical chain of events. The alarm clock goes off exactly at 6:30am. You get ready for work. You're in the car at 7:30am and on your way to work for a 9am starting time. You even have time to stop for a bagel and a cup of coffee. Traffic patterns are normal for a Monday morning, so you get to the office, find a parking spot and get to work well ahead of schedule.

When a morning starts in that predictable, typical way, how many people take a step back and say, "Thank God everything is going so right. Thank God I got to work totally safe and sound. Thank God my alarm clock went off on time." How often are we grateful for the day-to-day kinds of events where things just go smoothly? Never, and that same lack of gratitude transcends to our own health, and basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. It is a very rare person who sustains an ability known as "habit of attention," in which he or she focuses on what one should be grateful for.

Developing a Habit of Attention

The habit of attention sounds simple enough in theory (after all, how hard can it be to give simple thanks under your breath for getting to work on time?), but in reality it's a difficult thing to do. Yet positive psychology and Judaism, for that matter, are telling us that if we can develop that habit of attention – that focus on what we have – our happiness levels increase. Our benevolence, levels of optimism, and physical health all improve. That because it's our own choice as to how much psychological brain space will be consumed with gratitude for what we have, versus resentment over what we don't have. This is a fundamental concept that requires concentration in today's dog-eat-dog, "keeping up the Jones's" world.

Here's an example from my own experience. I went on trip once and the airline lost my luggage. I had nothing fresh to wear for two days. I remember how much gratitude I had just for the basic luxury of having fresh clothing when the airline finally delivered my lost suitcase. Almost all of my possessions took on the air of novelty in a way that allowed me to be grateful for things that I'm almost never grateful for.

In some of his writings, C. S. Lewis mentions that our enjoyment of something is restrained unless we are able to express our appreciation of the benefits. The expression of gratitude somehow completes our enjoyment. Unfortunately, human nature is to become used to that which we take for granted, it becomes difficult to sustain this type of gratitude. That leads us to some interesting-but-sad research that should resonate for you. Studies show that we tend to be least grateful to those we are closest to. Consider these two scenarios:

- If we get a flat tire on our car and a good Samaritan stops to help us, it's human nature to be incredibly grateful to that stranger for his or her help.

- On the other hand, it's hard to sustain gratitude for the daily good that our mothers, fathers, children and friends do for us. A piping hot, home-cooked meal at Mom's house, for example, is taken for granted as "something she should be doing for me anyway." It doesn't deserve the same praise as the good Samaritan's actions.

Research shows that people tend to be more grateful for the unexpected, and that they experience less gratitude for favors and benefits completed by those who are closest to them. This is very sad, but also correctable. Some of the positive psychologists say we can tackle the problem by deliberately reminding ourselves on a regular basis (daily or weekly, for example) to go through the list of everything you should be grateful for in life.

It turns out that taking these few minutes every day or week to complete this exercise can greatly improve family and social relationships. It also improves marriages. Who knew that a simple "thank you, I appreciate your help" spoken once a day could help chip away at the nation's skyrocketing divorce rate? It's amazing when you think about it.

Levels of Ingratitude

In one of the classics of Jewish thought written many centuries ago called, "The Duties of the Heart" (in Hebrew it is called Chovot Halevovot), the author says that our ingratitude even goes to the point of ingratitude to God. He writes the following, "People grow up surrounded with a super abundance of divine favors which, because they are experiencing them continuously they become so used to them and so habituated to them that they come to regard them as entitlements that they forget to be grateful for." The author goes on again to say the same thing I have been focusing on in this chapter, which is: How do we overcome this when our brains are wired to be habituated?

This topic reminds me of a part-business trip, part-vacation where I had to give a paper at a conference in Hawaii. I'd never been there before, and I was quickly overcome by the island's natural beauty. I relaxed outside in a chair and enjoyed an unbelievable Hawaiian sunset. I sat contemplating the magnificent scenery.

I saw one of the hotel workers and told him how lucky he was to work in such an unbelievably beautiful setting. "As a New Yorker who doesn't often see such beauty, I can't even imagine what's it like to work surrounded by such beauty," I said to him. He looked at me, kind of confused or maybe even a little bit annoyed, and said, "Sir, to me this is just a job. I dread going to work Monday morning just like the next guy."

Taken aback, I regrouped and realized he wasn't seeing what I was seeing. What for me was fresh and unbelievable beauty for him was just a job. There was nothing wrong with that man or his response. He was just reacting the way our brains are wired to respond. Our brains become used to even the most magnificent setting and even the most unbelievable ongoing kindness from family members and from our lives.

There is an interesting section in the Talmud that talks about one of the Rabbis who lived over 1500 years ago. Walking in the marketplace, the Rabbi starts screaming out to the people in the market, "Who wants life, who wants life?" as if he was selling life itself. This was a respected Rabbi by the name of Rabbi Alexandrei, so of course everyone flocked around him, eager to hear about his offer. They all looked expectantly looking at him, and he quotes a very well known passage in the Torah: "If you want life you have to be careful about how you treat others and how you talk about others."

This is a well-known passage, so I'm sure the Rabbi's audience had heard it hundreds of times. Just what is the Talmud trying to tell us here? It's the same point I'm making: Rabbi Alexandrei took a well-known, old, tired insight that no one was paying attention to and packaged it in an exciting way. He did this in a way that, as the Talmud tells us, allowed people to look at what for them had become mundane. You have to figure out how to do this in your own life.

So, how does one develop that habit of attention? Dr. Kretch calls this transformation the "challenge of the ordinary." He writes, "We are inclined to develop a habit of inattention where we fail to notice that which we are surrounded with that we need to be grateful for. The more we perfect a habit of attention, the more successful we will be in conveying gratitude and mastering a sense of happiness."

Impediments to Gratitude

Now let's take a look at the impediments to gratitude. Earlier in this chapter I discussed how our brains are hard-wired to not be able to even see the need for gratitude. Research shows that the following are three universal human characteristics:

- The first is self-preoccupation, where we become so caught up in our own personal life's drama that there is little room to notice what's around us. We get to the point where other's needs, or things that others do for us, go unnoticed.

- The next characteristic ties in with expectations. We expect that which we are accustomed to. Once that expectation is developed, we are no longer surprised or attentive to it. If a family member always clears off the table or picks up our laundry, we come to see the favors as parts of our lives. We are no longer surprised when it is done for us and we are no longer attentive to it. Whereas, your attention is grabbed only when your expectation is not met, not when it is met. Suddenly dinner is not on the table when you come home. Suddenly the laundry is not done. Suddenly the house is not as clean as you have come to expect it. And that is when we focus on what is happening rather than focusing on all the good that is happening for us.

- The third characteristic is entitlement. The more we feel deserving or entitled, the less likely we are to feel grateful for it. You know the feeling: As long as I feel entitled to something I won't view anything that is happening to me as a gift, or as something that I need to develop gratitude for.

These aren't easy habits to break, but I do have some recommendations to help you on your own journey. I'll start by discussing some ways to develop your own habit of attention. My first recommendation centers on the idea that developing the habit of attention takes practice. It may even take a little bit of ritualizing, and a focus on building it into our lives. Gratitude develops through continual practice. Without that practice, there is no guarantee that it is going to become embedded in our repertoire of relating to the world around us.

You must make gratitude a priority because it's too easy to passively fall victim to that habit of inattention, and to the three characteristics that foster a lack of gratitude.

My first recommendation is to write down five things from the week before that you were grateful for, and that yielded sustained benefits. This is a wonderful ritual that you can involve the whole family in. On Friday nights, at your weekly Shabbat or meal, go around the table and you ask family members to discuss five things that they are grateful for. All you have to say is, "Tell me five things that you are grateful for." To make it simpler, just ask, "Tell me one highlight of the week that you are grateful for." (People are less burdened by one request versus five). Go around the table and talk about one or more events or occurrences from the past seven days that you are grateful for.

This sharing exercise yields two benefits. It lets the rest of the family know something from the week that they might not know about otherwise. And, research shows, the more that one shares the intimate details of their regular lives with family members, the more cohesive and bonded the family unit becomes. Here's a story that really brought this concept home for me:

- I was visiting Israel and giving a series of talks during a stressful time in the country. It was the height of the Intifada and a lot of bombings were taking place. I was asked to do some work there since my psychological specialty is working with victims of post-traumatic stress disorder. There was a significant need for work in that area in Israel. I was on my way to catch a flight to the United Kingdom, where I had to attend a conference, and then I was going to go home for the weekend. So I am in a cab on the way to the airport to catch a flight to England. I remembered that a friend of ours had invited us to his daughter's wedding, which was going to be in Jerusalem that day. I remember this while in the cab.

- I told my friend that I couldn't make the wedding because my schedule was too tight and I asked the cab driver to pull to a hotel for a quick stop on the way to the airport. "Let me at least run in and congratulate my friend and congratulate the bride and the groom," I said to myself, thinking I could probably make my plane anyway. When I arrived, the marriage ceremony had already started.

It was outdoors in a magnificent setting. The sun was setting over the ancient stones of the Old City of Jerusalem – a city that holds so much meaning.

- In front of me were probably the happiest bride and groom I ever saw in my life. They were literally jumping with joy. The combination of the perfect weather, the spiritual and beautiful setting of the sun over this ancient beautiful city, and the unbelievable joy of the bride and groom, brought a tear to everyone's eyes. These were literally tears of job. I was so happy that I had stopped to spend at least a little bit of time at this wedding.

- I sneaked out the back after the ceremony was over, ran back to the cab and made it to the airport just in time. The plane took me to England, where I spent a very tense couple of days at a conference. I finally caught a plane back to JFK in New York, where I live, to make it to my house on Friday afternoon, just in time for Shabbat. I'm exhausted and jetlagged. During dinner my wife, who tries to keep me honest, looks around at the family at my kids, and says, "Okay let's talk about one thing for the week that we are grateful for."

- I wanted to kill her. I was exhausted I just wanted to go to sleep. The last thing I needed was to do this gratitude exercise. And as she goes around the table, the children each talk brought up one thing from the week that they are grateful for. They were teenagers at the time, and very resistant to the exercise. They still got into it, and have come to see the value in it. Finally it was my turn. In spite of my fatigue, the wedding flashes through my mind. I'd all but forgotten about it, thanks to the unbelievably busy time I had been having in Israel and England.

- I start telling my family about that experience of watching the sun set and of the bride and of the groom, a very special moment. As I described that moment, I was so grateful for two things that happened: one is that my wife and kids heard about something that happened to me; the other was that the wedding itself transferred from my short-term memory to my long-term memory. I think I would have forgotten it otherwise, but through the exercise it became part of me. It became a moment that I can now conjure up when I need to think about something spiritual and positive that happened.

That's the essence of gratitude – the essence of developing that habit of attention. It can only be cultivated by building the exercise into that type of family ritual. Interestingly, one of the researchers in the field of positive psychology has said that if you do these exercises once a week instead of once a day it has an even more powerful impact.

Where Humility Fits Into the Picture

My second recommendation is slightly counterintuitive, but it has to do with how you handle your mistakes. As one author in the field of psychology says, "As long as I am humbled by my own mistakes or limitations, I am more likely to receive what I am given with gratitude and a true sense of appreciation for the giver as well as the gift."

In other words, it takes a certain degree of humility to be able to be grateful and open up to the fact that we are dependent on others, and how we must be aware of what others do for us. Developing this humility requires an awareness of one's own needs and one's own vulnerabilities. Consider the fascinating University of Pennsylvania study that impacted how I myself relate to others. A sociologist at Penn Medical School compared the top 1 percent of neurosurgeons to the bottom 1 percent. The top 1 percent comprised those doctors who had incredibly long training. It starts with four years at medical school, goes into years of general surgery and then further specialization to become an independently practicing brain surgeon.

The sociologists looked at the top 1 percent, or those neurosurgeons who have the lowest death rate and best success with their surgeries. He then compared that group to the bottom 1 percent of neurosurgeons, those who are so bad that they actually are fired by their residency program.

The top differentiations between the two groups were not manual dexterity, IQ scores or years in medical school. Rather, the key difference was how the surgeon handled his or her mistakes after losing a patient. The top 1 percent neurosurgeon said that if they lost a patient, they would be energized by the experience and wouldn't rest until they learned (through investigation, research and by talking to colleagues) what they did wrong.

The bottom 1 percent responded differently. “Of course I lost that patient, thanks to the terrible nursing staff in the operating room,” was a common answer, as was “Of course I lost that patient, this hospital has the worst lighting in that operating room.” With the bottom echelon, it was all about seeing the mistakes as something that was externalized and the fault of others.

It turns out that a key aspect of developing the habit of attention, and part of developing gratitude, actually lies in the ability to recognize the power of one’s mistakes. It’s also about recognizing one’s inherent limitations and dependence on others. Get through these barriers and you’ll be open to help from others, and you’ll be more apt to receive what you are given with gratitude.

Instilling Gratitude in Children

My final set of recommendations focuses on parenting advice. How does one teach our children to be grateful? By showing gratitude in our own lives. Every time we thank a cab driver or treat a waiter with respect it helps teach children about gratitude. It weaves the lesson of gratitude into their daily lives. So taking that extra moment to thank a sales clerk or the person who is delivering the newspaper and, perhaps even more importantly, to remind children to thank us for what they may take for granted. Maybe you drove your daughter to her friend’s house, or perhaps you helped your son repair his video game console. No matter how small the gesture, children need to be reminded to say, “thank you.” And parents need to be reminded not to say, “Don’t mention it,” or “It’s okay, don’t worry about it.” Instead, children should be praised for expressing gratitude.

We can borrow a page from Japanese culture here. There’s a practice in Japan known as “Naikan,” which finds people building gratitude into the fabric of their lives as if that gratitude were a natural aspect of relating to the world around them. People who practice Naikan ask themselves these three questions every day: What have I received from others? What have I given to others? What troubles and difficulties have I caused others?

This Naikan exercise reveals the very essence of what we should all be doing as we try to overcome a natural tendency towards habituation, and as we develop the habit of attention to all of the good that surrounds us every day.

The Power of Forgiveness

The ability to forgive is an extremely powerful tool that not all of us readily possess. In today's competitive society, it seems like everyone is out to get each other, doesn't it? In such an environment, it's hard to imagine that there's much forgiveness floating around. After all, many people think it's easier to bottle up a grudge than to forgive the person who helped create it and move on.

In this chapter I'm going to walk you though the benefits and complexities of forgiveness.

We'll also look at how the Jewish approach to forgiveness differs from the Christian approach.

Let's start by looking at some of the research on forgiveness, which, incidentally, is similar to the research on happiness and gratitude that I've covered in earlier chapters. There are some particularly rich insights on forgiveness in Judaism. The way people respond to being wronged or hurt by others is something that actually impacts their quality of life. We all know people who are injustice collectors; they go through life collecting injustices. They harbor grudges, they hold onto anger, being with them is like walking on eggshells.

It turns out that the way people respond to the slights of others (make no mistake, one can't go through life without such challenges), significantly impacts one's feelings of emotional well-being and physical health. Those people who are always angry at others are prone to blame everyone for their problems. They also have the greatest risk of premature death. We all know people who are like that, and maybe we're even like that a little. Unfortunately, if we do not make a concerted effort to combat this, we wind up rehearsing and reliving hurtful memories over and over again.

Those of us who nurse grudges know what it's like to mire in the quicksand of the wrongs done to us by others. It pulls us down. The Torah teaches us that we are actually not allowed to hold a grudge against another. This is interesting, and the question then becomes: how can one legislate against emotions? Still, the Torah commands us that grudges are an emotion that people have to really work on eradicating from their minds, hearts, and souls.

The injustice collectors or those who hold grudges against others, when compared to those who are empathic and take the perspectives of others, are more likely to go through life feeling depressed. The grudge-holders are also more likely to go through life feeling as if they have less control over their lives than individuals who are more forgiving. The injustice collectors make their way through life with this cloud of negativity hanging over their heads. From a health standpoint, research shows that they are also more likely to have higher resting heart rates and elevated blood pressure. When forgiveness is nurtured, on the other hand, our blood pressure goes down and our happiness levels go up. Clearly, forgiveness is an important attribute to work on, understand and nurture in your life.

Making the Important Connections

Now let's look at the Hebrew word for forgiveness, which is mechila, or in Hebrew mem, chet, yud, lamed, heh. The word mechila is tied to a very similar word in Hebrew, machol which is defined as a circle, or dancing. The words machol and mechila are similar kinds of words, but they are not grammatically identical. The Radak, a well known commentator on the Bible, tells us that when King David is crying out to God and asking for understanding and forgiveness, he says the term hafachta mispedi l'machol li, which means he thanks God in Psalms for transforming his sadness to machol, meaning forgiveness.

The Radak explains that the word machol is milashon m'cholot v'rikud, and it is tied to the same word as the word for a circle and for dancing. Now what is that connection and how do we understand it? What is the connection between machol, a circle formed in dance, and the word mechila, or forgiveness? Much wisdom is implied in this Hebrew component. Forgiveness is a dance of reciprocity. It's a dance of relative contribution rather than blame. When we're angry at somebody and pointing a figure of blame at them, we feel set apart from them. At some level, we even feel set apart from others. When we have the humility about the experience that invoked the conflict, we rejoin the circle. Feelings of joy and belonging, typified by dancing in a circle, start to take over.

Forgiveness is a dance of reciprocity. It is relative contribution rather than blame, and that forms a circle or a machol. Otherwise our resentments tend to get stored up and eat away at us.

Understanding the reciprocity of human relationships and the relative contribution we have to any misunderstanding – especially if it is a misunderstanding where we might have played a role, no matter no minor – gives way to rejoining the circle and to connection.

There is interesting secular literature on the role of dance in joining the community. Historian William McNeill, who wrote a book called, "Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History," says community dancing is a universal and uniquely human activity. At an orthodox Jewish wedding, for example, all of the dancing is done in a circle. A common theme McNeill finds in community dancing is the sense of unity, joy, and shared purpose. When the dancing includes rhythmic movement and a regular beat, and continues for a long period of time, a feeling of euphoria and almost like merging with the community into a cohesive unit overtakes participants.

McNeill also discuss military personnel who are marching in a drill, and notes how a similar feeling of merging and participation takes place. He views such dancing as an activity that is crucial in building a sense of community and togetherness. How interesting then, that the Hebrew word for such dancing is virtually identical to the Hebrew word for forgiveness. Forgiveness is about rejoining, or a re-entry into the circle. So that's take-home message number one in terms of some of the underlying psychology taught us by the Hebrew language and the Hebrew word for forgiveness.

There is another fascinating insight that the word mechila, or forgiveness, teaches us. This Hebrew word is tied to another Hebrew word almost identical and that word is machol, or tunnel. At first glance, it's hard to see the connection between a tunnel and forgiveness. This is where the psychological insights embedded in the Hebrew language become particularly fascinating. Tunnels are devices used to break out of a place; tunnel through a place that is inaccessible into a place that is now accessible; or get into a place that you're trying to reach.

Interestingly, when God teaches Moses the formula for forgiveness he teaches him a passage that Jews are to say when asking for forgiveness. It is a passage known as the "13 principles, and it includes 13 divine attributes, including speaking and praying to God for mercy in asking for forgiveness.

When God teaches that divine formula for forgiveness to Moses, where does he put the principles? He places them in a machol, in the crevice of a rock in a tunnel. God literally says that throughout the ages when Jews want forgiveness, this is how they need to approach him.

Those words of God are very much the words that we say repeatedly, especially on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish Year. What is that all about? It turns out that Rabbi Motti Alon in Israel has brilliant insight on the connection between mechila, or forgiveness, and machol, a tunnel. The Rabbi says that when we excavate a tunnel in a boulder or a mountain, each party begins to dig from his side tunneling through the obstacle until both parties meet in the center.

That is exactly what the divine mechila, the divine pardoning, teaches us. In it, God digs and excavates and tunnels from his side in reaching us halfway in the divine forgiveness process. But God's expectations that the individual will also begin his act of digging serve to bring man and Creator together again. We are often told that what happens between God and man is a formula for what should happen between people in the interpersonal sphere as well. In other words, when someone seeks forgiveness, we must tunnel through on our side in order to meet God – or as in the case of interpersonal offences – meet the person who wronged us halfway.

Meeting wrongdoers halfway requires a dose of humility and ability to forget our anger, let go of the self-righteousness that comes with feeling wronged, and open ourselves up to the entreaties and the apologies of the other. In Jewish religious law we are told that we have no obligation to forgive somebody when it is one-sided. The concept of turning the other cheek is not a Jewish one. If somebody wrongs us, our job is to forgive, provided that the person who wronged us takes the proper steps to tunnel through from his or her side to our side. If those steps aren't taken, then we are under no obligation to forgive them. This concept is very clear in Jewish law.

However, Jewish law also says that if someone repeatedly asks for forgiveness, makes appropriate amends, and does everything within his or her power to ask for forgiveness – and if we don't forgive them, then the situation is called midas achzarios. This is the Hebrew word for a cruel personal style that is very much frowned upon in Jewish thinking and Jewish Law.

Tunneling and Forgiveness

Let me share with you a few other insights on the tunneling and forgiveness processes. I'll start with the bounce-back response. Did you ever notice that when you are angry with someone and fighting with them – let's say you are in a fight with your child or your spouse – you let go even without talking it out. Before long, you'll find that you are no longer angry with them, and that your interactions have returned to normal. There is no guarantee, and it depends on the nature of the conflict, but very often the key to forgiveness and the key to making peace is when the reciprocity is there, when there is no longer that bounce back response. That is something that is viewed and seen in various parts of the Torah.

There is a fascinating insight in the Torah in the story of Rivkah of Rebecca on the day that she sends her son Jacob off to run away from Esav. Esav is incredibly enraged at Ya'acov for stealing the birthright. Rebecca just wants to protect her children, and doesn't want her sons to murder each other. She tells her son Ya'acov to run away, and he asks, "How do I know when I can come back?" She answers, (this is in Genesis, chapter 27:44), "Just go, take time and you will know when you can come back ad asher toshuv chamas achicha which translates into 'when your brother is no longer angry with you it will be safe to return.' But right now in the heat of the anger you cannot do it, one has to strike when the iron is cold in having that reconciliation process take place.'"

Here's a strange passage in the Torah, and it's the very next verse, which says: ad shuv af achicha mimcha. Rebecca repeats herself by saying almost the same words, "when your brother is no longer angry at you, you can come back." Well-known Rabbi, Rav Itzel, asks the obvious question, "What is the redundancy about?" And he has a tremendous psychological insight into this. What Rav Itzel says is the second words of when ad shuv af achicha mimcha should be read differently: It is when your anger subsides at your brother that it will be safe to go back and reconcile because then you won't be bouncing your anger off each other.

We know that anger is reciprocal, and we also know that part of what goes into forgiveness and anger management is known as the pullback response.

I'll get into this concept more in depth in a later chapter within this course, but for now it's important to know that the pullback response is about striking when the iron is cold and not being angry at each other. There is a verse in Proverbs that is often used in talking about this insight, it says, k'mayim panim el panim, kein lev ha'adam, which translates into 'the human heart is like looking at our reflection in the water.'

It is interesting that some Rabbis who have unbelievable psychological insights say that if one literally looks at his or her reflection in the water on a lake, pond or puddle, a distorted image will bounce back. If this were true, then how would one be able to see a more accurate reflection of his or her face when looking in the water? Metaphorically, we literally have to bend down and eliminate our haughtiness and conceit, and we need to engage our humility. In fact, humility is at the heart of the forgiveness process.

Maimonides tells us that there are two human emotions that we must eradicate. These emotions can create much trouble in interpersonal relationships. The first is uncontrollable rage, and the second is conceit. Sadly, these emotions are often inextricably intertwined.

Think back to the last time you were angry with someone, or the last time you experienced the early stages of grudge keeping and injustice collecting in your own life. You probably felt slighted by someone, right? That person didn't give you the proper respect or honor, so the rage took over. To the extent that we can work on our humility, we can also maintain a key ingredient that is necessary in facilitating the forgiveness process. So again, when you reflect back calmness, and not anger, the tunneling and circling processes are facilitated.

The Secular View of Forgiveness

Now let's circle back and look more closely at the secular view of forgiveness and the psychology behind it. Interestingly, a number of psychologists spend time talking about how one can bring forgiveness into his or her life. These psychologists help people understand, as part of the process, how to put oneself into the offending party's shoes. That is to say, to be understood, one must first understand. Going a step further, attempting to understand why the offender did what he or she did can help a lot.

Realize, of course, that taking this perspective doesn't mean you have to blindly give into a one-sided process of forgiving without the offending party doing his or her share of tunneling. However, putting yourself in his or her shoes is part of the process. Consider the offender's humanity, but don't ignore or deny what has taken place. Instead, engage in a process that gradually allows you to release the anger and the resentment.

I have an excellent story to illustrate this point and wrap up this chapter. I once worked with an adult male who was extremely successful. As an adolescent, he had had been physically abused by his father. He came to me for issues related to that history of abuse. He told me that he prayed his father would die. You see, his father had not become much nicer when he was an older man, and had continued to psychologically torment my patient.

One day I got a phone call. It was my patient telling me that his father had died. I paid him a shiva visit, and he continued to come see me after the death of his father. The strangest thing happened. The patient says to me, "You know, I always dreamed of this day when I finally would be free of my father." That freedom didn't come. In fact, my patient's problems were very much exacerbated by his father's death. He became increasingly depressed and developed chronic headaches. The situation became so bad that my patient couldn't function anymore. He took a leave of absence from the job that he was so successful at, and watched as the life he'd built began to slowly unravel.

One day my patient says to me, "I just don't understand. Why is it that my fantasy comes true and my father is gone, but I am getting no relief from it? He is no longer here to torment me, he is no longer here to torture me.

Why am I not getting relief?" Another day he comes in and shares an insight. He realizes that what he was really mourning wasn't the loss of his father but his loss of the fantasy that one day he would have a father. He was excited by the insight, but strangely it did not lead to any kind of remission of his depression. It didn't result in any amelioration of his symptoms.

The client remained mired in the quicksand of his anger and his sadness and felt completely stuck. Sitting with him one day in session, I reviewed some of the research and insights we had just reviewed on forgiveness and the power of forgiveness and the importance of forgiveness. We even went over some of the liberating components of forgiveness, and discussed the tunneling process.

As a result of this discussion, my patient started keeping a journal of his memories, feelings and thoughts regarding his father. As he wrote, he began to develop empathy for his father, who was a concentration camp survivor whom Hitler had robbed of his adolescence. When he became a father of a teenage son, the man just didn't know how to deal with it. Much of his anger was rooted in anxiety, fear, and protectiveness. He was concerned about losing his son, and expressed that fear through abusive outbursts. Anxiety and love was transformed into rage, when the man was actually trying to show his love.

Just because my patient adopted a more understanding angle on his father's abusiveness didn't mean that what happened was okay. But it did free him up and help him start letting go of his rage, little by little. One day he comes into his session visibly lighter, stating that he had "finally figured out what to do." He said he went to the cemetery to visit his father's gravesite. As part of the tunneling process, he brought along the journal that contained his feelings and newly gained insights about his father. The cemetery was virtually empty that day. Using a heavy rock, he placed the journal on the headstone of his father's grave and then spent the rest of the day crying tears of rage, sadness and forgiveness for his father.

Then an interesting thing happened. My patient – who had left the journal at the gravesite – felt palpably lighter. He was no longer weighed down by the burden of his rage at his father. He had arrived at a place of true forgiveness. My patient had tunneled.

And while it is true that his father had not done his part of the tunneling, my patient had gained insights into where his father was coming from. This allowed the man to rejoin the circle. Little by little his good health returned and he was able to go back to work.

This poignant story clearly illustrates the power of forgiveness, the power of mechila, the power of rejoining the circle, reconnecting with the community, and tunneling through to a place of acceptance. Never underestimate the power of forgiveness, even in situations that seem otherwise impenetrable and impossible.

Effectively Managing Anger

How does one control anger, both in the moment, and in terms of dealing with anger in situations where the "anger trigger" is something or someone you have no control over? This is the chapter where I answer these and other important questions related to the human emotion known as anger.

Let's start with the three "Ps" – pullback, perspective and planned discussion. There is a beautiful quotation from psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, author of "Man's Search for Meaning." Dr. Frankl wrote this magnificent book about his experiences in the concentration camps, speaks about the pause between stimulus and response. He says, "Between stimulus and response there is a space, in that space lies our freedom and power to choose. In those choices lie our growth and our happiness."

In that quote, Dr. Frankl is talking about how individuals can occupy the space between the stimulus – or, the event which makes us upset and makes us angry – and our response to the provocative incident. The first "P" is the pullback, and it allows the space to be occupied by a literal "pulling back" instead of an immediate kind of animalistic response. In pre-Holocaust Europe the well-known Rabbi Baruch Ber Liebowitz had a special anger hat that he would put on before he'd allow himself to give into anger at his students. When someone (a family member, a student, etc.) upset him, the Rabbi would go home and rummage through his closet for that hat…before giving into the anger. Rabbi Baruch Ber would then approach the situation that had initially made him upset, and clearly by that time he was thinking from a much cooler, less impetuous place.

I'm not saying that one doesn't have a right to be upset and assertive about that which frustrates him or her. There is a clearly a place for this emotion. However, we are told in psychology that there are two neural pathways for anger. The first is the short loop, or the primitive neural circuitry located directly behind the nose (where the primitive brainwaves are). The second is the longer neurological pathway, or the longer loop that go to the frontal, pre-frontal cortex where more rational thinking lives.

If we could only bide the time to go from the shorter loop of the immediate animalistic response of our primitive rage, and through the pullback response utilize the longer neurologic circuitry that allows for perspective and thought, then much of the destructive force of impulsive expression of anger would be diminished.

It turns out that there are some interesting insights on anger in the Hebrew language, where the word af, for anger, is also the Hebrew word for nose. Interestingly, it is behind the nose that this primitive neural circuitry lives. It is through a few short breaths through the nose, as our mothers used to tell us, that one can often calm down. Using the longer neural circuitry, the term erech apayim, or the Hebrew phrase for someone who has more patience when provoked, is an interesting imagery. Erech epayim also means the length of the nose, and describes perfectly the journey from that shorter neurological pathway to the longer neurological pathway.

So what does this all mean? Well, it means that if we determine a way to pullback, we rarely regret it. It is almost never a wrong decision to wait before sending that angry e-mail, or to speculate and think before giving into frustration or anger at a child, student or spouse.

Leveraging the Pullback Response

A few years ago I was speaking to a group of teachers in Canada, and telling them the story of Rabbi Baruch Ber's anger hat. Later that day, the third grade Yeshiva teacher was waiting for me, and eager to share a story. He spoke of returning from my earlier lecture a bit late, and of walking into his third grade class, where a student looked at his watch as if to scold his teacher for being late. As most teachers would, this one got upset. He wanted to give this third-grader a piece of his mind for the impudent reaction.

But then the teacher reflected on what I'd said earlier in the day about Rabbi Baruch Ber's hat and the pullback response. He metaphorically "put on" Rabbi Baruch Ber's hat and waited for recess. Coming at the situation from a much cooler place, the teacher considered calling the boy over to tell him how inappropriate it was for him to give that implied criticism about his Rabbi coming late. As the teacher was about to follow through on his plan, the boy said, "Rabbi, Rabbi, look at the new watch I got for my birthday."

It turns out that the child was just trying to show his teacher how excited he was about his new watch.

In this instance, the teacher saved himself from misunderstanding an innocent gesture on the boy's part and turning the situation into something that could have been destructive to the teacher-student relationship. This is a perfect example of how effective the pullback response can be for managing anger.

Once one pulls back from a volatile situation, the next step is to view it through the eyes of others. This is the second "P," or perspective. I am sure you have found yourself in situations where you understand where someone who has really upset you is coming from. Let's say you find out that they treated you in a way that seemed insensitive, but then maybe you find out later they were struggling with an illness, a sick relative or other life stress. You were missing that important information needed to be able to clearly see things from that person's perspective. Once you put yourself in the offender's shoes, your own anger will nearly always diminish.

There is a well-known Midrash, or Jewish tradition, that focuses on Moses, the leader of the Jews. Moses takes the Jews out of Egypt and after the years in the desert, is nervous about his successor. Moses turns to God and asks, "How am I going to find a successor who is up to the challenge of understanding the incredibly different perspective of the 600,000 people who I must lead and who must take my place in leadership?"

The Midrash says, "k'sheim she'ein partzufosei'hem domim zeh l'zeh (just like no two faces among those 600,000 are similar) kach ein da'atan shel zeh l'zeh (so too, no two perspectives are similar) elah echad v'echad yesh lo de'oh bifnei atzmo (rather, each one has its own individual perspective)." This is particularly interesting because there are those who interpret this insight to mean that there is a religious obligation to see things through the eyes of others.

Chassidic Rabbi, The Kotzker, has a different take on the Midrash insight, and in turn gives an even deeper dimension to the second "P," or perspective. He says that if you are walking down the street and you see someone whose face looks different than yours, would you get angry at that person? When two people look different (one man who is bald and another who has a full head of hair, for example) from one another, the parties don't respond with anger.

The Kotzker also says that just like one doesn't get upset when two faces look different k'shem she'ein partzufosei'hem domim zeh l'zeh, one should also not get upset when their perspectives are different from one another. That is perspective.

The final "P" is planned discussion, which happens when you have completed the pullback and the actual cognitive exercise of seeing things through the eyes of others. Then it is time to sit down in a calm way and try to understand where the other person is coming from. It is here that one meets the other in order to gain understanding and to be understood. This isn't about simply agreeing with the offender and moving on, but it does involve mutual listening (one person speaking while the other listens, and vice versa).

Dealing With Life's Frustrations

Before I get into the basics of dealing with life's stresses and frustrations, I'd like to bring up a question that I'm often asked: Is anger hereditary? There is typically a biologic component – and possibly even a genetic component – to anger, but it is never enough to override one's free will and being able to control this emotion. Some people have a harder time from the standpoint of temperament; they have lower frustration tolerances. They are quick to react angrily, but that does not mean that one can't still control that tendency. It is just another of life's challenges, and one that takes hard work and attention to overcome.

Now let's take a look at how to deal with the day-to-day frustrations and anger in your life. If you recall from an earlier section of this course, managing anger is all about the space. As Viktor Frankl said, between stimulus and response there is a space, and in that space lies our choice to use the pullback response to figure out how to respond in a way that won't feed the problem, but that instead will feed a solution.

But what happens when the person who is the source of the anger has absolutely no interest in the dialogue? What happens, for example, if a child is the source, and is not in a position to talk things out? What happens if the attacker has a personality that doesn't allow him or her to see the other point of view at all? How do you handle it then? To the other side, there is no other side. Your perspective is irrelevant, which means there is no dialogue (and, no third "p").

The word dialogue includes the root 'di', or two, which means it requires two points of view. We all know that many times in life the other side is not interested at all in your side of the story. Here's my first recommendation for dealing with such situations. It's actually a fascinating insight that comes from the world renowned Rabbi, the Chofetz Chaim. Here's what he says about the shift in perspective:

- At the beginning of every year it is destined that every individual will go through a certain amount of suffering. In fact, you can almost imagine that in a given calendar year there are certain stresses that you will go through, from financial distress to illness to loss. Let's say you are lucky enough that the stress that God chooses for you comes not as an illness or a financial setback, but rather in the form of somebody criticizing or insulting you unfairly. Rabbi Chofetz sees this as "incredible news," and says this is a sign that God has decreed that this is going to be part of your measure of that year's stress. He says that is unbelievable, because that is something that is …doesn't have to become the center of your existence; that is something that can be handled. The Rabbi also says that when this occurs, we should accept it in a spirit of almost joy, and respond to it by dancing and singing.

Rabbi Chofetz quotes a well-known saying from the Talmud that says it is better to be insulted than to be the person who does the insulting. He also suggests that when you experience that paradigm shift in dealing with the attacks of others, that experience allows you to accept it without getting pulled into an escalating response of counter-anger. I learned this from a respected New York Rabbi, who told the following story in relation to Rabbi Chofetz Chaim's insight:

- The Rabbi was about to sit down for dinner with his family one evening when the phone rings. On the other end of the line was a congregant. The guy starts screaming, yelling and cursing at the Rabbi, and didn't even give him a chance to get a word in edgeways. It turns out that the congregant was angry over a misunderstanding that the Rabbi was completely unaware of. Somehow the congregant had misread or misunderstood a certain incident. The Rabbi listened to the screaming man, and was about to get upset himself, when his mind flashed to the famous insight from Rabbi Chofetz. He recalled the statement that one of the ways of looking at an incident like that is to dance with joy, and respond to it with the joy of realizing this is God's way of meting out his yearly dose of stress in a manageable form than other, far harsher forms of stress.

- Holding the phone away from his ear, the Rabbi started dancing around the room. His wife and children stared as if he were out of his mind. They wanted to call the men in the white coats to come take him away. But he explained to them later that this was really his psychological approach to such situations. He explained his reasoning to them. The Rabbi then went on to say that on the day before Yom Kippur, this man called him crying and asking for forgiveness, apologizing. "Rabbi I have to tell you that I was accusing you of something you had nothing to do with. I don't even know how to phone and ask you for forgiveness for that totally irrational attack."

So that is recommendation number one: It is always better to be among the insulted than the insulters. In Hebrew the words would be, ne'elovim v'einam olvim, shom'im cherpasam v'einam moshivim, or, listening to insults without necessarily giving an answer. When we follow this recommendation, we can save ourselves from getting sucked into a vicious cycle that is not healthy, and that doesn't solve the problem.

Just to be clear, I'm not talking about passively turning the other cheek. Think back to the chapter on forgiveness and you'll recall that forgiving does not mean letting the other person off the hook completely for his or her wrongdoing. Once you have assessed the situation and rationally determined that there is no opportunity for dialogue – and that things are out of your control – then you can tap your ability to change your perspective about what is happening. That is always within our control, nobody can ever take that away from us.

That leads us right into the second recommendation. This is a brilliant recommendation that comes from a Rabbi who lived even earlier than the Chofetz Chaim. His name was Tiferes Yisrael and while writing on a portion of the Mishnah in 1820, he says that we could learn from anybody. He says:

- "We don't really learn so much from friends giving us feedback because such feedback it is often tinged with a certain amount of concern about our feelings. These individuals don't tell us what we really need to hear, because they want to shelter us from anything that might smack of criticism or that might make us feel badly about ourselves. So who shall we really listen to? Critics, or the people who are often the engine of growth in our lives."

Tiferes Yisrael also says, "Most of all, the intelligent person should pay careful heed to the words of his enemy when he degrades and denigrates him and raises his voice. When this happens, he should cup his ears to listen carefully in a spirit of peace and tranquility, because this is the engine of growth." Is this not a fascinating approach to handling criticism from somebody who is not interested in taking your input? Continuing, the Rabbi says, "Listen carefully b'ruach sheket v'shalva, (which means in a spirit of tranquility and quiet, quiet receptivity), because these are the people that no matter how unfair their criticism might be there is a kernel of truth almost inevitably in their perspective that we could learn from and grow from even greater than when the source of input and feedback is from a friend."

The lesson is this: once you've failed at engaging the other person in dialogue, your next step is to transform the experience into an opportunity. Your attackers can be as uncooperative and as unwilling to engage in a dialogue as they want to be, but they can't shift your perspective in terms of a) having the perspective of saying, okay, this is not a bad way to have my yearly dose of stress meted out to me, or b) Tiferes Yisrael's perspective of, "Hey, maybe I could learn something from this."

Shifting Perceptions

My next recommendation is based on the insight of the Vilna Gaon, a well-known Rabbi who often has unusually brilliant insights that date back several centuries. His theories in these situations is based on a passage in Proverbs that says hachzek b'mussar al teref nitzrah k'hi chayecha, which means "hold onto self correction or the correction of others, do not weaken, and realize this is your life." This is a difficult passage to understand in Proverbs, but the Vilna Gaon says, ki mah she'ha'adam chai, or, "the purpose of life is to confront situations that are most difficult for us."

Let's look at how these philosophies apply in today's world. Let's say a relative is making unreasonable demands, or a friend can never be pleased and appears to be angry with you all the time. Any attempts at figuring out the root of the problem leads to increased frustration. The Vilna Gaon says, when you engage with such a person, and do not get sucked into an angry set of mutually kind of attacking recriminations, then you are actually fulfilling your purpose in life, because one of the main purposes of life is to engage in difficult situations and grow from them.

Ki hi chayecha, or that is your life and that is the purpose of life. Your purpose is to constantly engage in self-correction when faced with challenging people and daunting situations.

The paradigm shift comes when you are being unfairly challenged, insulted and attacked, and all of your answers and reconciliation attempts go nowhere. If you don't get sucked in, says the Rabbi, and you don't go down to the gutter like the person attacking you, then you are living life at its most sublime.

Consider the three recommendations from this chapter, and how all of them (from the Chofetz Chaim, the Vilna Gaon and the Tiferes Yisrael), address perspective shifting, and the fact that we have control over our perspective and stress management. It is all about perception.

I had an interesting experience a few years ago while lecturing to a large audience. I was a scholar in residence. The synagogue was made up of families, including one woman who was anxious to hear my talk, but who had no childcare options for her baby. She brought the child with here, and when the baby began to cry, the audience became aggravated quickly. She clearly didn't want to leave, but also didn't want to upset anyone.

An elderly gentleman in the front row leaned over to me and says, "Make the baby stay. I am a holocaust survivor and every time I hear a baby cry I see it as a sign of our victory over Hitler." He continues, "Other people are hearing this baby cry and they are being annoyed because they can't hear you so well. I hear the baby cry and I hear that we won, we are victorious. I hear, oh how wonderful, another Jewish child in the world." For me, that man's perspective changed the baby's wailing into the sweetest sound I could have heard.

The Parenting Connection

What happens when you're up against a child – someone who you can't establish dialogue with? Maybe it's a young kid throwing a tantrum, or perhaps it's an unreasonable adolescent. The trick is to be able to engage and use some of the approaches discussed in this chapter at moments when the person on the other side is not receptive to dialogue. Here's my recommendation on how to handle the situation:

- Imagine that a 10-year-old child is insisting that you allow him to have a sleepover at a friend's house. You say no, and he is not taking no for an answer. He's whining and disturbing your tranquility. Your mantra should be: I have no control over his behavior right now, but I always have control over the consequences.

By following this mantra, you can avoid the conflict that your child is so eager to create. What often pulls parents into an escalating, mutual, spiraling out-of-control parent-child damaging interaction is the belief on the part of the parent that they have to make their child act and think and feel in a certain way at this moment. Let go of this belief and you'll be well on your way to improved anger management.

But as any parent knows, there is nothing quite as challenging as trying to maintain one's cool when dealing with children, particularly with adolescents. It is easier to keep one's temper when challenged by the people who we don't care about, but the stakes are higher when we are parenting our children. The level of worry is greater, the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word ahava, or love is the same numerical equivalent as the Hebrew word da'aga, which is worry.

Love and worry are inextricably intertwined. It is not surprise that as we get more nervous about our children – particularly when it comes to not necessarily fitting into our set of expectations – it triggers intense responses. That in turn can lead to an escalating series of angry interchange, which can result in its own set of problems.

To avoid this escalating anger problem, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind. The first one concerns expectations – an issue I've discussed in earlier chapters in this course.

The fact is, when you shift to a more flexible mindset, it can be transformative in a way that goes beyond common sense. Consider the parent who sticks to his guns about the way his son "should be" acting. Children don't fit into those types of boxes, and a power struggle is sure to ensure.

Change the parent's mantra, however, and the end result is decidedly different. The parent who says, "I have not control over making my child think, feel or act in a certain way, but I always have control over the consequences of a child's misbehavior over the long term." This type of thinking changes our internal dialogue, and completely transforms the script. Here's an example:

- Imagine a 10-year-old child is acting in a disrespectful way when you're trying to get him to hang up his coat when he comes in the house. He has left the playroom in a mess, and you are getting angrier by the moment because he is ignoring you. He is playing a video game and smirking at you. You are trying to get him to stop playing the game system and clean up the house for the dinner party you are having tonight. It is, after all, his responsibility and mess.

- Now, if your mantra is "I have to make him act in a certain way," then you will be lost. However, if you change the internal tape in your head to say, "I have no control over his behavior now but I certainly have control over the long term. So what could I do?" then you could tell him that he has five minutes to stop playing the game system and to clean up this room. "And if you don't," you say, "then we are going to discuss the consequences later."

- Then, if the room is not being cleaned within five minutes, you will put everything away and even turn off your child's video game. Then you schedule a quiet planned discussion at a calmer time later on. If the child is not available to participate, then you will quietly remove the game system so that he won't be able to play with it for the next few days.

- Taking these steps will get the child's attention, and make him think about how long he will have to live without his video game. When consequences are logical and are played out without a lot of emotionalism, and when they flow from the misbehavior, children "get it."

By doing this, you strike when the iron is cold. You can talk things out with a receptive child, and you acknowledge that you cannot make your child think, feel or act in a certain way. You can, however, be consistent and clear about behavior that will be tolerated, and you can deliver consequences either now, or at some point down the road.

Parenting research shows repeatedly that high levels of expressed emotion (when parents get pulled into high levels of yelling, screaming, and criticism), it almost always exacerbates the situation and fuels the child's level of misbehavior and resistance. When we instead reflect back to the child with calmness, clarity and a clear understanding that there will be consequences, then the rules of the game change. It becomes much easier for parents to avoid angry interchanges.

The second point is a bit more subtle, and is based on some of the Jewish thinking that you have already learned about in this course: When a child responds with anger, and when there is the mutual bouncing back of anger between parent and child, it is important for the parent to look at the long-term picture.

We can again refer to adolescents for a real-life example of how this second, more subtle point can be used to the parents' advantage. At three different times during my career I have seen rebellious adolescents go crazy when their parents put limits on them. Let's say a curfew has been imposed, and has resulted in a child literally throwing tantrums in my office during a family session. The child then grows up, gets married and has children of her own. I have been in practice long enough and I see these former adolescents come to me with their own children.

On three different occasions I have had parents (who were once rebellious young teens themselves), tell me that deep down they were happy that their own parents cared enough to place limits on their activities (via curfews, for example). "I look back on it now and I am so happy that they gave me the limits because without those limits I could never have matured and become what I needed to become," the former teens and current parents would tell me.

Here's a more specific example:

- A 15-year-old boy was losing it when his parents were putting limits on him in my office. I was worried about him because the parents were loving and wonderful, but were not so great about imposing those limits. At a session in my office the parents were laying down the new regime and talking about how they were going to have new rules where the child couldn't go out on school nights. They were also limiting the amount of access he had to discretionary funds. The teen was really losing it as the father was laying down the new set of rules for the family.

- At one point I was worried that this kid would actually hit his father, so I ended that part of the session. I asked the parents to wait outside of the room, and the 15-year-old boy waited until he was sure that his father and mother were out of earshot. The child says to me, "It's about time." I wasn't surprised at the comment, as very often children do realize that there is logic behind the rules being imposed by their parents.

- Obviously there are times that parental rules are unreasonable, and when a certain amount of flexibility is required (particularly when raising an adolescent). Dictatorship may work when your children are small, but raising an adolescent requires an authoritative parenting structure wherein the child has a voice and knows that he or she will be listened to and validated.

Keeping that in mind, this point is made beautifully in Proverbs, which states that one should put limits on a child without wavering, v'el hamiso al titen nafshecha. This translates into, "put limits on your kids and don't worry about your child's yelling and screaming and complaints as you put limits on him or her." There is important commentary on that passage in Proverbs, where our Rabbis say regarding that commentary, kol hamosif av yisurrim al bno, mosif haben ahava al aviv, which translates into "the more a parent puts limits on his or her child, the more that child will love the parent."

I heard a wonderful example from an educator, Rabbi Roni Greenwald who specializes in working with rebellious adolescent girls in an orthodox Jewish community. He said, "Some people look at the girls that he works with and they get incredibly aggravated because of their sullenness and their rebelliousness and their challenging natures." He also says that when he looks at these girls, he doesn't see the pink-haired, rebellious, obnoxious 15-year- old with the earrings and piercings. Instead, he considers how she will look 10 years down the road. He knows that as long as we stay connected to this kid, and we let her know that in spite of all of this we care about her and love her and expect the best from her long term, she will outgrown this obnoxiously-difficult period.

Agree to Disagree

There are times when it makes sense to have a planned discussion with a child, especially with an adolescent, and to talk things out. But if the child isn't hearing us, and isn't in a receptive mood, then we just have to agree to disagree and determine an appropriate time to act on the issue. Ultimately, the art of anger control as a parent is knowing when it is safe to ignore and look the other way, and when it is safe to pullback and be flexible.

As parents, we must keep in mind that the more stressed out we are in other areas of our lives the more likely we are to lose control with our children. When we are stressed out, it is harder to see things through the eyes of others. When we are stressed out, we are more likely to give into our anger and to yell, scream, and even become physical with our children. Finally, research shows that when parents are under stress, we are more likely to view even innocuous behavior from our children and adolescents as a threat. When that occurs, we are more likely to get pulled into a host of reactions that make things worse rather than better.

Think back on the teachers in your childhood who were most in control. Most of them yelled the least and praised the most, right? They developed the quiet authority that we should hold onto as parents. Remember that the key to anger control when parenting is the same as it is in other areas of our lives. It's the three "Ps" of pulling back, planned discussions and perspective taking. When we follow these three recommendations and give our children the benefit of our calmness, love, and attention, we stand a much better chance of being able to maintain the kind of connection and parenting style that helps them internalize our values as parents.

The Concept of Shame

At first, the concept of shame isn't terribly relevant to positive psychology. That's because the concept of shame immediately brings on images of negative emotions. In reality, as we peer through the lens of Jewish thinking, there is a deeper set of lessons in terms of this value and construct.

Let's start with the psychological approaches. Basically, in social psychology research and clinical psychology, there is a very informative study that illustrates the point clearly. Imagine someone walking down the street at 2 o'clock in the morning in a bad neighborhood. He gets mugged, has all of his cash stolen and is injured in the process. The victim will elicit one of two responses: 50 percent of people will blame themselves and be ashamed of what they did. Another 50 percent accurately blame the mugger, and say things like, "A mugger came and mugged me and took away my money and it is the mugger's fault."

Let's say 100 people were mugged. If you follow the group over a year, you will see that those who blame themselves actually fare better psychologically. This doesn't mean that they're accurate about placing the blame (of course it's the mugger's fault), but it does mean that there is a clear advantage to engaging in "behavioral self blame" or behavioral shame. This doesn't mean that you're a bad person, it means that you did something that wasn't so smart. Thanks to the experience, you will hopefully avoid falling prey to muggers in the future. You will feel empowered, and your psychological recovery will be quicker than the person who says, "That was completely the mugger's fault."

This type of positive shame is an alien concept to Western ears. It's a concept that the Mussar masters, or the experts in moral growth in Jewish thinking, discuss frequently. A quote from the Talmud shows how Judaism views shame in the right context as a core component of actually a growth oriented personality. The Hebrew words are, "Mi she'ein lo boshes panim," (somebody who doesn't have the capacity of shame), "b'yodua she'lo omdu avosov al har sinai," (could not have stood with his father on Sinai). In other words, that shame is an attribute that's seen as core and central to the Jewish identity. It is kind of a strange thing, especially given the Western view of shame as the negative characteristic that should be totally shunned.

Now let's look at the same Talmud, which is in the tractate of Nedarim on page 79a, here is what it says: The part of a core Jewish identity is to be rachmanim, bayshanim and gomlei chasadim. It is to work and possess the characteristic of being empathic, and to be capable of having empathy and mercy for others, and the capacity for shame and the capacity for doing good for others. Now, then the Talmud goes onto say, "Why, what is it about shame? Shehabusha meviah liydei yiras chet." Somebody who has shame is more careful about doing that which is wrong. That's a good sign.

Digging Deeper into the Concept of Shame

We can also examine the concept of shame in a deeper way, through a discussion based on a piece of Talmudic wisdom. It says, "kol adam hamisbayeish, lo bimhera hu chotei," any person who experiences shame – and its ability to embrace shame in a positive way – will not easily hurt others, and will not easily sin.

Here is one more piece of valuable background from a Jewish text, this time from the 14th Century anonymously authored book called "Orchos Tzaddikim" or "The Ways of the Righteous." The author says that shame is so core to developing the ethical personality that it serves as, mechitzas habarzel, or an iron wall that prohibits us from transgressing. Of course, it is one thing to say that there is such a concept as "positive shame," but here you have one of the most pivotal works in self-improvement in the canon of Jewish literature, calling it the key barrier to sinning.

The best way to explain the dichotomy is to get psychological, and look at the author's next statement: al kein ro'ui l'chol adam, or "One should exert himself to conduct himself in accordance with the noble trait of positive shame and employ wisdom in cultivating it until it is implanted in his soul." The author then addresses the issue of ethical living, and says that shame should be enthroned above all of one's impulses, and regarded as more important than any other trait, "for through it one attains most of the virtues and guards himself against all unseemly traits."

So, you ask, what are the practical implications of all these insights? I will start with a basic biological fact: In different cultures, non-verbal communication differs. The way one shows emotions will be different in Asian cultures than in Western cultures. But yet, there are only a few universal kinds of non-verbal actions.

It turns out that across all cultures in the world, the way one manifests shame is by putting one's head down and averting one's eyes. It's universal and it starts at a pretty early age. That is the way shame is seen. It doesn't matter if you are in Sri Lanka or in the Bronx.

Now let us tie this universal manifestation of shame to the Hebrew word "busha," which carries an incredibly strong moral and ethical lesson. That's because busha is tied to the Hebrew word "yavesh" or dry, which means a break in the flow. This means that busha captures the essence of how positive shame can serve to erect the iron wall that the book "Orchos Tzaddikim," or "The Ways of the Righteous," discusses. Just like the non-verbal manifestation connotes, busha connotes a slowing down, an inhibition, or a pullback response.

Positive Shame

Think back a few chapters to the wonderful words of Viktor Frankl, who says, "between stimulus and response there is the space; there is a pause, in that space lies our choice, in that space lies our growth." Positive shame is about that pause which is manifested through a pullback response – or a busha, a break in the flow, a hesitation or a delay.

Consider the famous story of the Jews sinning with the golden calf in Sinai. The story is told to us in the Torah as, vayar ha'am ki boshesh Moshe laredes min hahar, or "the Jews saw that Moshe, our leader, was delayed in coming down from the mountain." There are a few other places in the Torah where we see that the word busha is rooted in the word "boshesh," which literally means a pause. This is what Dr. Frankl is talking about. He is talking about the break in the flow, or a pullback. This kicks in when you stop to ask yourself questions like, "Should I go out wearing that inappropriate dress or should I pullback and have that step-back response to ask myself is this worthy of the image I want to project about myself?" and "Should I engage in this behavior or not?"

I was speaking recently to a group of adolescents about the dangers of drug and substance abuse and one of the things that I discussed was the nekudas habechirah, which means there are certain points of choice on everyone's timeline. At those points, you can go one of two ways.

In the case of drugs, for example, you can give in to peer pressure and take the drug, or you can use that busha, or "paused" response to evaluate and make a more ethical choice.

In one of his books, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes about the connection between man's first experience with shame and the need for clothing. In his book, Rabbi Aryeh quotes the medieval Jewish thinker and philosopher the Abarbanel, and points out that the word for clothing in Hebrew is "l'vush." The word is derived from the word "lo bosh," which means we put clothing on so as not to be ashamed. The Talmud actually tells us this even earlier, and explains how the concept is tied to the idea of even dressing modestly. Consider this quote from a book on this characteristic, a monograph written by Ner L'Elef, a wonderful organization who wrote about this feeling of shame and constructive shame:

- "Shame is the feeling of smallness when faced with a contradiction between ones superficial actions and his inner essence. Shame restores one's real identity. When a person feels shame here, she will commonly say, 'I felt so small, I wanted to hide or even I felt I could die.' This is because when a person sees the wrong that she has done and is ashamed of it, it's as if a person is saying 'I couldn't have done that.' In a space where that transgression exists my essence cannot exist to the degree that I am faced with the transgression, to that degree my essence is reduced. In that way I separate my essence from the action, and show that it was really the superficial me which did the action."

We can again compare positive shame to the pullback response, or the pause that makes us human and stands as the iron gate against doing something we'll be ashamed of later. Psychologists call this type of negative shame "characterological self-blame," and it rears its head when someone says: "Look, I did something wrong, I am a terrible person, I am an awful person, and I deserved to be punished." And they get into this whole negative cycle of saying that their essence is bad, that it's associated with all kinds of bad outcomes. The research clearly shows that characterological self-blame is associated with depression, and that it will actually result in a lower likelihood of being able to act on one's wrongdoings in a constructive way.

Recently I was at a retreat for families of special needs children. It was an uplifting experience held at a resort in the Catskills region of New York State. At the beautiful resort, people get together for the weekend and talk about the challenges of having children with special needs. Very often, the children are so impaired that they literally cannot function.

At the retreat, as I talked to the parents about the incredible stress that they had to endure, many of them talked about how they went through a period where they felt that they were put in those positions by God, who was punishing and judging them. They just couldn't cope, and as a result they became more depressed and felt like they just couldn't go on. But when those families stopped seeing their challenges as punishments, and instead looked at them as gifts, their lives changed. They gave gratitude for the most basic gifts that they were given. The revelation was downright transformative.

I spent some time at the retreat with an inspiring couple whose child was so impaired that they worked literally day and night just to get their son to be able to sit up. At the gathering, they wheeled him over to me and their son gave me this heart-warming smile and you just saw them beaming with this pride. This 10-year-old child could not talk, communicate the need to be changed, or take care of his own basic needs. Yet his parents brimmed with pride over him. What was their secret? They saw him as a gift that taught them how to be grateful for even the most basic abilities that we tend to take for granted.

The parents told me that they weren't able to reach that point of pride until they moved from a place of characterological self blame (where they thought at some point that they were being punished by being given this child). It didn't happen until they made the transformation as seeing him as a gift. Now he is a source of much joy in their life. This may sound hokey and beyond attainment, but I spent the weekend with fifty parents, most of whom were going through the same type of struggle. Every one of them taught me the same lesson.

Sticks and Stones

I was director of psychology at a hospital where we had an abuse center, and I was working on a research project. The federally funded studies were focused on a group of adolescents who had been physically abused. Some of them were so badly beaten by their parents that they ended up being hospitalized.

We interviewed each of these kids and their parents for upwards of 12 to 15 hours in order to gain insights into the impact of this physical abuse. For example, we looked at which was worse, the beatings or the emotional tongue lashings that often accompanied the beatings. We used various statistical models to tease out the fact that more than 90 percent of the negative impact of the abuse came from the emotional abuse, and not the physical abuse.

There is some new research coming out in the field of neuro-imaging that shows that when somebody insults another person the part of the brain that lights up is the same part that does during a physical assault. Based on the 25 or so years that I have worked with traumatized individuals, they nearly always tell me that they prefer the physical beatings to the emotional abuse.

In the over 20 years that I co-led a group of women in a shelter for survivors of domestic violence, the victims repeatedly told me that the worst part of their trauma didn't come from the beatings, but from the ways their partners would verbally harass them, make them feel small and shame them constantly both in the privacy of their bedroom as well as in front of the children and in front of friends.

The women in those cases told me that they would prefer physical beatings to the horrible feelings of damage that came from the public shaming or even the private shaming of emotional abuse. And even though our mothers may have taught us "sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me," the research clearly shows that names can hurt in a way that is even more profound than the bruises that come from a beating.

Here is a rather surprising and confusing statement by the great ethicist Rabbi Yonah, who quotes the Talmud when he says, "If you shame somebody publicly it is worse than murder." He goes on to say that one who shames a person publicly does not have a share in the World to Come. And then he asks an obvious question in Hebrew, u'ma shelo omru kein al harotzei'ach?, which translates into "Why don't we say the same thing about a murderer?"

Rabbi Yonah raises a fascinating question. Even a murderer could repent and have a place in the World to Come, but why is it that we teach that publicly shaming somebody is so harsh a transgression that one doesn't have a share in the World to Come? It doesn't make any sense that it is treated more harshly than a murderer.

Rabbi Yonah goes on to say that the difference between a murderer and one who publicly shames somebody is ki hamalbin pnei chavero, one who publicly shamed somebody, einenu makir godel cheto, he has no recognition of the enormity his sin, v'ein nafsho moro lo al avono kmo harotzei'ach, and he doesn't have the regret and the compunction and the sense of sadness that comes from the realization of a murderer of the enormity of the horrible sin he committed. Al kein hu rachok min hateshuva, he therefore never changes and as a result there is no hope for him.

I would like to end out this section by telling you about a lecture I gave to a group of educators in a town in the Midwest. We were talking about emotional abuse and the enormity of its impact. The principal told me that the night before there was the 25th reunion for the high school where he was principal. He attended the reunion, where a group of women who hadn't seen each other for years were gathered. Suddenly, a woman no one had seen in 25 years marched into the room and took out her high school diary, and read it aloud to the women who had made her life miserable in school with teasing and insults.

"You know, today they teased me about the dress I was wearing, these girls; I am so depressed I think I may kill myself later today," she read, as she turned the page and delved deeper into the teasing, bullying and social exclusion inflicted by these now middle-aged women. The former queen-bee looks at her and says "I am so sorry I literally do not remember any of this."

This story illustrates what Rabbi Yonah taught us hundreds of years ago, which is that there is often a lack of recognition of the way shaming others could literally destroy a person's soul. And because these people are kind of tied up in their own world and their own insecurity, they don't realize that they have committed soul murder. This explains why in Jewish thinking and Jewish Law it's viewed as such an incredibly harsh and serious crime.

As we wrap up this section, it's important to note that the Jewish concept of positive shame, busha, is the iron barrier that invokes pullback, and allows us to check our future actions against our internal ideals and internal goals. It allows us to occupy that pause between stimulus and response with a pullback response, and ensures that we live up to our own internal standards and our best selves.

Humility's Varied Polarities

"The more one realizes how insignificant he is the more humble he becomes, the more humble one becomes the more he will fear to do anything which is against God's will," says the great Jewish Rabbi from hundreds of years ago, the Malbim. In fact, if you look at one of the most famous Hebrew passages in Biblical passages on humility you'll see that it is a core Jewish value in a very well known passage in Micah, "umah Hashem doresh mimcha ki im asos mishpat v'ahavta chesed, v'hatzne'a leches im Hashem elokecha." This basically means that God asks us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

Interestingly, humility has varied polarities. On one hand there are dangers to crossing over into humility into self-loathing, or into not recognizing one's worth. There is also the other edge of the sword, which is that a humble person recognizes his assets, but also doesn't cross the line into being conceited.

So how does one aim for the right level between the polarities of humility? How does humility become cultivated in a psychologically healthy way? The key is to recognize that a humble person understands his or her strengths, and is always aware that those strengths can be used to help others and do the right thing. When one's positive self-concept does not include this recognition, arrogance rears its ugly head. As you can see, humility is not merely the absence of pride and arrogance, but it is actually an active, positive force which expresses itself in a variety of ways.

Let us go to some of the Jewish sources to understand the varied polarities of humility. In the Talmud, the tractate of Gittin on page 56a, is the famous story of how the Temple was destroyed because of a dispute involving Bar Kamsa, a man who felt slighted by being publicly embarrassed at a wedding that he was mistakenly invited to. There was a spiraling of events that got completely out of control. Bar Kamsa dealt with his shame and humiliation by wanting to bring down the entire Jewish people at the time.

The English translation of that Talmudic story says that Bar Kamsa made a blemish on the upper lip of the sacrifice that he was bringing, and some say it was the white of the eye of the sacrifice and it was in a place that Jews count as a blemish, but the Romans do not. Now the problem was that the Rabbis said that this sacrifice – which was actually being brought in the name of the Romans and was viewed as in some ways representing the attitude of the Jews towards the Roman monarchy – was against Jewish Law. The Rabbis were inclined to offer it to avoid offending the Roman government.

Their leader, Rabbi Zechariah, the son of Abkulas, said to them, "if we in fact say that it's okay to bring this animal as a sacrifice even though it is blemished in a way that is against our Law, people will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar." The other Rabbis present, who again were under the leadership and tutelage of Rabbi Zechariah, proposed killing Bar Kamsa. They felt that he might go to the Roman authorities and say, "You see the Jews will not bring the sacrifice given by the Roman government, it's because they mean to rebel against you."

Right here is where the misplaced humility comes in. Rabbi Zechariah said to Rabbis, "Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?" He took a very narrow view and didn't see the big picture. Because he was unwilling to take a stand, the Romans ultimately believed that there was a rebellion going on by the Jews against the Roman government. This led to the destruction of the Temple and the exile which continues in part to this day.

So Rabbi Yochanan said, "through the humility or the misplaced humility of Rabbi Zechariah, son of Abkulas, our house has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves are exiled from our land."

This may seem like longwinded story that's not worth our time, but think again. When you look at it, it was Rabbi Zechariah's failure to step up to the plate; his failure to properly assume a position of confidence and leadership by asserting himself and viewing the wider picture. He didn't see how this was a time to be flexible and look at the big picture. Because of this, and because of his false humility, this story serves as the paradigm for an excess of humility.

As you can see, real humility is about knowing where you stand and knowing your place. Had Rabbi Zechariah known his place and taken his proper position of leadership, Jewish history would have been different. That's exactly what Rabbi Chelbo is telling us in the name of Rabbi Chunah. In life, humility is about is taking your place, knowing where you stand and not thinking too highly of yourself. When you know where you stand, you have found the right balance between arrogance and self-effacement.

There is an interesting cryptic Midrash that says, "One of the signs that Moses' successor, Joshua, was worthy of leadership, or hu haya mashkim umariv b'veis hava'ad, umesadar es hasafsalim. He literally got up in the morning to arrange the benches. And the Midrash goes on to explain to us that it was clear that Joshua was worthy of assuming the mantle of leadership after Moshe left the scene. For Joshua, everything was important, including setting up the benches.

In a modern-day example, consider the man who is a pretty good baseball player for his neighborhood team. Imagine how humble or significant that must feel when he sees that he is playing against the major league pitcher. For this reason, finding that balance in humility is such an incredibly important part of the process.

Psychological Perspectives on Humility

The psychological perspective addresses humility as a non-defensive willingness to see oneself accurately, including both strengths and limitations. A humble person, psychologists tell us, won't distort information in order to maintain his or her positive self-concept. The humble person can also take criticism without getting bent out of shape.

Dr. Tangly, a psychologist who conducts research on the key features of humility, says that the real definition of humility is: an accurate sense of one's abilities. It's the ability to acknowledge one's mistakes and imperfections, an openness to new ideas, and keeping one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective. The humble person understands where he stands in the universe in terms of a real understanding of his assets and strengths.

Interestingly, Dr. Tangly also talks about truly humble people being the opposite of narcissists. They have a relatively low focus on themselves and an ability to forget themselves. In the workplace, for example, you probably know someone who is truly humble and able to give credit to others for their success. This person can appreciate the values of all things, as well as the many different ways that people can contribute.

So how does one get in touch with his or her humility? One way is by exposing yourself to truly great leaders, including athletes, scientists, actors or artists. Exposure to nature also brings humility. How many times have you felt an incredible sense of your own insignificance and humility while standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon, observing its massiveness and beauty? You felt small, didn't you? Of course you did.

Now let us contrast humility with narcissism. Narcissists believe that they are better than others. If failure occurs – and if the narcissist had anything to do with the failure – he or she will always externalize blame and put their failure on others. They tend to be competitive and to out-perform (whereas the humble person is perfectly happy to be in a collaborative effort). They believe that they deserve special treatment, and again in contrast to the humble person, they have a tendency to lash out at others who do not share their views. Narcissists are also incredibly preoccupied with their own rights and they can become aggressive when their sense of superiority is questioned.

The Benefits of Humility

There are many psychological benefits of humility. For starters, the humble person can work better in a group, and are viewed by others more positively. After all, it's not fun to be around a narcissist, but it is pleasurable to have a humble person as a friend. Humble people tend to be more forgiving, and are not always in competition; they do not prioritize victory at any cost.

Pull together all of these benefits of cultivating humility. We can do this by exposing ourselves to great people, and by realizing the need to cultivate characteristics opposite of narcissism. Interestingly, there is another interesting set of research that shows that humility and modesty are very much tied to some of life's challenges.

When one goes through some of the tough times in life and faces traumatic experiences or loss, for example, humility is often the resultant emotional experience. The person who goes through the challenge starts to appreciate life more, and gratitude becomes the close cousin of that process.

Fostering Humility in Children

Let us now look at humility from the parenting perspective. What is it that fosters humility in our parenting, and what is it that fosters narcissism? It turns out that parents or teachers who place an extreme emphasis on performance, and when they put a lot of emphasis on appearance, do not foster humility. When you have that emphasis on performance, appearance, and popularity merging with an emphasis on perfectionism, humility will not be effectively developed.

Humility is also not fostered in the presence of excessive criticism or excessive praise. Praise must be earned, and shouldn't be lavished in a way that doesn't make sense. Another enemy of humility is a parent who frequently compares a child to siblings, or who heightens competitiveness (a behavior that fosters self importance and even narcissism).

The person who wants to develop humility in his or her children, or in the classroom, should avoid emphasizing perfection, and should also be careful about administering praise, criticizing and creating an atmosphere of competitiveness. Finally, the adult should also be careful about comparisons – a trait for which there is a lack of awareness in Western culture.

Collectivistic cultures like Japan, for example, are more prone to emphasize the value of humility than individualistic cultures in the United States.

It all comes back to knowing your place, and helping children find theirs in a supportive, constructive manner that doesn't exaggerate abilities, but that recognizes and cultivates strengths. Do that, and you will help build the foundation of a life that enables everyone to work together in a way that maximizes potential.

Exuberance as a Hidden Positive

Now it is time to look at a topic in positive psychology that's often overlooked. It is exuberance, or zeal, which in Hebrew is "zerisus," or doing something with enthusiasm. One doesn't always think about zeal as a personality trait that must be cultivated, but it is interesting to see how Jewish thought views this trait. Consider, for example, the classic Mussar work, the Orchot Tzaddikim, which says there that the trait of zeal is the foundation of all positive traits. It also says, "midat hazerizus hi tachshit l'chol hamiddos," or that zeal, enthusiasm, exuberance is the ornament to all other traits and it perfects them all.

To understand fully what we mean by zerisus, we have to look at its polar opposite which in a way is its twin, which is called zehirut, or the trait of self-control. Part of wisdom is knowing when to rush head on with excitement and enthusiasm, and when to put the breaks on. The central work guiding observant Jews today, the Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law), opens with a focus on the importance of zerisus as a spice that informs all of our actions.

The guiding work starts with a statement made in the Talmud by Rabbi Yehuda, the son of Teimah that, "havei oz kanemer, vekal kanesher," which says that you have to be strong as a leopard and as light-footed as an eagle, and as swift in action as a deer, and as strong as a lion in fulfilling the will of God. The guiding work tells us that this is the spice, the ornament, the informing emotional accompaniment that should be at our side when we greet the first rays of sunlight in the morning.

Rabbi Wolbe, a well known scholar and expert on the field of self improvement and Jewish thought of the last generation, in his classic book called the "Alei Shur" talks about zerisus, and points out the Hebrew word for will, ratzon, which is to basically want to do something, while rutz translates into "to run."

So again, it is about the idea that when you take something on and you tackle something of importance it needs to be done in a way that it is enthused with a high level of zerisus.

This obviously must be tempered with the understanding that you have to think. A zariz, or someone who will go at things with enthusiasm, must run not only with their legs, but also with their heads. In other words, you plan for something and then you act on it with zerisus, or enthusiasm. There has to be an integration of head with heart.

Exuberance from the Secular Perspective

It has been pointed out by psychiatrists and by psychologists who write about exuberance, that the English word enthusiasm has a fascinating etymology. One of the synonyms for zerisus, the word enthusiasm comes from the Greek word "en theos" which means the God within. Interestingly, when you look at some of the work on vitality and psychology, exuberance is a trait that is universally associated within the psychological research with positive, physical, and psychological benefits.

Dr. Jamieson, a psychiatrist who is a well-known expert in this field, writes about how nature is filled with exuberance. She writes about one poppy in nature, and says one poppy has a potential to generate, 820,000 million, million, million descendants. What does this have to do with exuberance? Well, the word itself is based on the root word "ex," which means "out of" or fruitful and abundant. Nature is basically all about exuberance.

Knowing this, we can understand the importance that exuberance plays across all species. Let us look at recent research about how schools have eliminated recess. The research shows that when you cut out recess, reading scores and concentration goes down. Play is actually serious stuff for almost every mammal, human beings included. Early exploration of the world is basically fueled through the exuberant play of the young, who have an inborn need for play. In order to develop the skills you need as an adult, you literally have to play. If you deprive young animals of play, they never learn the survival skills necessary to defend themselves as adults.

Studies also show that children who engage in regular, creative play have better memories. They do better on formal IQ Tests, and are happier children. In fact, their play actually serves as a positive predictor of later academic and vocational success.

Now let us take exuberance indoors, into the classroom. There, Dr. Jamieson says that teachers who are exuberant are often able to spread their enthusiasm to the classroom. She writes, "..their exuberance is contagious as it spreads pall mall through a group; exuberance excites, it delights and it dispels tension in a way that basically becomes an incredibly powerful motivating force for students."

Recent studies found that when you can teach a teacher how to be exuberant in their teaching, it automatically shows itself in students' improved academic testing scores. The reasoning is fairly clear: students learn better when they're interested in the topic and in that topic's place in real-life situations. The same reasoning can be applied across many different life situations.

Cynicism as Exuberance's Opposite

The opposite of enthusiasm, a component of it, is deadness and also cynicism. Oscar Wilde said it best when he said, "a cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." Unfortunately, cynicism is on the rise in Western cultures. There is some real evidence at adolescence in particular, that levels of cynicism are going up.

In the last decade, research shows a tremendous rise and the percentage of high school age students who self describe themselves as cynical. They who endorse statements like "a person has to lie or cheat at times in order to succeed," and who in general have sort of caught what you so often see on television sitcoms. In some ways it is the opposite of zerisus.

There is evidence that when you are exposed to cynics you have seeds of doubt planted in you, that get you kind of pessimistic and that take away your enthusiasm. There is reason to believe that cynicism drains energy and motivation, and leads to a lack of respect of people who need to be respected. It also leads to, again to quote Wilde, to a general view of life that echoes knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

I want to wrap up this chapter with a quick story about a conference that I went to a few years back. It was the 80th anniversary of a Jewish organization called 'Amit,' a wonderful group that does all kinds of incredible stuff.

The title of the conference was "Where has all the passion gone?" A woman who must have been in her eighties got up at the conference and she turned to the younger generation, complaining to them about their lack of enthusiasm and their failure to volunteer to do work, and their failure of leadership.

Here's what the woman said:

- Listen, my generation had unbelievable passion. I survived the Holocaust. I came to this country in the late 1940s straight from a DP Camp and the level of excitement back then was almost too much to bear. We were totally passionate in terms of building Jewish day schools in terms of building the State of Israel. In terms of our excitement about rising from the ashes and the destruction of Europe and the Holocaust to planting the new seeds of hope and learning and pride that was what characterized the passion of our generation in building a country, in building schools, in building a sense of excellence and excitement. So, where is your passion? The problem with your generation is you seem to bring high levels of complaints, a lack of energy, and skepticism in a way that drains our community of energy and we desperately need the exuberance and passion that leads to the next generation of building and hope.

That perfectly sums up the essence zerisus, which is essential to transmitting hope to the next generation, and to transmitting knowledge in an exciting way to the next generation. It's an essential component of self-improvement and it's the perfect antidote to the age of current media that often infuses us with cynicism or indifference.

The Roots of Spirituality

You can't achieve maximum personal growth in life without spirituality. In this final chapter, I am going to focus on spirituality in general, with insights that come from work that I have done with some colleagues on adolescent spirituality. (For example, some of the research funded by the Avichai Foundation opened my eyes to some of the complex ways that spirituality is ignited.)

Let me start with Chozeh of Lublin, a well-known Chassidic figure who many years ago wrote the "Possible," and who says, "It is impossible to tell people what way they should take in the pathways towards spirituality. For one way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to and then choose his way with all his strength."

What Chozeh of Lublin was saying foreshadowed recent, modern-day research on spirituality. This is an era where the dominant view is that religion is the crutch of the masses. But recent research shows us that without that crutch, one limps. Many studies show that the individual who manages to bring spirituality into his or her life has higher levels of happiness, lower levels of depression, certain advantages in terms of even physical health, and better marriages.

Especially in today's society, telling somebody to hurry up and be spiritual, or by pressuring either the child or the adolescent or the adult to develop that side, is fruitless. In his book called "The Courage to Teach," Dr. Palmer writes:

- "If we want to support each others' inner lives we must remember a simple truth; the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. If we want to see and hear a person's soul there is another truth, we must remember, the soul is like a wild animal tough, resilient, and yet shy. When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it the soul will stay in hiding, but if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while the soul may show itself."

There is almost a poetic truth being stated here. The bottom line is, if you try to grade spirituality or pressure it to the point where it becomes the source of parent-adolescent conflict, you squelch it.

The Pathways to Spirituality

So what are some of the pathways to spirituality? Rachel Kessler, in her beautiful book "The Soul of Education" discusses five areas, the first two of which are silence and stillness. This is an interested concept in the age of the Internet, where a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report found that the average adolescent uses some form of media almost 40 hours a week, or eight hours a day. With multi-tasking, constant texts and phone calls, silence and stillness are rare.

Dr. Kessler says the next path to spirituality is anything that connects a person to meaning and purpose. When people are connected to who they are, are when they are on the path towards their destiny, spirituality serves as a natural component of that process.

The next area Dr. Kessler addresses is joy. There is a beautiful statement that our Rabbis tell us: spirituality does not develop from a place of sadness nor does it develop from a place of laziness, but it does develop from a place of joy, connecting to doing what one does naturally as one fulfills, the commandments, fulfills the mitzvos. Dr. Kessler also talks about deep connections and transcendence – two concepts that have clear ties to one's ability to develop spirituality.

Rabbi Aryeh Ben David, in his book "The God File," talks about how, when he works with either with adults or with teens, he undertakes a spiritual check-up. He will ask them, what are your peak spiritual moments? What are your peak moments when you feel most connected? Then he'll ask when they feel most alienated, and will try and help people look for their own pathways to spirituality.

Parents play a key role in developing children's spirituality. If a child has spiritual role models who connect in a way that shows them a pathway, the child will always follow. A eulogy given by Rabbi Josef B. Soleveichik at the funeral for the Rebbetzin of Talma, one of his relatives, can teach us a lot about spiritual connection.

Here's the eulogy:

- "I used to have long conversations with my mother, in fact, it was a monologue rather than a dialogue she talked and I happened to overhear. She talked about the holidays or about the Shabbat. I used to watch her arranging the house in honor of whatever holiday was coming up. I used to see her recite the prayers, I used to watch her recite the Torah portion every Friday night. But most of all I learned that Judaism expressed itself not only in formal compliance with the Law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a sense, and a warmth to mitzvos. I learned from her the most important thing in life is to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of his hands resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry, and insensitive. The fathers knew much about the Shabbos, the mothers lived the Shabbos, experiencing her presence and perceiving her beauty and splendor."

Isn't that a great summary of how a parent transmits spirituality and a deep connection to the divine in a home? I can't think of a more magnificent kind of summary of what that process is about.

Spirituality Vs. Religion

There is a fundamental difference between spirituality and religion. In psychological research, religion is described as an individual's degree and acceptance of the actual beliefs in a supreme being, and in an accompanying participation in the public and private acts of worship of their religion.

Spirituality on the other hand describes both the private, intimate relationship between humans and the divine and a range of virtues that result from that relationship. Put simply, spirituality is basically about the spirits, the etymology of it is spirituous, which is the breath of life, it says in the Torah 'vayipach b'apov nishmas chaim' that when God created men he breathed in him the spirit of life and that is what gave man life.

Technically, for example, you could be spiritual and be an atheist. You could feel an incredibly spiritual moment watching a sunset, because there is something about connecting to the transcendent that is inherently spiritual. All cultures have a concept of the transcendent, of the sacred and divine force and all religions try to help people grapple with core existential concerns like finding the purpose and meaning in life.

Now interestingly, new research that shows that some of this is genetic. When you look at identical twins reared apart, nearly half of the reason that twins felt that religion helped them turned out to have been inherited. Self-transcendence, an intrinsic sense of spirituality, is more powerfully predicted by genetic factors than any environmental factor.

So where does spirituality fit into the greater scheme of personal growth? For starters, religious or spiritual people are more likely to have greater emotional self regulation, to avoid a range of anti-social activities including drugs, to delay high risk for premature sexual involvement and to do better in school.

Religious people are also more likely to be happily married, more likely to make good parents, and even to be more altruistic, kind, forgiving, empathic, optimistic and happy. The bottom line is that spirituality is a life-long process. The older we get, the more likely we are to take religious development and spiritual development seriously, and the more likely we are to find it fulfilling.

I want to wrap up this course with an insight from Rabbi Mechel Twerski, who has an incredible track record in helping people who felt spiritually and religiously alienated become more connected in terms of the community. I once heard him say in a speech that whenever his agenda was to make people more spiritual or more religious, he failed miserably. On the other hand, when he simply connected to people, and had no ulterior motives, he experienced success.

The Happiness Circle

To an extent, everything you learned in this chapter about spirituality circles back to the beginning of this course, where you learned that happiness is all about connections and meaning. This theme held through the entire course, which reveals why forgiveness, humility, shame, and gratitude are just a few of the powerful characteristics that can help you achieve your dreams.

So now that you have the tools that you need to create a happier, more fulfilling life, what are you waiting for? By putting them to work in your own life, you'll be surprised at how quickly the positive results start to surface. Whether you are taking that "step back" when dealing with your teenager's anger, "tunneling" your way to resolution, cultivating your own spiritualism in a media-frenzied world, or simply learning how to "breathe" before throwing a tantrum, you are taking steps in the right direction.

I wish you all of the best in your journey towards personal growth. Good luck!

About the Author

Your guiding light throughout the course has been Dr. David Pelcovitz, a psychologist who holds the Gwendolyn and Joseph Straus Chair in Psychology and Jewish Education at Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, where he is also the special assistant to the president. Serving for over two decades as Director of Psychology at North Shore University Hospital-NYU School of Medicine, and Clinical Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry, at NYU School of Medicine, Dr. Pelcovitz has consulted extensively with the Jewish community in the United States, Europe and Israel on a wide range of issues facing children and adolescents. His recent book, "Balanced Parenting," was written in collaboration with his father, and focuses on parenting from a Jewish perspective.