

# THE ATTITUDE IS GRATITUDE

By Rabbi Baruch Cohon

The American Thanksgiving is a delightful holiday, with good food, good friends, family gatherings. One day a year when we hear various people tell us to count our blessings.

Count our blessings, indeed. Jewish tradition tells us to do that every day. Three times a day, in fact. Our daily prayers, evening, morning and afternoon, include a paragraph that expresses gratitude for “our lives and our spirits” – physical and mental survival – and “for the miracles that are with us every day.” Barbra Streisand once recorded a song by Marvin Hamlisch and the Bergmans (all Jewish, of course) called “Ordinary Miracles.” That’s what I’m talking about, ordinary miracles. Not parting the Red Sea. Miracles that are with us every day.

Sunrise – day follows night. What a miracle! Don’t take it for granted. Ice floats. If it didn’t, all life in the water would cease. A child is born.

Ordinary miracles.

When my kids were sweating out a personal problem, or brought home a good grade they didn’t expect, I would tell them: “You see, you can’t lose ‘em all.” That’s because of those ordinary miracles. Here are some of the ones I’m grateful for:

1) Let’s give thanks for the ability to love. To give love and to receive it. All creatures crave it, humans most of all – from the first expression of a mother’s care and a baby’s outreach...to the devotion of a boy and his dog...to teenage romance...to adult passion...to connubial companionship...to lifelong friendships. We can love our work. Our sports. Our music. Our cars. Our country. How deeply we love measures how full our life can be. I had an uncle who carried a cane he had carved for himself. Running the length of that walking stick was the neatly chiseled message: “To Love is To Live.”

2) Let’s give thanks for the ability to laugh. To my knowledge, only humans can do this. Maybe hyenas and kookaburras, but I doubt their sense of humor. I think I heard some of them on sitcom laugh tracks.

Personally, I'm grateful for belly laughs. Laurel and Hardy. Lemmon and Matthau. Sight gags. Word gags. And the special kick of laughing at ourselves.

3) Let's give thanks for the ability to learn. We may never learn all we want to, and certainly less than we should. But what a blessing to learn from our own mistakes.

4) Let's give thanks for our forebears. I am grateful for my Jewish heritage. It stood the test of time, and the testiness of some of its interpreters. I give thanks for those interpreters too. For brilliant scholarship and eloquent folklore. For Torah and Talmud and Midrash. Rashi and Rabbi Nakhman. Rebbes and Bubbes. For prophecy and anecdote. Jeremiah and Sholem Aleichem. Steinsaltz and Agnon and Kishon. For holy days and ethnic food. Yom Kippur and Purim. Farfel and falafel. Bar Kochba and Bar Mitzvah. For heroic history and personal memories.

5) Let's give thanks for freedom. For the United States of America. A place where all have access, and many reach success. We may fall short sometimes of the goal of "crowning her good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea"...but it's still worth trying.

6) Let's give thanks for the ability to argue. Not to shout slogans at each other, but to challenge each other with ideas and viewpoints. To dispute and debate and air our differences. That way we learn. That way we grow.

7) And finally, let's give thanks for the ability to remember. And the ability to forget. My father of blessed memory, who was also my teacher, used to tell me I had a "good forgettery." He was right. Surprisingly, though, it comes in handy sometimes. Losing one's memory is no fun. But total recall can be a real burden. At least I think it must be. Thank G-d I don't have that problem. I just try to hang onto memories I enjoy.

8) And I give humble thanks that, far from losing 'em all, sometimes in my life, I win.

Happy Thanksgiving.