

# Time to count your blessings

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It's my favorite time of the year. The excitement leading up to the holidays – the end of one year, the start of the next – a time of great reflection and an opportunity for each one of us to do our own personal annual review of sorts. It's a time to take stock, look within yourself, and ask who you are and “where you are at” with your life. What goals did you set for yourself over the past year, and how well did you accomplish them?

It is not an easy task as no one likes to acknowledge failures, but setbacks enable us to learn where we went wrong and what needs fixing, where there needs to be a greater focus and in what way our goals perhaps need to be modified. Embrace it, as in many ways it's an opportunity to “reset the clock” and begin anew. It is also a time to look forward and ask where you are going and as such, what are your goals for the coming year. It is a time to assess what is important in life, and search for how to achieve it.

Everyone has challenges both large and small. How did, and how will, you respond to them? As you move along through life, you may not have much choice over which challenges greet you along the way, but you certainly have a choice as to how you choose to deal with these challenges – as an individual, as part of a community and all of us together, as a nation, and that in itself can be empowering. How do these challenges make you feel and what do you personally do about them? How do you want to help change the world?

In spite of all that has happened in my life this past year, I'm a very happy person. I feel truly blessed and am grateful to have a wonderful family, incredible friends, a supportive community and a country that still leaves me in disbelief that I'm fortunate enough to be living here. It simply does not get better than this.

A recent study found that Israel is one of the best places in the world to raise a family. Other surveys found that Israel has one of the highest percentages of happy people, in spite of the fact that so much of the world hates us. Given that we have no shortage of problems here, I often wonder just what our formula for success is. I'm hopeful that in the New Year each and every one of us can count our blessings, see the good that is in so many people around us, and work together to further enhance our collective sense of happiness.

Here are just a few of my thoughts on what I've observed and what we can do to best cope with our challenges.

1. Count your blessings. So many Israelis feel blessed and find that life here has meaning. Israelis seem to know how to live and have fun. Do you search for the



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positive and can you learn from others? Are you grateful for even the tiniest spark of good? So much that happens in your day-to-day life is simply miraculous. Are you too caught up in reaching your destination to appreciate the journey itself?

2. Take nothing for granted. Some do this by stopping to give thanks to someone greater than themselves when they wake up each morning. Take the time to contemplate the many things you have to be thankful for and appreciate what each new day offers – the wonders of sight, smell, hearing and touch and all that is around you, no matter how small. Appreciate each moment as if it could be your last. An “attitude of gratitude” leads to greater emotional and physical well-being.

3. Value community and connectedness. Where else do complete strangers address others with such words of endearment as *ahi* (my brother) or *hamuda* (sweetie)? When times get tough, in spite of our differences, we seem to know how to come together as a country. There is so much diversity among us – embrace this, reach out, build connections and community.

4. Volunteer. Offer to help others. Take the time to give blood, help make a *minyan* (prayer quorum), shop or prepare a meal for a shut-in, take a disadvantaged child to the park. Just look at how even as a country we help other countries rebuild after a disaster.

5. Do you have a sense of pride in who you are, both individually and collectively and in all that you've accomplished? History teaches us to put things into perspective, take the long view, look at the big picture, and focus on what's really important.

6. Recognize the importance of saying “I'm sorry.”

While striving to be decent human beings, at times, through our actions and words, we fail to live up to our goals of being caring, honest, loving and kind, hurting the very people we love the most. It is never too late to look within yourself, take a moral inventory, acknowledge your failings and ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness enables you to let things go and move on with a lighter heart. Looking inward, ask yourself what you can do to avoid the same mistakes in the future.

7. Choose to be happy. When you're unhappy, stop and look for ways to improve things. Dare to dream. In this start-up nation you achieve your goals by putting in effort, risking failure and celebrating success.

With the sound of the shofar still resounding in our ears, now is the time to reflect on who we are, both individually and as a nation, and ask if who we want to be on the inside is reflected by who we are on the outside.

I wish that we all have the strength and courage to continue to focus on the values that are truly important in our lives and look for ways to help both ourselves and others to achieve them. May we continue to feel pride in our accomplishments, encouraged by who we are and what we do, and always work to make the world a better place for us all.

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