

I hate checking bags when I fly.

If I can pack light enough, it means reclaiming hours of my life that would have otherwise been spent watching the luggage carousel spin round and round, never spitting out my bag, until everyone else has already left.

Usually.... I manage to cram everything into my two carry-on bags.

Although, last weekend, was a little different.

Lydia and I flew to upstate New York to spend time with my family.

It was a great trip and it was really special.

During my time there, I rummaged through my parents' attic and found a number of things I wanted to bring home with me.

In fact, I found about another suitcase worth of stuff.

So, left with no other option, I had to check a bag on our return flight.

And since we were already going to have to wait, we checked our other bags, too.

So, there we were, at the Los Angeles International Airport, doing what I dreaded, watching everyone else's suitcase pass before me on the luggage carousel.

Over half an hour had passed

and about half the crowd had gathered their luggage and left already.

It dawned on me that since we had such a long layover in Philadelphia, that perhaps our bags had been loaded onto another plane coming to LA, and had already arrived and were simply waiting for us at the baggage office.

Lydia was skeptical, but recognized that I was feeling a bit antsy, and I needed something proactive to do.

When I arrived at the baggage office, there were our bags waiting patiently for us.

Lydia and I had the same initial reaction: Darn it!

We wasted almost 45 minutes just standing there waiting for our luggage that was never going to appear on the carousel.

We were frustrated! ----- But, here's where the situation changed:

I said, "Just think, if I had not checked with the baggage office,

we could have been standing here for another hour until everyone else had gone home, and we had given up hope with the carousel. So, at least we got our bags when we did.”

That one shift in perspective, saved what could have been a very bitter ride home. Our entire demeanor was changed by thinking positively about our situation. Truth be told, we were still a bit frustrated, but it could have been a lot worse.

As I go about my life, I am constantly trying to look on the bright side of things. To be sure, this is a challenging perspective to hold, but I believe it makes me a happier person.

Think about it this way, its almost like a simple equation:

If you are always looking for the positive in a situation or person, you will always find something good.

If you always find good things, your life will be filled with goodness and happiness. Ultimately, the way we view the world, affects how we experience it.

Not too surprisingly, our ancestors also figured this out thousands of years ago, and tried to share this insight with us.

In fact, they thought it so important, they built it into the very fabric of our tradition.

They are called “brachot” - blessings.

And they are designed to help us take a step out of what we are doing to appreciate what we have.

In Judaism, we have blessings over everything:

eating, breathing, standing, singing,

learning, growing, seeing, believing.

In fact, one tradition says that we are commanded to say at least 100 blessings each day.

Imagine taking the time to appreciate 100 different things in your day.

Granted this might take a lot of time,

but it might actually increase the happiness ratio of our lives immeasurably.

In fact, there is another tradition that says,  
if we enjoy something, and do not thank God for it,  
it is as if we have stolen it from God.

I've put together a short list of prayers from our tradition  
which can be said at a variety of occasions,  
as ways to help us be thankful for what we have or what we've experienced.  
Feel free to take a copy for yourself at the conclusion of services.  
But, it is important to remember that you are also free, and even encouraged,  
to make up your own blessings.  
These blessings can be a pure expression of appreciation  
or they can serve to help us look on the positive side of things.

For example,

If you are feeling burdened by having to buy groceries, you could say:

“thank you God for giving me the means to feed myself and my family.”

Or if you are frustrated by having to clean your home or pay bills, you could say:

“thank you God for giving me a place to live and a roof over my head.”

Sometimes I can never seem to find a close parking spot to the place I'm going, I try to  
remember to say, “thank you God for the strength of my legs, allowing me to walk.”

There never seems to be enough time to keep in touch with every one want,  
so instead of feeling overwhelmed,

I try to be thankful for having people in my life that I love and who love me.

If you are ever feeling too tired to come to Temple,

try thanking God that you have such a wonderful community to be a part of.

There are countless places in our day to day life,  
where we can pause to appreciate the goodness in our lives.

By looking at the positive side of situations,

we can recognize that our lives are filled with blessings.

Even though I will do my best to never check bags again,  
Lydia and I were happy that we actually got our bags back at all.