

The Key to Happiness and Goodness

Okay, I'd like you to guess the most important quality in human life; the most important thing that you can be. Now, there are a lot of contenders for that title, but here is my nomination: *grateful*. If I could wish that people had one quality, more than any other, more than brilliance, or attractiveness, or anything, it would be gratitude. That's right: *gratitude*.

Gratitude is the basis of the two most important things in life; happiness and goodness. You cannot be a good person if you are not grateful and you cannot be a happy person if you are not grateful. Gratitude is the most important single thing a human being can have; everything good flows from gratitude, and everything bad flows from ingratitude.

If you are not grateful you walk around thinking you're a victim. And guess what? A sense of victimhood, either of you or your group, is the single biggest reason people commit evil. People think that they are victims and that they can do whatever they want; they're morally not bound to the same rules that others are, and so they act out on their victimhood. "Hey! I'm a victim. I can do whatever I want."

In addition to evil, ingratitude is also the source of unhappiness; if you walk around ungrateful, you cannot be happy. Gratitude is the indispensable element to happiness. There is not a single happy person on Earth, there has never been one, who is ungrateful.

Meanwhile, on the other side, gratitude is both the source of goodness and happiness. If you walk around grateful you will act as a good person should; grateful people are happier, they are more good, they act kinder toward people, and they walk around with a sense of feeling, "Hey, hey! Am I fortunate."

If you walk around thinking that you have good fortune, then you will not only be happier, you will be kinder. Therefore, there is no quality in life, that is as important as gratitude.

The problem, however, and it's a big one, is that in our society we undermine gratitude tremendously. We tell people all the time that they are entitled to things and the more you are entitled, the more "rights" that you have, or that you feel that you have, the less gratitude you will have and the more angry you will be: "I have this legitimately coming to me, now I'm angry that I didn't get it."

The more that you feel that life, or the state, or that others owe you, the angrier you will get, the more bad you will do, the more you will lash out, the less happy you will be. We're actually developing bad people by making people feel entitled. It's a terrible price society will pay for all the entitlement that we have given over to people.

And we have also developed a sense of victimhood; "Oh, I am a victim because of my parents"; "I am a victim because my group has been maltreated historically"; "I am a victim because of...", well, you just fill in the blank. And the more people feel like they are victims, the more evil we will have in society, and of course the more unhappiness we will have in society.

By the way, you go to a prison, you will find prisoners, they all think they are victims, overwhelmingly. No matter how much they've hurt people, they're victims, too.

And as I have pointed out in another Prager University video, happy people make the world a lot more good than the unhappy do.

So, yes, if I had an Aladdin's lamp, if I could make one wish, that all people would have one single quality, yes, it would be gratitude. That is the source of happiness, that is the source of goodness, and the more good people, and the more happy people there are walking around, the better, obviously, our world will be.

Next time you assess any social policy, or you think through any issue, ask this question first: Will this policy increase or decrease *gratitude* among people? Or, will it increase or decrease a *sense of entitlement* among people, and therefore *ingratitude*? And then you will know whether it is something that will bring more goodness and happiness to the world, or less.

I'm Dennis Prager.