



# Looking through the **APPRECIATIVE LENS**

Witnessing the image of Hashem in every person you encounter

BY LEONARD CARR



**YOU WERE BORN WITH ABUNDANT UNIQUE GIFTS** and talents. Sharing the best of who you are is the greatest gift that you can give the world. Discovering your gifts and bequeathing them to the world is the way to become whole and to ultimately achieve inner serenity and joy. Love is the catalyst that enables you to discover your gifts. It is also the force that impels you to use your talents and positive qualities to make your unique contribution to the great project of completing creation and perfecting the world – the project of shalom.

Being the best person that you are able to be and benevolently giving of your goodness to others humanises and creates shalom in the world. It is therefore the most loving way that you can be. Goodness binds you to others and also connects you to your true self. Love creates the conditions for self-discovery. Love encompasses all forms of beneficence like compassion, kindness and mercy. You bring out the best in yourself when you direct your intention to bringing out the best in others. In order to bring out the best in others, you need to view them through an appreciative lens.

These ideals are embodied in a concept that I call appreciative witnessing. Through the appreciative lens, you get to see the image of Hashem in every person you encounter. Appreciative witnessing affirms the position of the other in your world as someone for whom you have awe, respect and reverence. It demonstrates a desire to connect and forge an authentic bond with that person. It is the embodiment of your intention to make a meaningful difference in the life of another. It is a way of practically fulfilling the biblical injunction to love your fellow human being as yourself. It is a means of touching people in ways that invites and motivates them to be the best they can be, and through that, becoming an enriched more complete version of themselves.

An appreciative witness is by definition compassionate. Compassion is a unifying force. Through compassion, the universal transcendent human experience and the uniquely personal meet each other. The act of witnessing is intentional – you need to choose to be an appreciative witness and be dedicated to playing this role in all of your interactions.

It is a way of demonstrating your commitment to really being there and understanding the other person. It means treating anyone that you interact with as the most important person in your world at that moment. Consider what a profound experience it is to be at the receiving end of such an approach.

The appreciative witness is the enlightened individual who is able to touch people in a way that they have never been touched before. Appreciative witnessing highlights and awakens people to aspects of themselves about which they were previously unaware. In so doing, the appreciative witness makes the other feel more substantial, resourceful and consequently more valuable.

An appreciative approach enriches your experience of everyday life because it expands your awareness and widens your focus, enabling you to host the richness and variety of every moment. This applies equally in the way that you host your own experience and show up in your relationship with yourself. Appreciative witnessing means hosting conversations and interactions in ways that makes others feel appreciated.

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Appreciative relationships expand and grow people's view of themselves. In order to help others to become more substantial, you need to access your own resources which makes you feel more whole. In order to help others find the goodness within, you need to connect with them through your own benevolence.

What you give away in relationships becomes yours. You first need to identify that quality within in order to give it away. Once you possess that quality within, you no longer feel the need to seek it outside of yourself. This is why the Mishna in Avos defines the person who is honoured as the one who honours others. In order to give what you need, you first have to find and mobilise that quality within yourself. Sharing it puts more of that quality into the relationship for both participants to benefit from and enjoy.

When you make others feel magnificent, you will experience your own inner beauty. When you recognise and value your own uniqueness, you will help others to show up in more authentic ways. When you bring out and nurture the brilliance in others, you will have discovered your own wisdom. When you find security within yourself through deepening your own faith and trust, you will be able to help others to find and make their home in the world. When you connect with your own creativity then you can guide others to free their spirits by pointing them to their limitless possibilities. You become strong when you can allow others to experience their unlimited power to shape their own lives. You will feel wealthy when you help others discover the bounty of their own internal resources and all the good they have to offer the world. In order to become godly, help others discover their own godliness without needing your influence to be noticed or credited.

What you demand reinforces the sense of your own lacking. Through demanding something, you confirm that you do not possess that quality. Every time you demand some emotional quality from another, you are reminding yourself and reinforcing the fact that you lack that quality. You cannot fill yourself with something that you admit to lacking and exists outside of yourself, even if the other person gives it you. This is why people often act resentfully when you try to give them what they lack.

Placing demands on people that give them opportunities to experience their power to make a uniquely valuable contribution to the world is an important appreciative practice. Oftentimes, when you see someone lacking, for example, those isolated by infirmity or old age, give to them by asking them for advice or to inspire you with their story. In this way, you are inviting the other person to connect with their inner resources, thereby enriching them. When you try to give to them you may make them feel diminished. For example, sympathy or mollycoddling can reinforce someone's sense of lacking.

What counts most in relationships is not what you say and do, nor even how you feel about each other. What counts most is how you make each other feel. This means how your participation in the relationship makes you each feel emotionally, as well as how the relationship makes you feel about yourself as a person.

The way that people show up or not in your presence is a mirror of how you invite them in to participate in your world. People show up fully in relationships when they feel invited, welcomed, valued and wanted. People show a sense of ownership by their commitment, loyalty, and active wholehearted participation. Ownership is taking

responsibility for your participation in the relationship. People show ownership in relationships when they in turn feel owned.

The pinnacle of appreciative witnessing is making someone feel cherished. Feeling cherished is the ultimate catalyst for bringing out the best in somebody. When cultivated in a marriage, it becomes the most fail-proof cement for building the foundation of a healthy home. In marriage and family life, you make people feel cherished when you show dedication to their happiness and well-being by being attentive and devoted to fulfilling their needs. You make someone feel cherished by showing an ongoing consistent sense of concern for their well-being, by being curious about their experiences, knowledge and opinions framed by an approach that shows reverence and respect. You affirm and give them a felt sense of their value when you are attentive towards them, show devotion and dedication in the relationship.

Feeling cherished gives people a sense of security in the knowledge that they are valued and appreciated. This knowledge makes it safe for them to take risks, to open themselves, show candour and by being creative and expressing their full potential in the relationship. In an atmosphere fostered by the appreciative approach, people feel comfortable to make demands, claim space and resources in the relationship. When people feel respected, it becomes safe for them to be vulnerable and frankly reveal their differences and even idiosyncrasies.

When people experience your interest in them they become interesting. When they feel liked and valued, they feel comfortable to be authentic. Respectful curiosity invites the other person to engage with you and express their true impressions, thoughts, needs and feelings. Security relaxes people into playfulness, creativity and gives them the safety to risk taking initiative. Admiration invites them to show their brilliance. If you make people feel embraced, valued and appreciated, they will show their loyalty. When you sincerely invest in people, they show you their potential. Invite people to teach you their wisdom, knowledge and their skilfulness and then sit back and watch them surprise you. **JL**

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