

ABSTRACT

A Study of Three Gratitude Interventions

Implemented by Religious Instructors in a Jewish Day School

The present study evaluated a control condition and three 4-6 week gratitude interventions (Gratitude Letter Writing, Counting Blessings, and Ben David Method) implemented by religious male instructors, aimed at increasing gratitude and spirituality with 109 9th-11th grade students. Pre- and post-test ratings of gratitude, positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, spirituality and five domains that are meant to reflect Seligman's (2011) well-being theory (engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness), were collected. The pretesting was conducted at the end of February 2020 and the interventions were conducted in April and May of 2020, during the height of the trauma from Covid 19 when students and Jewish educators were precipitously forced to switch to online schooling. There were no statistically significant changes based on intervention status. The only significant differences found in any intervention group was for positive and negative affect. On average, some students tended to report a decrease in both positive affect (i.e., in the Control and Gratitude Letter Writing group) and negative affect (i.e., in the Ben David Method group). Although Gratitude and Religiosity/Spirituality were concurrently positively correlated, changes in one did not predict changes in the other. It is possible that student and teacher compliance and re-

sponses may have been affected by the timing and consequences of the pandemic. The limitations and implications of this study are discussed, and suggestions for future interventions are made.

A Study of Three Gratitude Interventions Implemented by
Religious Instructors in a Jewish Day School

By

David Mark

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by

David Mark

The committee for this doctoral dissertation consists of:

David Pelcovitz, PhD, Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at
Yeshiva University

Rona Novick, PhD, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Admin-
istration at Yeshiva University

Laya Salomon, EdD, Associate Professor at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education
and Administration at Yeshiva University

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Dedication

To my wife and children, I am grateful every day for your existence.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are numerous potential positive effects that gratitude has on individuals and society. Gratitude has been shown to predict increased prosocial behavior (McCullough et al., 2001), greater communal involvement, lower materialism (Lambert et al., 2009), lower rates of depression (Wood et. al, 2008), and stronger social bonds and friendships (McCullough et al., 2004). Therefore, fostering gratitude appears to provide a wide range of benefit, including mental health and social well-being.

This research presents an empirical effort to investigate gratitude interventions cultivated by Judaic Studies teachers. This study compares two widely accepted gratitude interventions that have been found to be effective in prior research. The study is different than other studies because a religious/spiritual leader, rather than a secular teacher and approach alone, is used to implement and cultivate gratitude. In addition, a third intervention is utilized that is aimed at cultivating gratitude by using a more meaningful teaching method that engages the mind, heart, and soul, and that focuses on the power of prayer to increase gratitude.

This dissertation seeks to explore the impact of Judaic Studies teachers (also referred to as *Rebbe*) who engage students in gratitude interventions. In order to further operationalize and define the term *Rebbe*, each Judaic Studies teacher or *Rebbe* in this all-male Jewish Day School high school were asked to define this position as they understand it. From their responses it can be summarized that the *Rebbe* is a teacher of *Torah*, a religious life-time mentor, spiritual guide, father figure, teacher of social and emotional religious health. The

role of the *Rebbe* is to bring out the latent potential of each student, allowing them to reach their greatest potential and self-actualize. Given the pivotal role in which the *Rebbe* sees himself, one can further argue that the *Rebbe* would be a good candidate for teaching gratitude to students. Their interest in teaching students extends far beyond the subject matter and may have a greater influence on the development of gratitude. Additionally, the *Rebbe* has access to texts, religious practices, and practices of prayer that can all be influential in cultivating gratitude. An additional added factor and benefit to this study is that gratitude has not been studied in a systematic manner in a Jewish modern orthodox high school setting with a focus on the role of the *Rebbe*.

The current study explores the impact of three approaches to strengthening gratitude. The first two are known as Gratitude Letter Writing (Seligman et. al, 2005) and Counting Blessings (Emmons & McCullough 2003). The third uses prayer to systematically increase gratitude, and will be referred to as the Ben David method (Ben David, 2016). Several measures aimed at assessing well-being in youth are examined in this quantitative study, both before and after the interventions. More specifically, the focus of this study is to explore the impact of gratitude-based interventions on emotions, thoughts, and action tendencies or behaviors. Although gratitude is well researched in secular environments, the field of Jewish education would greatly benefit from having gratitude taught and researched in a religious school setting. Data was collected from 9th – 11th grade students in an all-male Orthodox Jewish Day School High School in an East Coast suburb of a major Jewish Orthodox city.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Introduction to Positive Psychology

The disease model, which focuses on treating illness, has been the prevalent model for psychology for hundreds of years. Conversely, a wellness approach focuses on what it takes to be and stay well. Positive psychology, which emerged in recent decades - seeks to conduct scientific inquiries into how to help individuals, communities, and organizations thrive by measuring and cultivating their strengths and virtues (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

In 2000, Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi authored an article in *American Psychologist* introducing positive psychology. The authors defined positive psychology as “a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (p. 5). The founders of positive psychology sought to expand the field of psychology from its focus on repairing the negatives in life to also promoting the positives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The main assertion of positive psychology is that rather than focusing on curing illness and negative emotions, the focus should be on achieving happiness and cultivating positive emotions. Positive psychology provides a more balanced view of humanity by focusing on what is working and the individual’s inherent strengths, and moves from identifying a person’s weaknesses to defining and implementing methods of self-improvement.

Shortly after seeing the benefits of positive psychology for adults, researchers expanded their work to include children and adolescents (Waters & Stokes, 2015). Researchers

reasoned that in order to prevent the onset of mental illness in childhood, young people need to be equipped with skills that allow them to engage with their surroundings in a proactive, prosocial manner. Schools are important partners in helping adolescents develop cognitive, social and emotional health (Waters & Stokes, 2015; Waters & White, 2015; White, 2016). During the past two decades, there has been a new paradigm for schools that has come to include the social and emotional development of the child and incorporating both explicit and implicit instruction of the research-based tenets of positive psychology (Seligman et al., 2009; Tian et al., 2015; Waters, 2011; Waters, White, & Murray, 2012). Many empirically based practices have emerged from positive psychology and have been adapted for use in schools which has led to the creation of a field called positive education (Allison, Waters, & Kern, 2020; Shoshani & Slone, 2017). Twenty years after launching this new field of positive psychology, we have learned that happiness and gratitude are not only naturally felt but also something that one can learn and, critically, be taught (Palhares et al., 2018).

Criticism of Positive Psychology

Although the field of positive psychology has been widely embraced, both in academic circles and by people who practice it in their daily lives, it has been met with some criticism. Ciarrochi et al. (2016) have voiced concern that positive psychology has been de-contextualized, forcing individuals to only focus on positive states, while failing to consider negative states. Additional criticisms include the promotion of emotion regulating strategies that promote the avoidance of certain negative experiences. Additionally, there is a concern that there is a continuous pursuit of positive internal states while ignoring other internal states (Ciarrochi et. al, 2016). Fernández-Ríos & Novo (2012) claim that positive psychology has acquired worldwide popularity “without any critical thinking” (p. 334) because it has been

disseminated in the mass media and in specialized journals to people who aren't trained to understand that its general characteristics, are not, by their account, reliable or valid. They argue that treating positive psychology as a new field with new approaches is “disinformation and ignorance of philosophy, cultural anthropology and the history of psychology” (p. 333). The authors insist that positive psychology supporters have attempted to frame it as a new paradigm in theory and practice of psychology, but it may not be because positive psychology training is missing “content and skills based on interdisciplinary, critical thinking, and the sociocultural context of human beings” (p. 342).

Despite this criticism, there is ample support of its validity and relevance (Chakhssi et al., 2018; White et al., 2019). The field of positive psychology has advanced certain psychological principles that increase subjective well-being and has made these practices accessible. However, positive psychology has not adequately considered that many of its findings and practices can be found in religious approaches, including Jewish literature and daily prayer. For example, a *Torah* observant Jew (i.e. one who lives in accordance with traditional Jewish law) begins each morning with the prayer of *Modeh Ani*, thanking God for allowing them to wake that morning. *Torah* observant Jews then proceed with morning prayers that acknowledge that God did enable the waking in the expectation that the person will serve God.

Practicing and cultivating gratitude is among the most popular interventions currently employed in positive psychology (Cunha et al., 2019), yet it has been practiced and cultivated through Jewish practice for thousands of years. The current dissertation allows exploration of positive psychology approaches in the context of a Jewish religious school environment, allowing for consideration of distinct and combined impacts on students.

Positive Psychology and Gratitude

As positive psychology grew and developed, more and more attention in the research was given to the cultivation of gratitude and how it impacts overall well-being. Park et al. (2006) conducted a web-based study of 117,676 adults from 54 nations and all 50 US states and found that of the 24 character strengths that make up their Values In Action (VIA) character strength survey, gratitude was one of the most commonly endorsed strengths. When they expanded this research to include youth, they found that character strengths are related to achievement, life satisfaction, and well-being of children and youth (Park & Peterson, 2008). In fact, a recent meta-analysis that aggregated effect sizes from 158 independent samples ($N=100,099$) provides evidence that dispositional gratitude is moderately to strongly correlated with well-being (Portocarrero et al., 2020).

One of the first studies in this new era of gratitude research was seeking to find a link between gratitude and happiness and investigate the effects of a grateful outlook on psychological and physical well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). There were three studies that took place in this research. In studies 1 and 2 participants were undergraduates who were assigned randomly to one of three experimental conditions. Condition 1 was instructed to keep a daily journal of hassles in their life, condition 2 was instructed to keep a gratitude list, and condition 3 was told to keep a journal of neutral events. This was done either weekly (Study 1) or daily (Study 2), at which points participants also reported their moods, coping behaviors, health behaviors, physical symptoms, and overall life appraisals. The reporting also included self-ratings of mood, feedback from significant others, physical symptoms, reactions to social support received, estimated amount of time spent exercising, and two global

life appraisal questions. There was an increase in well-being as well as emotional and interpersonal benefits when there is a conscious effort to focus on blessings in one's life. In a follow-up, study 3 participants were adults between the ages of 22 and 77 with either congenital or neuromuscular diseases. These participants were assigned to either a gratitude condition used in study 1 and 2 or a control condition in which participants completed the affect, well-being, and global appraisals only. The results of study 3 found that random assignment to the gratitude condition resulted in greater levels of positive affect, reductions in negative affect, more sleep, better sleep quality, and greater optimism and a sense of connectedness to others. The study provided evidence that, in a relatively easy way, we can increase positive affect and overall well-being. This study was limited in it did not explore the long term consequences of expressive gratitude or counting one's blessings.

Many others have suggested that there are benefits of cultivating gratitude in adults, children and adolescence. Froh and Bono (2014) make the case that cultivating gratitude in teachers, parents, mentors and children leads to achieving greater life satisfaction. They have identified important components missing in the research on gratitude in the earlier stages of a child's and adolescent's life, noting that until 2005 there were no studies that examined gratitude and well-being in children.

In their research on gratitude, McCullough et al. (2002) suggest that grateful people exhibit positive states and outcomes; they assert that compared with less grateful people, grateful people report experiencing more life satisfaction, more vitality, more optimism and less depression and envy. Gratitude is cited as beneficial to one's emotional and social well-being (Emmons, 2007; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2002).

McCullough et al. (2008) found that grateful people display high levels of agreeableness, extraversion, and openness, and they experience low levels of neuroticism. Similarly, Anand and Anand (2014) found that gratitude interventions decrease negative affect and increase gratitude, life satisfaction, optimism, prosocial behavior, positive affect, and well-being. The expression of gratitude is linked to increased positive mood, social connection with peers, and feeling more engaged with the world. A significant amount of evidence supports a variety of positive outcomes in adults who are grateful, including improved health behavior, mental health, and psychological as well as social well-being (e.g. Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005). Nevertheless, because these studies have tended to be correlational, they provide minimal evidence of cause-and-effect.

Additional research has shown that numerous pro-social behaviors are associated with gratitude; grateful people engage in more prosocial behavior and are perceived by others to be more giving and helpful (McCullough et al., 2002). Research recognizes that gratitude is essential for the development of well-being and social life and well-being for children and adults (Duthely et al., 2017). Wood et al. (2010) argue that gratitude interventions are among the most successful of all positive psychology interventions in promoting well-being. Given the brief history and positive effects of gratitude on adults, researchers naturally became interested in how gratitude impacts children and adolescents.

Many questions have yet to be answered regarding the role of gratitude in fostering youth development, but first it is important to review how gratitude is measured and expand upon what we do know about school based positive psychology programs.

Research Based Definitions of Gratitude

Before we further explore the impact of interventions to increase gratitude, we must consider how it is defined and measured. The Roman author orator and politician Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) said, “gratitude is not only the greatest of all virtues, but the parent of all virtues” (p. 890; as cited in Wood et al., 2010). Froh and Bono (2014) define gratitude as “the appreciation people feel when someone has done something kind or helpful for them or when they recognize the good things and people they have in their lives” (p. 37). They further note that “gratitude can be considered an emotion, a mood, or a personality trait” (p. 37). Emmons (2007) explains that gratitude is experienced when one person receives something beneficial from another. It is the appreciation that an individual feels when somebody does something kind or helpful, a “sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Emmons, 2007, p. 35). Individuals are grateful when they notice and appreciate things that happen to them and express thanks to those responsible (Emmons, 2007). Gratitude has been explained to be a higher level moral emotion that enables humans to notice, understand, and capitalize on positive social exchanges with others (McCullough et al., 2008). Teenagers often need assistance in higher level emotions and guidance in cultivating these positive social exchanges, as the digital world has negatively impacted them in this area of social and emotional functioning (Al-Sabti et al., 2017).

Self-Reports of Gratitude

Given the attention that gratitude has been given in the research in the past 20 years it would also be important to look at how gratitude is measured and commonly used measures of gratitude. Gratitude is a construct that begins to develop in early childhood (Hussong et

al., 2019). Existing measures of gratitude in children measure gratitude as a trait or a behavior and this may be limiting as they do not capture different aspects of gratitude moments (i.e. awareness, thoughts, feelings, and actions) and the way that these facets appear in children (Hussong et al., 2019).

In a meta-analytic study Card (2019) identified four commonly used measures of gratitude used in gratitude studies. In 74 studies consisting of over 34,000 participants, the average internal consistency of measures was $\alpha = .82$. The four measures include: 1. Gratitude Questionnaire 6 (GQ-6), which has been widely used in subsequent gratitude research, 2. the Gratitude Adjective Checklist, which instructs participants to indicate how accurately three adjectives describe them 3. the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test (GRAT), which is a multidimensional measure tapping various aspects of gratitude, and 4. a shortened version of the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test that has been used in several studies. Card (2019) notes that the study was limited as it only took into account internal consistency and did not look at validity. The GQ-6 was used in the current study and this tool has demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$; McCullough et al., 2002).

Measuring Gratitude in the Brain

Gratitude, and its expression, is an essential part of human prosocial behavior. It seems that little is known about the neural bases of gratitude expression and the longer-term effects of gratitude on brain activity. In a study conducted by Kini et al. (2016) individuals entering therapy with depression and/or anxiety were asked to write letters expressing gratitude. After three months the participants were asked to perform a "Pay It Forward" task. Brain activity measured in a fMRI scanner found specific areas of participants' brain activity correlated with self-reported gratitude experiences while they were performing the task. The

brain areas that were active during the gratitude task were very different from the brain areas that are active for empathy tasks. The findings revealed that simple letter writing appears to significantly increase neural activity in response to gratitude. Finally, the study identified the medial prefrontal cortex as an area of the brain that modulates gratitude.

Another study that was interested in neurological response to gratitude was conducted by Balconi et al. (2019). They had participants perform a task with a dear friend. Half the friends were asked to exchange gifts before the task and half were asked to exchange a gift halfway through the task performance. The researchers were interested in the hemodynamic (blood flow) brain responses in response to gift giving. Results showed an increase in cognitive performance that occurred after the exchange of gifts with improved accuracy and lower response times in performing the task. The brain's blood response showed an increase in oxygenated hemoglobin especially in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex following the gift exchange. Additionally, it was observed that gift exchange before the beginning of the task increased the performance level (Balconi et al., 2019).

Looking at how individuals' brains benefit from the experience of gratitude and the goodwill of others provides a little more understanding into the circuitry of the brain when there is a positive emotion. Fox et al. (2015) conducted an experiment during which gratitude was induced in participants while they underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging, a technique used to measure activity in the brain over time. The stimuli used to elicit gratitude were drawn from stories of survivors of the Holocaust, as many survivors report being sheltered by strangers or receiving lifesaving food and clothing and having strong feelings of gratitude for such gifts. The participants were asked to place themselves in the context of the Holocaust and imagine what they would feel like if they received such gifts. For each gift,

they rated how grateful they felt. The results revealed that ratings of gratitude correlated with brain activity in the anterior cingulate cortex and medial prefrontal cortex, further supporting the powerful neural component of gratitude.

American and Judaic Concepts of Gratitude

In Judaism, gratitude has been a pervasive theme in texts, prayers, and teachings for thousands of years. The first words a Jew utters in the morning before getting out of bed are words that give thanks to God for returning one's soul after a night's sleep. Gratitude is central to Jewish thinking and living and essential to daily Jewish life (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

American culture and traditions also value the trait of gratitude. Our calendar is scattered with holidays that express gratitude toward certain individuals or entities. On Veterans Day, we thank those that have protected our country. On Memorial Day, we show gratitude for those that have died in protecting our democracy and Western lifestyle. On Labor Day, we show our gratitude toward the American workforce. On numerous other days during the year we thank individuals for their heroism and their contributions they have made to our country. The words "In God We Trust" on our one-dollar bill serves as a reminder to be grateful to a specific source for all of our achievements and for our abilities to acquire goods and services.

Jewish people turn to the *Torah* for guidance and deeper insights into gratitude. The commandment regarding first fruits (*bikkurim*; Deuteronomy 26:1–12) is completely dedicated to gratitude. Approximately 2000 years ago, farmers were commanded to bring their first ripened fruits to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. They would recite a prayer thanking God for the land and His crop and give the fruits to the *kohanim* (priests). Jewish literature

enthusiastically praises the great virtue of this commandment, going so far as to say that the land of Israel was given to the Jews as a reward for observing the commandment of *bikurim*. The practice of *bikurim* is no longer practical as the last temple stood over 2000 years ago, but the lesson of thankfulness is timeless. Gratitude infuses all Jewish actions, even the seemingly mundane. There is a prayer recited after going to the bathroom, thanking God for allowing our body to function normally. We thank God before and after we eat or drink.

Gratitude seems to be at the heart of American culture and is a core value in Judaism. Therefore, Jewish Days schools in America may be quite fertile grounds for fostering gratitude. Schools, in general, may play a pivotal role in orchestrating and implementing positive psychology practices that can shape our youth.

Positive Education in Schools

Positive psychology, an important field for educational psychologists and educational administrators, provides a framework that utilizes positive practices aimed at promoting growth and well-being (Hoy & Tarter, 2011). In the past decade psychologists and educators have become increasingly interested in positive psychology, and in particular, traits like gratitude (Park & Peterson, 2008).

The application of positive psychology in schools is called positive education, which is defined as an approach to education that builds traditional academic skills while concurrently building skills that increase students' subjective well-being (Seligman et al., 2009). Seligman et al. (2009) argue that skills of well-being and skills of academic achievement can be taught side by side.

Historically the field of school psychology has largely focused on a problem or deficit based model (Terjesen et al., 2004). Researchers have argued that even as prevention-based

efforts aimed at thwarting potential future problems began to receive more attention, positive psychology principles were often not included in these efforts (Froh et al., 2011; McCabe et al., 2011). However, recent years have seen a growth in the use of positive psychology models in the school environment.

Positive education initiatives have been employed in many countries including the United States (Dawood, 2013; Froh et al., 2014; Hasemeyer, 2013; Tian & Huebner, 2015), Israel (Israel-Cohen et al., 2015; Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014; Shoshani et al., 2016), Australia (Dawood, 2013; Norrish, 2015; Waters, 2011; Waters & Stokes, 2015), and Brazil (Palhares et al., 2018). These school-based interventions have endured and increased given strong evidence that supports their impact.

For example, in Australia, The Geelong School fully embraced positive psychology as part of its curriculum and places well-being at the center of its mission, viewing positive psychology interventions as a more comprehensive approach to education. Norrish (2015) summarizes the work at Geelong, describing how these empirically supported positive psychology interventions were adapted for a school setting calling this a new approach to teaching positive education.

Positive education initiatives in Brazil examined changes in children's gratitude expression and the association between the children's greatest wishes and gratitude expression (Palhares et al., 2018). The aim of Palhares et al.'s (2018) study was to investigate how youth in Brazil express gratitude, age related differences in the expression of gratitude, and associations between what children wished for and how they express gratitude. Participants were 285 children aged 7 to 14 ($M = 10.87$, $SD = 2.27$, 54% girls) from public and private schools in Porto Alegre, a large urban center of Brazil. The most common gratitude expression was

verbal expression. Although older children were most likely to express verbal gratitude, younger children's expressions of gratitude tended to be more concrete in nature. The researchers' results also suggest that gratitude is linked to the ability of thinking about others, and may be hindered by a focus on immediate pleasure.

In Israel, Shoshani et al. (2016) launched a two-year longitudinal study of the impact and sustained effect of positive psychology interventions in schools serving Jewish children. The study examined the interventions' quantitative effects on well-being, school engagement, and academic achievement. The study of the Maytiv school program, which incorporates positive psychology at the classroom level, included 2,517 seventh to ninth-grade students in 70 classrooms, from six schools in the Central District of Israel. The Maytiv sample exhibited improved positive emotions, peer relations, emotional engagement in school, cognitive engagement, and higher grade point averages. This program is another example of scientifically based interventions that have a positive effect on a child's social and emotional and academic functioning when incorporating positive psychology into school curricula. This program was the first positive psychology program to integrate Jewish content into the classroom. Although the Maytiv study did utilize teachers in the classroom to implement the intervention, the current research seeks to expand the Maytiv research by introducing religious teachers as the figures who implement positive psychology interventions. By doing this one can not only test more standard types of gratitude interventions, but it also allows for additional religious or spiritual methods to cultivate gratitude, such as utilizing prayer.

In all of the above studies there were several limitations. The first being that an evaluation of the program effects on the teachers who underwent the training to implement the in-

interventions was not done. Being that the teacher is the one who shaped the quality of the content it is possible that the teachers' emotional connection to the program content had an effect on outcomes. Another limitation, which is hard to control for, is the Hawthorne effect. There is a possibility that students in the intervention group experienced change due to being treated differently and receiving more attention. A third limitation to the above studies was the effects of socio-political events on the implementation and outcomes of gratitude-based interventions were not measured or controlled for, the study took place during the 2020 presidential race. A final limitation is that studies generally fail to utilize personnel that focus less on academic development and more on character development. Religious schools have the benefit of employing religious leaders that generally work to cultivate religious, spiritual, and personal growth. They may be an ideal conduit for delivery of gratitude-based interventions. In the following sections, we will explore gratitude interventions in schools in greater depth, highlighting some common types of gratitude-based interventions that have received empirical support.

Gratitude Research in Schools

Benefits of Gratitude for Children and Adolescents

Studies on the effects of gratitude in children began to gain popularity a few years after the introduction of positive psychology and positive education in schools. Given the gratitude benefits seen in adults, a strong interest quickly developed in examining gratitude's effects on children and adolescents.

Froh et al. (2010) found evidence in a longitudinal study that indicates greater psychological and social functioning lasting up to 6 months after implementing gratitude interventions with children. The researchers investigated the relationship between gratitude and

social integration, along with how they enhance each other over time. Social integration is described as a desire to make a unique contribution to one's community. Their study involved 700 middle school students aged 10-14. More specifically, the researchers were interested in whether participants who are more grateful were also more socially integrated than their less grateful counterparts 6 months after the interventions were implemented, controlling for demographics and baseline social integration levels. They also examined overall life satisfaction and prosocial behavior at 3 months and discovered that students who were more grateful were also more socially integrated even after a 6 month follow up. The measures used included the Gratitude Adjective Checklist (GAC), the Child Social Behaviour Questionnaire (CSBQ), the Multidimensional Students' Satisfaction with Life Scale (MSSLS) and the Engaged Living in Youth scale. Students completed the GAC and social integration subscale at time 1, the prosocial behavior and life satisfaction scales at time 2 (3 months later), and the GAC and social integration subscale at time 3 (6 months later). The importance of this study is the findings that gratitude interventions can have impact on psychological and social functioning that endures for 6 months.

Another study of the link between gratitude and social support found that grateful youth feel greater social support, lower levels of stress, and lower depression over time (Wood et al., 2008). The measurements used to assess perceived support included using the belonging, tangible, and appraisal sub-scales of the college student version of the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List. Wood et al. (2008) investigated 156 college freshman (aged 18-19) and found that gratitude measured at the very beginning of the academic semester of their first year of college was a significant predictor for two types of social support three months later. The first predictor was belonging (the availability for people to provide shared

social experiences and activities), and the second was appraisal (the availability of people to give advice, listen to problems, and provide emotional support). The authors concluded that gratitude leads to the development of social support and naturally also leads to improved levels of stress and depression. Previously, experimental evidence had shown the short-term efficacy of increasing gratitude to reduce depression and increase happiness (Duckworth et al., 2005; Emmons & McCullough, 2003), but this study shows that gratitude leads to improved social support and well-being over a longer period of time, and during a life transition. Although the sample was limited in diversity and number of participants, the researchers replicated these findings in the second study with a new sample of 87 undergraduates. This second study revealed a particularly interesting finding - effects of gratitude were not better accounted for than the big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness). A final limitation was that the authors could not establish cause and effect because they did not use experimental methodology but rather, focused on naturally occurring changes during a potentially important life transition.

A study by Froh et al. (2009) assigned 89 children and adolescents to either a gratitude or control condition. The gratitude condition consisted of a "hyperemotional situation" (p. 413), where students were asked to write a letter thanking someone who had done something good for them, whom they have not previously properly thanked. After writing the letter, students read the letter to this benefactor in person. Students in the control condition, were instructed to write about what they did recently, and how they felt while engaging in those activities. Students in both groups wrote for five days in a 2-week timeframe for 10-15 minutes at a time. Students in the gratitude condition then read the letter to their benefactor

on Friday of the second week. Analysis of the results showed that students low in positive affect (positive affect refers to the frequency of positive emotions such as joy) in the gratitude condition reported greater gratitude and positive affect at post-treatment, as well as greater positive affect at 2-month follow up, compared with controls. Results from this intervention suggest, specifically for students low in positive affect, that this grateful expression exercise has beneficial outcomes and suggests that gratitude not only helps youth form, maintain, and strengthen supportive relationships, but it also helps them feel connected to a greater social support. There is emerging evidence that supports the development of gratitude among early adolescents (11-13 years old): those who were more grateful reported more positive affect, optimism, social support from peers and family, and satisfaction with school, family, community, friends and self, in comparison with their less grateful peers (Froh et. al, 2009).

Overall, the development of gratitude may support broader advancement of well-being as demonstrated by many of the studies cited above (Duckworth et al., 2005; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et. al, 2009; Wood et al., 2010).

Application for School Implementation

Since 2005, the trait of gratitude has received significant attention in the field of positive psychology and in school curricula (Waters & Stokes, 2015). Evidence-based positive psychology interventions have been one of the major contributions to the field of positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) identified evidence based positive psychology interventions as being programs, practices, methods or activities that focus on cultivating positive feelings, positive behaviors, or positive cognitions. In the last ten years, education researchers have developed positive psychology interventions for schools that aim to increase positive states in students, such as resilience, optimism, hope,

gratitude, mindfulness and persistence (Froh et al., 2008). In a broader review of the field, Waters (2011) concluded that positive psychology interventions had significant and robust positive effects on students.

As research into the effects of developing gratitude progressed, there was an emerging interest in exploring gratitude in elementary school students, early adolescents, and high school students. In 2007, Robert Emmons dedicated a book to the subject of gratitude in schools and defined gratitude as one's acknowledgement of the good that one has in one's life, coupled with the knowledge that the source of this goodness is, to some extent, outside of oneself. According to Emmons, gratitude has been associated with a number of positive outcomes (Emmons, 2007). Assuming that gratitude promotes these positive outcomes, schools would naturally consider which interventions might support students' development of gratitude. We turn now to additional studies that evaluate the impact of specific interventions.

Waters (2011) reviewed school-based positive psychology interventions that were conducted internationally, implemented across public and private schools, used in coeducational and single gender schools, and were used for students ranging in ages from 5-19, from various ethnic backgrounds. This review focused on interventions targeting five specific positive psychology interventions (i.e., gratitude, hope, serenity, resilience, and character strengths). These interventions were designed to foster student well-being and academic performance, noting that improvements can be made to the process of integrating and embedding positive psychology into schools. Gratitude is one of the areas that Waters (2011) investigated and attributed improvements in children's and adolescents' well-being to gratitude interventions. In reviewing school-based interventions that cultivate gratitude, Waters (2011)

reviewed multiple studies (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009, Froh, Sefick, & Emmons (2008), Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009), and cites them as further support that interventions increase positive affect, foster well-being and cultivate positive emotions.

Jeffrey Froh and many others have turned their attention toward positive psychology interventions that can be implemented in schools with a focus on gratitude. Froh et. al, (2008) designed a “counting blessings” intervention for sixth and seventh graders. Their research randomly assigned students ($N=221$) to one of three conditions. There was a gratitude condition, a hassle condition, and a no-treatment control group. Students in the gratitude and hassle condition were asked to journal for a 2-week period. Students in the gratitude condition recorded five things they were grateful for, and those in the hassle condition recorded things that annoyed them. The no-treatment control group participated in the measurements and received no other intervention. Data were collected daily for 2 weeks during class instruction time with a 3-week follow-up. Therefore, given the nature of a school's schedule, data were collected on Monday through Friday for weeks 1 and 2 and then 3 Fridays from the immediate post-test for the follow-up. The students who counted their blessings showed increases in self-reported gratitude, optimism, and life satisfaction, as compared to students in the hassle and control groups, who did not experience these benefits. For those in the gratitude condition, improvements were reported in positive affect and feeling grateful for help from others; however, students felt these effects most strongly three weeks after the intervention ended. Additionally, students instructed to count blessings reported more satisfaction with their school experiences.

In another school-based gratitude intervention, Froh, et. al, (2009) investigated gratitude visits with students in grades 3, 8, and 12 (ages 8-19 years) in a parochial school. Students were randomly assigned to a control or gratitude visit intervention. The gratitude visit group was asked to write a letter of gratitude and deliver it to someone important to them. The control condition students were asked to write about something they did the day before and how they felt when they were doing it. Both interventions took place during class time over a 2-week period. Students in the gratitude visit condition who scored low in positive affect at the start of the intervention immediately reported more gratitude as compared to those in the control groups after the 2-week intervention. Additionally, those in the gratitude condition reported having more gratitude three months later. Although the study is limited by the lack of consistency between the groups, (the gratitude condition included a visit while control condition did not), the fairly small sample (89 students) and the gratitude intervention met as a group to process their experiences prior to completing follow up measures, the results do add to those of other studies suggesting the positive impact of increasing students' gratitude.

Anand and Anand (2014) reviewed the literature on gratitude interventions in schools and youth and compared the impact of three interventions to develop gratitude as compared to a no-intervention control group: (a) counting blessings;(b) gratitude visit; and (c) learning schematic help appraisals. In reviewing the three interventions they found that counting blessings resulted in the largest improvement in adolescents' well-being. Participants in this intervention activity were asked to journal about five things for which they were grateful for 2 weeks and measures of psychological, physical and social well-being were taken at pretest, immediate posttest, and a 3 week follow up. When comparing the other two groups to the

counting blessings group, they were found to be more grateful, optimistic, more satisfied with life, had less negative affect, and reported an increase in positive school experience.

The second intervention reviewed was the gratitude visit intervention. In this intervention students were asked to write a letter of gratitude to an individual, whom they had not properly thanked, read it to them and then discuss and share their experience with others in the same condition. Adolescents in the gratitude letter writing group were found to be more grateful, have more positive affect, and greater positive affect in a 2 month follow up compared to those in the control condition.

The third intervention was a school-based gratitude curriculum focused on shaping schematic help appraisals. Results from this study suggested that children can become more aware in cognitively-appraising circumstances where they receive help, and that this awareness also makes them more grateful and has a positive effect on their well-being. The authors emphasize that gratitude in schools starts at the top with principals, which funnels down to teachers who can encourage appreciative responding to students and model thankfulness and grateful behavior, and this will boost students' social and academic success.

Froh et al. (2014) introduced a gratitude intervention to the field that focuses on developing specific cognitions to increase gratefulness. In this study the researchers set up elementary school classrooms in one of two conditions: an intervention that educated children about appraisal of benefit of exchanges (how to think about perceiving what is valuable to them, whether or not it was provided to them intentionally and altruistically, as opposed to with ulterior motives) and a control condition. The authors found that children's awareness of cognitive appraisals, that is clarifying evaluations and the benefits of exchanges, can be

strengthened and, in turn, make children more grateful and increase their general positive affect. A daily intervention led children to express gratitude and produced the feeling of gratitude immediately. The intervention induced gratitude that endured up to 5 months and additionally showed a positive effect on well-being. In the end, the results supported the effectiveness of this intervention.

Having reviewed selected research on gratitude interventions in schools and multiple reviews on this topic, we present below a brief description of some specific interventions and research on their efficacy.

Gratitude Meditation

Duthely et al. (2017) wove together the practice of meditation and gratitude visualizations and tested these practices among 68 adolescent middle school students attending a public charter school. The purpose of their research was to consider the impacts of gratitude meditations on life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and measurable gratitude among a culturally diverse group of adolescents. The Student Life Satisfaction Scale, the School Satisfaction Sub-scale, and the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form, all self-report instruments, were used to assess the intervention impact. Students were assigned to either the delayed intervention group, the no treatment control group, or the experimental group. The intervention was taken from the heart-centered gratitude visualizations outlined in a happiness and positive emotions handbook, by Chinmoy (2014) called *The Jewels of Happiness: Inspiration and Wisdom to Guide Your Life Journey*. The author of this handbook proposes that cultivating qualities of peace and gratitude increase life satisfaction. In the Duthely et al. study, meditation techniques were combined with visualization exercises that cultivate gratitude. The

intervention significantly and positively affected life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and gratitude in the experimental group when compared to the control group.

Gratitude Letter Writing

Toepfer et al, (2012) researched the effects of gratitude letter writing in three primary areas of well-being; happiness (positive affect), life-satisfaction (cognitive evaluation), and depression (negative affect). The 219 men and women who wrote gratitude letters over a 3-week period, which encompassed letters written to benefactors whom the participants have never given the proper thanks and read it to them in person, experienced increased happiness and life satisfaction and decreased depressive symptoms on self-report inventories. Studies have shown that simple, brief, and self-administered positive writing tasks can boost positive emotions (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Seligman et al., 2005).

Gratitude letter writing is only one popular way in which gratitude can be increased. When college students were asked to write optimistically about “their best possible future self” there was an increase in positive affect, when compared to those students who simply wrote about what they did during the past week (Layous et al., 2013). In addition, people who wrote about their most “intensely positive experience” reported increased positive affect compared to those who wrote about neutral topics such as the layout of their bedroom (Burton & King, 2004). The researchers found that apparently while writing about gratitude is important and can have a positive effect, writing optimistically, in general, can also improve mood. However, individuals who expressed a list of things they are grateful for showed greater positive affect compared to those who did not express gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). This suggests that writing and reflecting on gratitude and positive expe-

riences in an organized format helps to shape and solidify these experiences resulting in positive affect, increased life satisfaction and lasting boosts in happiness. Moreover, these effects have also been found in adolescents (Anand & Anand, 2014).

Counting Blessings in Our Classrooms

Emmons and McCullough (2003) are among the early researchers in gratitude and its effects on adults. They examined the effect of gratitude on psychological and physical well-being, and they found that a conscious focus on counting one's blessings significantly improves positive affect. These findings are in line with the Anand and Anand (2014) review of the counting blessings intervention discussed earlier in this paper. Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) replicated Emmons and McCullough's counting blessings intervention. They randomly assigned 11 classrooms of 6th and 7th graders (ages 11-14) to one of three conditions: gratitude, hassle, or no treatment control condition. Students who completed the intervention activity daily for 2 weeks; psychological, physical, and social well-being were measured at pretest, immediately after the intervention, and at a 3 week follow up. The gratitude group was asked to count up to five things a day that they were grateful for, and the hassle condition was asked to count 5 'irritants.' Results indicated that the gratitude group's responses reflected more optimism, life satisfaction, and less negative affect after the 2-week intervention, and it was strongest at the 3-week follow up. In addition, they reported more satisfaction with school experiences (finding school interesting, feeling good at school, thinking they are learning a lot, and feeling eager to go to school) than the control condition. However, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2004) found that counting blessings once a week, compared to engaging in the same behavior three times a week, led to greater benefits. Perhaps less frequent systematic practice may make the process fresher and more meaningful. This

suggests that a counting blessings intervention may be more effective when used less frequently, over a longer period of time.

It may be important to note that significant dissatisfaction with their school experience is reported by many late and early adolescents; this dissatisfaction is associated with risky behavior like drug use, unprotected sex, violations of norms, and illegal behavior (Levy et al., 2006). Introducing a counting blessing intervention might mitigate this tendency, promoting positive affect and a positive attitude about school. The counting blessings intervention may predispose students to improving their social interactions and help them maximize their school experience, thereby minimizing their risk of engaging in dangerous or destructive behavior.

Religion, Spirituality, and Gratitude

Jewish Day Schools (JDS) are modern educational institutions that are designed to provide Jewish children a Judaic and secular education (dual-curriculum) on a full time basis, typically a longer day than the average public school day. Additionally, JDS have religious instructors who may include gratitude as a practice or lesson content in their classrooms, as gratitude is a core value of being Jewish. Despite this seemingly natural fit between gratitude and Jewish education, Schnall and Schnall (2017) recognize that although gratitude is a priority for many psychologists and school psychologists, religious educators have not embraced the field of positive psychology or its interventions as a practice in their classrooms. They further recommend increased implementation and make recommendations about how to introduce positive psychology practices like gratitude into the Jewish religious classroom.

Perhaps JDS need to embrace newer models in dealing with mental health, such as those that embrace wellness rather than focusing on psychopathology. When assessing students and providing interventions in mental health, the Jewish Orthodox day school system has typically focused on traditional negative indicators and getting rid of psychopathology or dealing with psychopathology as it appears in students, as opposed to cultivating health and wellness. The JDS system has not taken full advantage of the field of positive psychology; more specifically, it traditionally has not used gratitude interventions and psychometrically validated these interventions as an educational tool. While some JDS may offer a one-day program that highlights gratitude, there appears to be limited use of a comprehensive curriculum that focuses on skill development for sustainable happiness, and more specifically, an ongoing intervention that increases students' gratitude. In JDS there is language around gratitude and prayer; however, it is often a component of religious rituals which may or may not speak to students, nor may it be specifically taught as a gratitude practice. This author's involvement in the JDS system for the past 17 years has led him to the belief that JDS rarely offer teachers the time, support, professional development to consider how ancient practices could be leveraged to support the development of gratitude. Schnall and Schnall (2017) further support the notion that religious educators need not duplicate the error of slow adaptation of positive approaches secular schools and JDS should install these practices into their curriculum on a more regular basis. The current study is a move to do exactly that, expanding the focused teaching of gratitude and perhaps enabling students to increase gratitude in conjunction with their religious studies.

An example of how gratitude is being taught or encouraged in JDS can be seen in the example below. A prominent Jewish Day School on the upper east side of Manhattan, has

implemented gratitude programming into their Jewish classroom. In anticipation of Thanksgiving, the lower school held an assembly at which they incorporated an expression of appreciation for all that *Hashem* (God) has given them. Students presented reasons to be grateful to Judaic and General studies teachers, and each grade sang a song of thanks. The value of sharing “the attitude of gratitude,” was highlighted as part of a “*Mensch* (a person of integrity and honor) Madness” program for the month of November. Teachers and students reported that the blessings were heartfelt and a unifying family-like experience, but no data to support this claim has been disseminated.

Given that gratitude development is seen as important to Judaism and that the research supports gratitude as an effective school-based intervention, systematically developing and cultivating gratitude may be essential for adolescents in Jewish high schools.

Spirituality and Gratitude

The robust research on the benefits of gratitude for adults and adolescents has been documented earlier in this paper. We turn our attention now to the relationship between spirituality and gratitude, particularly relevant for this study in a religious school. Emmons and Crumpler (2000) note that gratitude is found in the three major world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and their texts and prayers. Gratitude is promoted to its congregants in all three of these religions, thereby making religious affiliation related to gratitude. There is some evidence that religious and spiritual people tend to be more grateful (McCullough et al. 2004). In reviewing gratitude and spirituality, religion can easily be discussed as there is overlap between spirituality and religion. Tudder et al. (2017) examined the relationship between gratitude and religion and its role on affect. Results showed a strong predictive rela-

tionship between spiritual well-being and gratitude; more specifically, they found that an individual's emotional experience and religious experience join together to predict how these individuals experience emotions, such as gratitude. In Kraus et al. (2015) it is clear from the research that there are dimensions of religion like "affiliation, participation in organized religion, and private devotion" (p. 1331) that contribute to feelings of gratitude. They further note that previous research has demonstrated a clear connection between religiosity and gratitude; however, many studies are limited to college and middle school samples, or focus on individuals having specific conditions or ailments. Even though the population for the current study is Jewish Orthodox, *Torah* observant, students, there are still challenges in supporting adolescents' spirituality and gratitude. Our study will use a population that attends a JDS all male high school.

Spirituality and Adolescence

The extensive research on the development of spirituality in adolescence is beyond the scope of this discussion. We briefly explore here the connection between spirituality and well-being as it relates to gratitude. We begin with a very abbreviated discussion of spirituality in adolescent development, then consider the role of prayer in gratitude formation.

Spiritual intelligence may be a factor in adolescent well-being. According to Emmons and Crumpler (2000) spiritual intelligence is the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment. Mishrai and Vashist (2014) provided a review study of spiritual intelligence, stress and adolescent well-being and found that, when provided with training, adolescents can improve their spiritual intelligence. They found that adolescence is an important time for teenagers to develop spiritual intelligence and gratitude, and these two variables can increase when students are trained to do so.

Miller and Barker (2016) note various important findings relating to why adolescents seek spiritual development, even though there is a high emotional cost and great intellectual work involved. Just as there are critical periods for development of language, and physical maturity, Miller and Barker (2016) point out that there is a “biological surge that unlocks the capacity for spiritual development in your child during adolescence” (p. 66).

There is a growing body of research that supports spiritual growth in adolescence. In Jewish culture we know that Bar and Bat Mitzvah are intended to be a spiritual time for the emerging adolescent. Unfortunately, at times, these events may pass the emerging adolescent’s life as if it were a regular birthday with no sustainable spiritual practice as an outcome. Cobb and Miller (2015) found that a strong spiritual experience exists in 66% of adolescents. Cobb and Miller note that these experiences come from ‘trait mindfulness’ or ‘religious practice.’ Mindfulness was defined by the authors as “a receptive state of mind in which attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place” (p. 863). Cobb and Miller argue that there are essentially two ways that adolescence access spiritual life. One manner would include religious practice and the other would be through mindfulness, where mindfulness becomes a “gateway” to spirituality. The strongest level of spiritual experience was reported by adolescents that utilized both methods for accessing the spiritual life.

Another important finding to support the adolescent spiritual spike is the surge in spirituality from early adolescence through approximately age 25. Using twin studies Miller (2016) found that as the adolescent ages the impact on spirituality from family environment drops from 74 percent at age fourteen, to 55 percent at age eighteen, 49 percent at age

twenty, and 30 percent at age twenty-five. Miller (2016) concluded that the surge in spirituality is happening from the inside out driven by genetic contributions. This emergence of biology needs a supportive environment to help teens build a life that makes sense. Along with physical maturity and emotional rollercoaster, the biology of the teenager can bring on a surge in spirituality. Miller and Barker (2016) make it clear that teens are biologically primed to seek a transcendent relationship and to quest for meaning and purpose in life. The current study hopes to take advantage of this surge and quest of teenagers by studying the impact of the *Rebbe*, a spiritual mentor, and his ability to positively affect an adolescent student's gratitude.

Prayer and Gratitude

In their study, "Can Prayer Increase Gratitude?" Lambert et al. (2009) found that prayer is strongly associated with increased feelings of gratitude in adults. Using 674 undergraduate students ranging in age from 18 to 54 years old, with a median age of 19, they considered the relationship between prayer and gratitude. Prayer was assessed with a 3 item measure (e.g., "I pray daily"; $\alpha = .88$) and gratitude was assessed using the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6). Lambert et al. (2009) conducted four studies where they utilized cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental designs to study the relationship between prayer and gratitude. In all four studies there was an increase in gratitude when prayer was used as the medium. One of the limitations to this and many other studies is the use of college students as a convenience sample, because there is no evidence that these findings will generalize to individuals with diverse backgrounds.

Prayer and Gratitude in Jewish High Schools

There is a strong theological link between gratitude and prayer in Judaism. As an emotion, gratitude can be seen in many world religions, but in Judaism the trait of gratitude permeates through texts, prayers, and historical teachings. One of the three foundational areas of Jewish prayer involves giving thanks and recognizing the good that God does for the individual. In the JDS in this study, students engage in prayer daily, using a prayer book and required prayers that directly relate to being grateful in various areas of life. Despite these daily repetitions of individual and communal prayer that includes statements of thanks, it is unclear if gratitude is being directly cultivated or experienced.

The literature does seem to support the notion that spirituality, and even prayer, has a positive effect on gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009). Lambert and colleagues sought to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between gratitude and prayer. These researchers hypothesized that participants, who included 112 (98 female) undergraduate students from a Southeastern public university, who were randomly assigned to a daily prayer condition would report higher gratitude scores than would those assigned to a neutral activity condition at the end of a 4-week journal activity. Using a longitudinal experimental design to examine the relationship between prayer and gratitude, they found support that the frequency with which one engages in prayer increases one's gratitude. They noted that neither socially desirable responding nor religious inclination provided an alternative explanation for this relationship. Their research provides clear support for the notion that prayer causes increased gratitude. The study was limited to a specific group of students and may not be generalizable to different age groups or different people of diverse backgrounds. Thus, it is important that this be tested in multiple settings, with varying types of schools and students.

Ben David Method for Cultivating Gratitude

This study utilizes well documented previously published gratitude interventions such as gratitude journals, which have been described in prior sections of this literature review.

One of the intervention groups in this study, however, drew on the work of Aryeh Ben David, an influential spiritual leader who has successfully provided experiential interventions to JDS in North America. Although Ben David has not provided any data empirically validating the effectiveness of his approach as yet, his methodical approach to becoming a soulful educator and his practices are easily adaptable to interventions that increase gratitude and spirituality.

Aryeh Ben David (2007) makes specific recommendations for personalizing prayer experiences. He begins by explaining and emphasizing the peak moment of Jewish prayer, the standing, silent prayer (*Amidah*). This prayer begins with the phrase “Our God and the God of our forefathers” (p. 3). Ben David stresses that “Our God” (p. 4) should represent an individual’s personal experience and asserts that the “vertical experience” (p. 4) of standing in prayer is a unique personal experience that is yours. “The God of our Fathers,” (p. 4) is a different experience, that represents the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and may also include all the people that came before us or a “horizontal experience” (p. 4). The author emphasizes that we first need to have a “vertical” experience before we can have a “horizontal” experience. Only after an individual has gone through their own experience can they share from others’ experience. As this relates to cultivating gratitude in adolescence, his approach seems to suggest that one would first need to personalize and work on their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in developing gratitude and then they can use the prayer book to access and express the gratitude they have developed.

Ben David (2007) presents the idea of creating a Godfile, which is a mental representation that encompasses your personal relationship with God. One would first have to ‘write’ this file, by cultivating personal experiences, answering personalized questions, processing these questions, and sharing thoughts and feelings, while integrating concepts of gratitude. One can later “open up” the “gratitude file” while using the prayer book and have a personal, gratitude-rich prayer experience. According to Ben David (2007), this gratitude-filled relationship with God cannot be cultivated during prayer; instead, it needs to first be ‘written’ on a personal level.

In order to have a soulful personal experience and allow gratitude to have an effect, Ben David (2016) offers six steps to educators. Step 1 is transition into the classroom. This step involves full intentionality and presence of the teacher. For this study the *Rebbe* will personalize his own gratitude prior to entering the classroom. Step 2 is introducing the learning. Students need to know that their teachers are personally involved in the subject matter. Students knowing that the *Rebbe* is wholeheartedly involved in the subject matter will impact the learning. Step 3 is mindful engagements. In this step the teacher introduces new information, new ideas and new material to the class through lecture and discussion. However, teachers need to be spiritual beings and not just present information on spiritual subject matters. The *Rebbe* should be deepening himself and gaining more clarity about himself and his own gratitude. Step 4 is intentional engagement of the heart, which involves engaging through personal writing and allowing students time to reflect on what they have written. This may also be accomplished by engaging with a partner or with a group. Step 5 is a summary of the learning. Students develop a personal take away from the lesson. Step 6 is transitioning from classroom into life. The goal of learning and the classroom is to impact what

happens after the class is over. Ideally this method will enable students to use prayer in a personal and meaningful way to cultivate gratitude.

Gratitude, Stress, and Trauma

This research was scheduled to occur during the 2019-2020 year. In March of 2020, the widespread occurrence of the corona virus prompted all schools being closed for in-person instruction. This necessitated a change in the original research design and requires an additional understanding of the impact stress and trauma may have on gratitude. Below is a brief review of the current crisis and research on the intersection of gratitude and trauma's psychological impact.

The subjects for the current study are primarily from Nassau County. As of May 26, 2020, the Nassau County's website (www.nassaucountyny.gov) reported 39,907 individuals who tested positive, and 2,103 Covid-related deaths. As of May 25, 2020 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website reported 1,637,456 positive cases and 97,669 deaths.

Thousands of school-age children experienced traumatic grief or traumatic separation as a result of these Covid-19 deaths and illnesses. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) explains that "the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in thousands of children being separated from loved ones who require isolation and/ or hospitalization due to a loved one testing positive for COVID-19 or because of potential exposure for essential workers. For some children, the separation may result in distress or in a traumatic reaction. If a loved one dies from the virus, a child may experience traumatic grief due the sudden nature of the death and being unable to say goodbye or observe cultural or religious mourning rituals"

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/helping_children_with-traumatic_seperation_or_traumatic_grief_related_to_covid19.pdf). The NCTSN highlights the traumatic grief-related feelings that affected children may experience, including fear, anger, and sadness. They offer tips for helping children manage their traumatic grief by processing their emotions.

It is clear from the research that practicing gratitude during and after a traumatic event can help individuals effectively manage and cope with trauma and stress (Greene & McGovern, 2017). For example, in a study conducted by Stoeckel et al. (2015), it was noted that children of ill parents are more susceptible to anxiety and depression. They also found that some children respond to these threatening circumstances with positive emotions and greater gratitude for life and greater emotional strength. In this study college students were asked to complete self-report measures that assessed gratitude, family quality of life, depression, and anxiety. When compared with a group of students with healthy parents the ill parent group experienced a lower family quality of life. However, high levels of gratitude that served as a buffer for the relationship between parental health status and anxiety and depression.

There is a significant amount of stress and trauma that falls upon adolescents and adults when there is a global pandemic. Examining academic engagement trajectories becomes a worthwhile goal. A very recent study (Rui et al., 2020) considered adolescent engagement amongst 342 adolescents following the Wenchuan earthquake in China. These students were asked to complete self-report questionnaires at 3.5, 4.5 and 5.5 years after the earthquake. They found that gratitude reduced the risk for decreasing behavioral engagement over time and having social supports increased psychological engagement. These results

suggest that gratitude may protect adolescents from the potential negative effects of the traumatic experience.

Another recent study (Zhou et al., 2019) examined the relationship between life satisfaction and gratitude in a post disaster context. This study focused on how social support, self-esteem, and hope mediated life satisfaction and gratitude. The researchers asked 397 adolescents to answer self-report questionnaires two and a half years after the Ya'an earthquake. Upon controlling for trauma severity, they found that gratitude can have a positive association with life satisfaction. Other important mediating factors included hope, social support, self-esteem, and these findings suggested that following a natural disaster, adolescent survivors' gratitude can have a positive relationship with life satisfaction.

Everybody copes with trauma and loss differently, according to their own healing timeline. Ramstad (2014) notes that individuals pass through stages of grief, but not necessarily in the same order or experiencing all the stages of grief. Ramstad (2014) further notes that gratitude is more easily expressed during life changing events that take place throughout a person's life and can focus on being grateful for those who have been unharmed, those who provide care and comfort, and gratitude for ongoing survival. Finally, Ramstad emphasizes that in order to obtain full emotional recovery, gratitude and grief need to be explored and expressed, and clients who are struggling for survival find it easier to express their gratitude.

There are two gratitude interventions that are widely used, gratitude letter writing and counting blessings. In studying responses to stressors, Krejtz et al (2016) had participants describe stressors and the well-being they experienced each day for 2 weeks. Prior to completing this writing task half of the participants described things they were grateful for and

half completed their writing entry without doing this. The findings revealed that daily gratitude writing increased well-being. In addition, the negative relation between daily stress and well-being was weaker for those who were asked to think about things for which they were grateful, compared to those who had not been asked. This study suggests that counting one's blessings can reduce the daily stress effects, which, in the long term can have positive health effects (Krejtz et al., 2016). This piece of research is important as it suggests that gratitude is a powerful coping tool in dealing with ongoing stress, a finding relevant for the current pandemic. To best understand the role of gratitude in predicting positive student outcomes, it may be best to conceptualize the process within a larger theoretical model.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Two theories are particularly relevant to the study. Barbara Fredrickson's (2005) broaden-and-build theory postulates that increasing positive emotions improves life satisfaction, happiness, and joy. She explains that positive emotions spark additional positive emotions and lead to an increase in happiness and positive wellbeing. This dissertation seeks to test this theory by showing that the students' gratitude, positive affect, and satisfaction with life would be increased by the *Rebbe's* implementation of gratitude exercises.

The find-remind-and-bind theory by Algoe (2012) instructs people to find something that makes them feel positive emotions, actively remember that thing, and attach themselves to this practice. Therefore, the more often a person engages in gratitude interventions the greater the positive affect. The counting blessings intervention reflects the "find" component of the find-remind-and-bind theory; it requires the *Rebbe* to constantly instruct the students to determine things they were thankful for in their lives. Ben David's method and the gratitude letter writing intervention also rely on the find component; both interventions required the

students to examine their lives to determine things for which they were grateful, particularly in the short-term.

When utilizing the counting blessings intervention participants are told to identify things for which they were grateful, whether big or small, and to write them down daily for a period of two weeks. At the end of each week, they reflected on and remembered what they were grateful for during that week. The letter-writing intervention also used this “remind” tool, the students wrote down things for which they were grateful; similarly, the Ben David method also required this activity. In all three interventions, writing is an essential part of the “reminding” segment of the theory, and they all required repeating the intervention daily to bind the feelings of gratitude.

The find-remind-and-bind theory also provides an understanding of the link between gratitude interventions and spirituality; it postulates that focusing on specific positive emotions can lead to an increase in these feelings. When an intervention method focuses on elevating spirituality, we would expect to see the “reminding” and “binding” exercise result in stronger spirituality. However, Cunha et al. (2019) reported that when the test population’s daily lives already incorporate behaviors similar to those performed in the interventions, the intervention benefits are limited. The Jewish Orthodox Day School curriculum, and Jewish Orthodox religious prayers and rituals, include daily activities that reinforce, and bind, the students’ gratitude and spirituality. Therefore, it may be important to consider baseline levels of religiosity/spirituality, when examining the effects of gratitude interventions on promoting spirituality.

The Current Study

There has been much attention given to gratitude and its impact children, adolescents, and adults, however, little effort has been made to employ these practices educationally in the classroom, specifically by a faith-based educator such as a *Rebbe*. Gratitude appears to be central to subjective well-being. If the implications from the research are true, gratitude interventions may be simple and efficient to use in conjunction with the Judaic studies classrooms across North America. This study focused on three specific gratitude interventions: gratitude letter writing, counting blessings, and the Ben David method. The Ben David method may be particularly relevant to Jewish religious educators because all JDSs incorporate prayer in their daily schedule. This study might provide great insight and value if a gratitude intervention can increase spirituality and if the use of the prayer book can increase gratitude.

The current study will make a significant contribution to the substantial research on gratitude and youth. Studying the effects of gratitude on an all-male Jewish Orthodox population will serve as a unique study on gratitude in JDS and that could be generalized to other all-male Orthodox JDS high schools, and potentially to other parochial schools. This study focused on collecting data utilizing the *Rebbe* as the teacher of gratitude because it can have far reaching positive effects across the JDS schooling system and help us better understand how we can best utilize religious educators. Looking at how gratitude and spirituality affect the spirituality burst of the adolescent can give us a view on how to foster spirituality and gratitude in teenagers. By looking at the effects of gratitude interventions in JDS we will be able to better understand if they are an effective tool for promoting positive growth and well-

being, and by adding the Rebbe as the interventionist we can explore their potentially critical role in the promotion of gratitude among religious adolescents attending JDS.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In exploring gratitude in JDS a set of primary and secondary research questions were explored.

Primary Research Questions

RQ1: Do gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* increase student levels of gratitude in 9-11th grade boys in a Jewish Orthodox Day School high school?

Hypothesis: 1a. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase of gratitude, as measured by the Gratitude Questionnaire – 6 (GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002).

RQ2: Do gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* increase student levels of emotional and religious/spiritual well-being?

Hypothesis: 2a. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase in Positive Affect, as measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children (PANAS-C; Laurent et al., 1999).

Hypothesis: 2b. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase in Negative Affect, as measured by the PANAS-C.

Hypothesis: 2c. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase in Life Satisfaction, as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (adapted for children; SWLS-C)

Hypothesis: 2d. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase in adolescent well-being, as measured by the EPOCH (Kern et al., 2015). The increases will occur across the five factors: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness.

Hypothesis: 2e. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* will show an increase in Religiousness/Spirituality, as measured by the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS; Fetzer Institute, 1999).

Secondary Research Questions

RQ3: What is the relation between self-reports of Gratitude and Religiousness/Spirituality?

Hypothesis 3a. Gratitude will be positively correlated with Religiousness/Spirituality

Hypothesis 3b. Changes in Gratitude will be correlated with changes in Religiousness/Spirituality

RQ4: Will Ben David's (2016) soulful educator approach have a greater impact on gratitude and religiousness/spirituality, as compared to Counting Blessings or Letter Writing?

Hypothesis 4a. The Ben David method will have a greater impact on gratitude, as compared to counting blessings or letter writing.

Hypothesis 4b. The Ben David method will have a greater impact on Religiousness/Spirituality, as compared to Counting Blessings or Letter Writing.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Participants

Participants of this study were 9-11th graders between the ages of 13-17 who attend an all-male JDS high school in an east coast suburb of a major Jewish Orthodox city. All students identified as white. Most students were from upper middle class homes; however, it should be noted that there is a wide range of socioeconomic status among families whose children attend the school. Data is not available on household income, as this is a private school. The *Rebbe* and his class were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (i.e., gratitude letter writing, counting blessings, or Ben David Method, 2016) and a no treatment control condition. In each grade classes were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions and a control, resulting in at least three classrooms per experimental group, and three classrooms for the control condition. All measures were described to participants and any questions were answered at pre and post testing. Passive consent forms were emailed to the parents of each participating student. This passive consent form described the study and explained that the student could withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent was assumed when parents did not respond to the consent form and request that their child not participate. The form also indicated that students' names will not be used in the research paper and all information provided by students will remain confidential (Appendix A). The student assent forms described the study goals and stated that students may withdraw at any time without any penalty (Appendix B).

Measures

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children (PANAS-C)

The PANAS assesses 15 positive and 15 negative emotions experienced over the past few weeks (Laurent et al., 1999). Positive emotions include joy, excitement, and interest; negative emotions include sadness, stress, and fear (Appendix C). The instrument is a 30 item self-report scale that measures positive affect and negative affect in children and adolescents. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). Scores were calculated by taking the average of each participant's scores for each of the two sub-scales. Therefore, scores could range from 1-5, with higher levels reflecting more positive emotions for the positive affect scale, and more negative emotions on the negative affect scale. Participants were instructed to indicate how often they have felt this way over the past few weeks. The PANAS-C sub-scales have demonstrated adequate internal consistency, moderate convergent and discriminant validity (Hughes & Kendall, 2009). Laurent et al. (1999) found that the internal consistency for positive affect was .90 (.89 for the replication sample) and .94 (.92 for the replication ample) for negative affect. The current study was interested in increasing subjective well-being by implementing a gratitude intervention, which should translate into increases in positive emotions and a decrease negative emotions. The PANAS-C provides a more nuanced view into the affective or emotional well-being of a student.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (adapted for children; SWLS-C)

The SWLS-C measures individuals' assessment of their lives as a whole (Appendix D). The SWLS-C is a five item scale and items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale

ranging from 1 (“disagree a lot”) to 5 (“agree a lot”) that were averaged yielded a total score ranging from 1-5. Higher scores reflect higher levels of life satisfaction.

The SWLS-C was adapted from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). Items on the SWLS-C include questions like “I am happy with my life” and “the things in my life are excellent.” The measure has demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$), evidence of convergent and discriminant validity with the other measures and showed evidence of construct validity for children aged 9-14 years of age (Gadermann et al., 2010). This measure provides insight into the possible effects of gratitude on how adolescents think about their own life satisfaction and well-being.

The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6)

This questionnaire is a self-report six question measure of gratitude where students respond using a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Responses from each item were averaged to obtain an overall score from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater levels of gratitude (see Appendix E). The GQ-6 measures four areas of gratitude that were conceptualized by gratitude science experts: intensity (i.e., how strongly one experiences gratitude), frequency (i.e., how often one feels grateful), span. (i.e., experiencing gratitude across multiple life events and circumstances), and density (i.e., feeling grateful to many people for any specific positive outcome). McCullough et. al, (2003) demonstrate that this measure has a robust, one-factor solution, suggesting that together these four aspects of gratitude represent the overall grateful disposition. Some examples of items on the scale include “I have so much in life to be thankful for” and “I am grateful to a wide variety of people.” This measure is widely used in assessing the trait of gratitude and has

shown strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$; McCullough et al., 2002). The GQ-6 demonstrates good convergent validity with positive affect ($r = .53, p < .01$), life satisfaction ($r = .53, p < .01$) and the Big Five Personality Traits agreeableness ($r = .41, p < .01$), conscientiousness ($r = .26, p < .01$), extraversion ($r = .32, p < .01$) and openness ($r = .23, p < .01$; McCullough et al., 2002). The GQ-6 has also demonstrated good divergent validity and was negatively correlated with negative affect ($r = -.43, p < .01$) and the Big Five Personality Trait, neuroticism ($r = -.42, p < .01$; McCullough et al., 2002). This instrument can further be used to explore the convergent validity between other measures of positive affect and life satisfaction, and to further substantiate the use of gratitude interventions.

The Epoch

Researchers in adolescent well-being have proposed five factors that are synonymous with the five domains of Seligman's (2011) well-being theory. The EPOCH measures engagement (absorption and focus on what one is doing and interested in life activities), perseverance (pursuing goals to completion, despite setbacks), optimism (hopefulness and confidence for the future), connectedness (satisfying relationships with others, feeling loved, and providing friendship to others), and happiness (positive affect; Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015). The EPOCH consists of 20 items with 4 in each of the 5 domains. Each item is scored 1 to 5, and the average of the 4 items for each domain is computed, with higher scores representing strength in that domain. The EPOCH measure of adolescent well-being has been internationally validated in various cross-cultural populations. Kern et al. (2015) found that the five factors were strongly correlated with one another with strongest correlations between happiness and connectedness ($r = .70$) and between perseverance and opti-

mism ($r = .65$). The EPOCH also demonstrated some evidence of 3-week test-retest reliability with r scores ranging from .55 for connectedness to .71 for happiness. The EPOCH provides a relational component that other measures do not provide. When cultivating gratitude, it is beneficial to see the effects it may have on relationships with others. The EPOCH is an instrument that includes measures of three important life domains that all humans constantly engage in; an affective domain, a cognitive domain and a behavioral domain.

Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS)

The BMMRS is a 13-item scale (Fetzer Institute, 1999; see Appendix G). The BMMRS measures several dimensions of spirituality, including values/beliefs (2-items; e.g., “I believe in a God who watches over me”), private religious practices (2-items; e.g., “How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature on your own?”), religious and spiritual coping (5-items; e.g., “I work together with God as partners”), overall self-ranking (2-items; e.g., “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?”), and meaning (2-items; e.g., “I have a sense of mission or calling in my own life”). Items were scored on a Likert scale of 1-4, and were averaged, and then recoded so higher scores indicated higher frequency, level of importance, or level of agreement. This measure has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity (Harris et al., 2008). This measure is important to the current study because it measures spiritual behavioral change, as well as probing cognitive religious practice and religious and spiritual coping. Jewish Day Schools share a mission of encouraging and facilitating the integration of God, in a meaningful and lasting way, into students’ lives. As mentioned in the literature review, this is a worthy goal as the research supports that greater religiosity and spirituality in adolescence is correlated with less involvement in high risk behavior and more involvement with health promoting behaviors (Brown, 2001). This

measure provides information about the role of gratitude interventions by *Rebbe* in rostering religion and spirituality.

In order to further operationalize and define the term *Rebbe*, each Judaic Studies teacher or *Rebbe* in this all-male Jewish Day School high school were asked to define this position as they understand it (see Appendix H).

Procedure

To implement the study, permission was requested from the principal of the high school where the intervention was implemented. Parents were given passive consent forms and students completed an assent form prior to the study beginning. All measures and instructions were reviewed with the principal and the *Rebbes* prior to implementation. Additionally, the *Rebbes* were given instructions on maintaining student confidentiality. All *Rebbes* were given identical written instructions in order to commence the intervention each day it was administered. The *Rebbe* was asked to limit his commentary and teaching about gratitude to the specific intervention being used prior and during the intervention phase of the study. To ensure consistency, a script was given to the *Rebbe* for each intervention. The interventions were designed to be administered during the first two hours of the school day after prayers and breakfast, as this is when the *Rebbe* is assigned to his class. The surveys were administered through survey monkey and each student was assigned a code at pretest so the researcher remained blind as to the subjects' identities at pre and post testing. Each subject used the same code at pre and post testing.

One factor that could not have been anticipated was the pandemic. Therefore, much of the intervention was executed remotely because students were not able to attend in-person

classes. This was a very unique situation with educators and students needing to quickly adapt to this novel modality for instruction.

Treatment Integrity

In order to ensure that the interventions were implemented in accordance with the parameters of the study the researcher provided a brief training to the *Rebbe* that included the protocols for each intervention. Additionally, the researcher interviewed the *Rebbe* during and after the interventions were implemented. This study relied on the *Rebbe* self-report and interviews with the *Rebbers* to ensure treatment integrity. These methods were less intrusive as compared to more direct methods of assessment such as directly observing the actual implementation. At several points throughout the intervention the researcher asked each *Rebbe* a standard set of questions. These interview questions are attached in Appendix I.

Gratitude Letter Writing

Students receiving this intervention were given a 10-minute time frame to remember and write about a time in their life that they were grateful to another person. The instructions are adapted from Seligman et al. (2005), and are as follows:

“Please take a moment to think back over the past several years of your life and remember an individual to whom you are extremely grateful. For example, think of the people – parents, children, spouses/partners, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, employers, and so on – who have impacted your life. Now for the next 10 minutes, write a letter to one of these individuals. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process:

Use whatever letter format you like but remember to write as though you are directly addressing the individual you are grateful to. If it is helpful to head the letter “Dear so-and-so,” or end with “Sincerely, XXX,” feel free to do so. Do not worry

about perfect grammar and spelling. Describe in specific terms why you are grateful to this individual and how the individual's behavior affected your life. Describe what you are doing now and how you often remember their efforts. Remember: Anything you write will remain strictly confidential. Although you are welcome to show or give this letter to anyone you please, for the purposes of this study, the letter you write is a private document in which you can express your gratitude freely without intent to deliver it to anyone. Should an experimenter read this entry in the future, it will be identifiable only by a subject number and not by a name."

Students participated in the gratitude letter writing intervention four times at 1 week intervals and completed the questionnaires at pre-test, and immediately after the intervention.

Counting Blessings

As replicated from Emmons and McCullough (2003) the following instructions were read to participants in this experimental condition:

"There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about. Think back over the past week and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for."

The gratitude group was asked to count up to five things a day that they were grateful for as a daily activity for 2 weeks and completed the questionnaires at pre-test, and immediately after the intervention.

Ben-David Method

Prior to any measures being given to students, each *Rebbe* that was randomly assigned to this condition was provided with and asked to read Ben David's (2016) book. *Reb- bes* were asked to pay extra attention to the section in part two of this book, which details the six essential steps of soulful education as it primed them for implementing the intervention. These six steps have been summarized in this dissertation. This intervention took place over 10 consecutive school days; with each day a different writing task around gratitude being prompted. These prompts were taken from a PowerPoint by Dr. David Pelcovitz (personal communication, 2019) using the work of Aryeh Ben David on developing the Prayerful Personality; Aryeh Ben David suggests and provides content examples for steps three, four, and five of the six-step process. In order to control for consistency and demand characteristics, the following prompts were read by the *Rebbe* from an instruction sheet

Day 1. Write a list of items you are grateful for and state why for at least half of the items. In your Body (10 Items)

Day 2. In your Family (10 items)

Day 3. In nature (10 items)

Day 4. In your school (10 items)

Day 5. Which moment in your life are you most proud of or grateful for?

Day 6. List 5 people in your life you are most grateful to and share a reason why you chose each person.

Day 7. What in your Jewish life are you most grateful for?

Day 8. Looking back on your life, which difficult moments are you most grateful for?

Day 9. Find a place in the prayer book where you see gratitude and explain how this text you have found relates to your life.

Day 10. Write how would you personally summarize your work on gratitude and what is your personal “take-away.” Share your responses with one other person in the class.

Participants in this intervention group completed the post-intervention measures on day 10 after the last intervention was administered.

The control condition for all experimental groups consisted of participants who were told that a writing assignment would be forthcoming but were not privy to the nature of an upcoming letter writing or other gratitude assignment. All groups completed the pre-post measures electronically via computer.

Power Analysis

A power analysis was conducted in order to determine the optimal sample size for this study. Based on the experimental study design, in order to measure differences before and after the intervention, paired samples t-tests were conducted to test some of the primary hypotheses. In this study there were three experimental groups and one control group, therefore, the optimal sample size will need to be multiplied by four. Cohen (1988) suggested that the desired power level should be a minimum of .8, meaning the corresponding Beta value (type II error) would be set at .2. Additionally, Cohen (1988) defines a small effect size as 2% and medium effect size as 15%. The accepted level of effect size is 10%. Therefore, in calculating the optimal sample size, the effect size was set to 0.1, the type II error rate (1-power) will be set to 0.2, alpha (the significance level) will be set to equal 0.05. In order to

achieve the optimal power, there should ideally be a minimum of 49 participants in each group. Since this study consisted of three experimental groups and one control group, a total of 196 students were initially targeted.

Potential Assessment Limitation of the Current Study

Emmons and McCullough (2003) acknowledge that the length of time positive effects of gratitude building have on the individual is not long-lasting. While it is clear there is a positive effect, how long participants can sustain this positivity is in question. Researchers acknowledge that future studies should examine long-term consequences of counting blessings, and they have additionally noted that much of the gratitude research is based solely on self-reporting. Expanding the methods of gratitude assessment could be important for future research (Tian et al., 2015). The current research study is limited in this way, assessing only the immediate effects of gratitude interventions and relying solely on self-reports.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

After cleaning the data and discarding incomplete and unmatched data, responses from 108 cases were available for analysis. The 108 participants were divided amongst the four groups as follows: 23 (21%) in the control group, 24 (22%) in the Ben David Method group; 30 (28%) in the Counting Blessings group, and 31(29%) in the Gratitude Letter Writing group.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

On initial screening all the main study variables were roughly normal in distribution. Cronbach's alphas were computed for each variable, pre- and post-intervention. All measures demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha \geq .70$), except for several of the sub-scales on the BMMR. However, most of the sub-scales consisted of only two items and the reliability was adequate when all items were averaged into a total score. In order to create an average total score, the two items that were scored on an 8-point scale were converted to a 4-point scale, to match with all the other items on the scale. The reliability for each scale is presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Cronbach's Alphas for Continuous Variables*

Variable	Pre-Intervention α	Post-Intervention α
Positive Affect	.88	.90
Negative Affect	.91	.84
Life Satisfaction	.86	.88
Gratitude	.74	.75
Engagement	.83	.83
Perseverance	.89	.87
Optimism	.82	.84
Connectedness	.79	.83
Happiness	.90	.90
Religiousness/Spirituality	.78	.80

Intercorrelations between the study variables were also computed and are presented in Table 2. Intercorrelations between variables were highly stable with stability coefficients ranging from .62 - .86. The one exception was negative affect, which demonstrated moderate to strong stability ($r = .42$). Also, all variables were either unrelated or positive related, with the exception being Negative Affect, which was either unrelated or negatively related to all other variables.

Table 2*Correlations Between all the Variables Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Positive Affect	.62**	.17	.42**	.42**	.28**	.31**	.56**	.39**	.62*	.17
2. Negative Affect	-.26**	.42**	-.44**	-.41**	-.02	.08	-.21	-.41**	-.37**	.02
3. Life Satisfaction	.59**	-.45**	.75**	-.59**	.15	.25*	.51**	.54**	.68**	.42**
4. Gratitude	.56**	-.30**	.61**	.71**	-.06	.22*	.43**	.48**	.48**	.40**
5. Engagement	.37**	-.09	.25*	.23*	.64**	.40**	.47**	.22**	.46**	.07
6. Perseverance	.39**	-.12	.28**	.34**	.48**	.84**	.59**	.24**	.42**	.35**
7. Optimism	.63**	-.36**	.54**	.58**	.44**	.54**	.76**	.53**	.75**	.27**
8. Connectedness	.43**	-.29**	.60**	.55**	.43*	.33**	.39**	.71**	.69**	.11
9. Happiness	.73**	-.41**	.73**	.69**	.53**	.46**	.77**	.66**	.81**	.21*
10. Religiousness/Spirituality	.25*	.05	.28**	.29**	.10	.39**	.34**	.14	.32**	.86**

Note. Data below diagonal are from T1 (pre-intervention); bolded data on diagonal represent stability coefficients; data above the diagonal are from T2 (post-intervention).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Primary Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

1a. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in Gratitude.

In order to determine whether gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* increase student levels of gratitude, relative to the control group, a 2 (intervention status: pre-post) X4 (intervention group: control, Counting Blessings, and Letter Writing) mixed ANOVA was executed utilizing the GQ-6. The interaction between intervention status and intervention group was not significant, suggesting that the effects of the intervention did not depend on which group you were in, $F(3,96) = .422, p = .74$. There was no evidence that any of the intervention groups differed significantly from the control group. In order to independently examine the effects of each intervention and the control group, four t-test for dependent means were calculated. There were no significant changes in gratitude in any group. We failed to find support for Hypothesis 1a. Statistics for each intervention group are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Effects of Intervention Group on Changes in Gratitude*

Intervention group	Pre-intervention	Post-Intervention	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
Control	6.09 (.71)	5.99 (.64)	.953	.35
Ben David Method	5.67 (.80)	5.65 (.91)	.099	.92
Counting Blessings	5.83 (.90)	5.72 (1.12)	.614	.55
Gratitude Letter Writing	5.60 (.98)	5.75 (.91)	-.722	.47

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis: 2a. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in Positive Affect.

Hypothesis: 2b. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in Negative Affect.

Hypothesis: 2c. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in Life Satisfaction.

Hypothesis: 2d. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in adolescent well-being, across the five factors: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness.

Hypothesis: 2e. Students who participate in gratitude interventions implemented by the Rebbe will show an increase in Religiousness/Spirituality.

In order to determine whether gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* decrease Negative Affect, and increase student levels of Positive Affect, Life Satisfaction, Well-Being across five domains (engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness), and Religiousness/Spirituality, nine 2 (intervention status: pre-post) X4 (intervention group: control, Counting Blessings, and Letter Writing) mixed ANOVAs were executed utilizing the PANAS-C, SWLS-C, EPOCH, and BMMRS scales. The interactions between intervention status and intervention group were not significant, suggesting that the effects of the intervention did not depend on which group you were in ($p > .10$ for all nine dependent variables). There was no evidence that any of the intervention groups differed significantly from the control group. In order to independently examine the effects of each intervention and the control group, a set of four t-test for dependent means were calculated, one set for each outcome. There were significant changes in Positive and Negative Affect, but none of the remaining seven outcomes changed significantly in any of the intervention groups. Statistics for each intervention group are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Effects of Intervention Group on Changes in Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Life Satisfaction, Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, Happiness, and Religiousness/Spirituality

Intervention group	Pre-intervention	Post Intervention		
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<u>Positive Affect</u>				
Control	3.55 (.64)	3.23 (.60)	2.47	.02*
Ben David Method	3.32 (.66)	3.08 (.85)	1.87	.08
Counting Blessings	3.52 (.67)	3.54 (.77)	-.18	.86
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.26 (.81)	2.92 (.59)	2.92	.01**
<u>Negative Affect</u>				
Control	1.54 (.41)	1.57 (.35)	-.30	.77
Ben David Method	2.15 (.84)	1.74 (.54)	2.9	.01**
Counting Blessings	2.02 (.64)	1.86 (.48)	1.40	.17
Gratitude Letter Writing	2.08 (.84)	1.92 (.57)	1.06	.30
<u>Life Satisfaction</u>				
Control	3.86 (.88)	3.91 (.84)	-.34	.74
Ben David Method	3.10 (1.21)	3.35 (1.00)	-1.43	.17
Counting Blessings	3.800 (1.00)	3.98 (1.17)	-1.50	.15
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.54 (.92)	3.55 (1.02)	-.10	.92

Intervention group	Pre-intervention	Post Intervention	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
<u>Engagement</u>				
Control	2.67 (.85)	2.82 (.77)	-.82	.42
Ben David Method	2.83 (.79)	3.11 (.88)	-1.72	.10
Counting Blessings	3.20 (.95)	3.51 (.92)	-1.99	.06
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.12 (1.09)	3.06 (.93)	.35	.73
<u>Preserverance</u>				
Control	3.01 (1.0)	2.18 (.93)	-1.36	.19
Ben David Method	2.99 (.92)	3.04 (.96)	-.45	.66
Counting Blessings	3.43 (.99)	3.56 (.93)	-.97	.34
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.42 (1.19)	3.31 (1.11)	1.00	.33
<u>Optimism</u>				
Control	3.60 (.83)	370 (.77)	-.82	.42
Ben David Method	3.22 (.90)	3.53 (.87)	-1.83	.08
Counting Blessings	3.62 (.98)	3.74 (1.03)	-.88	.39
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.19 (.86)	3.17 (.90)	.18	.86

Intervention group	Pre-intervention	Post Intervention	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
<u>Connectedness</u>				
Control	4.18 (.72)	4.23 (.69)	-.43	.67
Ben David Method	4.04 (.94)	4.01 (.92)	.13	.90
Counting Blessings	4.20 (.90)	4.21 (.95)	-.07	.95
Gratitude Letter Writing	4.01 (.89)	3.88 (.94)	1.18	.25
<u>Happiness</u>				
Control	3.87 (.78)	3.86 (.84)	.08	.94
Ben David Method	3.32 (.79)	3.46 (.96)	-1.03	.32
Counting Blessings	3.95 (1.05)	4.14 (.92)	-1.39	.18
Gratitude Letter Writing	3.63 (1.03)	3.52 (.95)	1.24	.23
<u>Religiousness/Spirituality</u>				
Control	2.57 (.57)	2.58 (.46)	-.31	.76
Ben David Method	2.60 (.43)	2.71 (.31)	-1.85	.08
Counting Blessings	2.72 (.61)	2.76 (.60)	-.65	.53
Gratitude Letter Writing	2.82 (.45)	2.76 (.50)	1.46	.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The few significant findings that did emerge were that those in the Gratitude Letter Writing group showed significant decreases in Positive Affect, but so did the Control group. The changes for the Gratitude Letter Writing group were opposite to the hypothesis that they would improve in Positive Affect. The one finding that did partially support hypothesis 2a is that those in the Ben David Method group reported significantly lower Negative Affect after the intervention. Overall, we found little support for the second set of hypotheses, with the one exception being for Negative Affect for the Ben David Method group. It must be noted that given the high number of comparisons that needed to be made for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (40), the single significant effect found to support the effects of the intervention must be interpreted with caution, due to a high probability of Type 1 error.

Secondary Hypotheses

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3a. Gratitude will be positively correlated with Religiousness/Spirituality

Hypothesis 3b. Changes in Gratitude will be correlated with changes in Religiousness/Spirituality

Table 2 shows the correlations between Gratitude and Religiousness/Spirituality. Gratitude was positively correlated with Religiosity/Spirituality prior to intervention ($r = .25$, $p < .05$) and became even more correlated following the intervention ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). This suggests that individuals who report higher levels of gratitude tend to report being more spiritual/religious, prior to the intervention and after the intervention. However, the correlation between changes in gratitude and changes in religiousness/spirituality was not significant ($p = .02$, $p = .85$), indicating that growth in gratitude and religiosity/spirituality does not appear to be related. This may be partially related to the very small changes that individuals reported

in both domains, and this lack of variability can attenuate correlations. Therefore, support for found for hypothesis 3a, but not for Hypothesis 3b.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4a. The Ben David method will have a greater impact on gratitude, as compared to counting blessings or letter writing.

Hypothesis 4b. The Ben David method will have a greater impact on Religiousness/Spirituality, as compared to Counting Blessings or Letter Writing.

Previous results reported for Hypothesis 1a and 2e demonstrated that no intervention group showed significant changes in Gratitude or Religiousness/Spirituality, so the effects of intervention on Gratitude and Religiousness/Spirituality were not different for the Ben David intervention, compared to the Counting Blessings and Letter Writing interventions.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides an interpretation and analysis of the findings presented in the previous chapter. It reviews the hypotheses and their results, and it links them to the past scholarly work discussed in the literature review section. It explores how the findings fit in the theoretical frameworks chosen. Finally, it reviews the study's implications, contributions, and limitations, and it offers recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis tested in the study proposed that gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* would result in an increase of gratitude in 9-11th graders. There were no significant differences between groups in terms of rates of change in gratitude. Furthermore, when each intervention group was examined independently, no significant changes in gratitude were found for any of the groups. None of the gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* led to the hypothesized increases in gratitude.

Similarly, the second hypothesis tested in the study proposed that gratitude interventions implemented by the *Rebbe* would result in a decrease in negative affect, and increases in positive affect, satisfaction with life, well-being, and religiousness/spirituality. There were no significant differences between groups in terms of rates of change in negative and positive affect, satisfaction with life, well-being across five domains (engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness), and religiousness/spirituality in 9-11th

graders. Furthermore, when each intervention group was examined independently, no significant changes in satisfaction with life, well-being, or religiosity/spirituality were found for any of the groups. However, two effects were detected. Those in the Gratitude Letter Writing group showed significant decreases in positive affect, but so did the Control group, suggesting that positive affect actually decreased for students engaging in the gratitude letter writing intervention, as well as those who did not participate in any specific intervention. The changes for the Gratitude Letter Writing group were opposite to the hypothesis that they would improve in Positive Affect, however, this may have reflected a more general drop in positive affect over the course of this study, because this effect was also evident in the control group.

The one finding that did partially support hypothesis 2 was that those in the Ben David Method group reported significantly lower negative affect after the intervention. Although this does suggest that this particular type of intervention may have resulted in reductions in negative emotions, this finding emerged from a total of 40 potential analyses examining group differences in hypotheses 1 and 2. Because the significance level was set for $p < .05$, it is likely that 2 of the 40 analyses (or 5%) might be the product of type 1 error, meaning that significant results were found despite any real differences in the population. It is notable that a total of two analyses were significant, exactly what would be expected by chance alone. Therefore, these significant results for hypothesis 2 must be interpreted with great caution.

For the remaining 38 comparisons no support was found. Although it might be expected that no changes occurred for the control groups, the lack of change for all three active interventions goes against much of the literature. For example, studies conducted in Australia

(Waters, 2011) and the United States (Froh et al., 2008; Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009) found a positive association between gratitude interventions and increased positive emotions. The study by Froh et al. (2008) consisted of a no-treatment group, a hassle condition, and a gratitude condition; it reported a substantial increase in feelings of gratitude among participants in the gratitude group than those in the no treatment group.

More recently, Klibert et al. (2019) examined the impact of gratitude interventions on students' wellbeing, and they found that individuals in the gratitude group had higher positive emotion levels than those in the control groups. The factors that may have had a major impact on the current study were twofold. One, conducting a gratitude study at the height of a global pandemic, and two, was the interventions were implemented over Zoom and not done in person as originally designed. The implications of these situational limitations will be discussed more extensively.

Similar to this dissertation study, however, Cunha et al. (2019), did not find significant differences in gratitude between gratitude intervention and non-intervention groups. Their study found no difference in life satisfaction, depression or happiness between the two groups; they attributed this to the fact that all participants recorded positive events on a daily list during the study. This may also explain the lack of intervention effects in the current study. As was true for students in the Cunha et al. study, the Jewish Orthodox Day School daily standard curriculum focuses on nurturing students' emotional wellbeing and their spiritual growth. The *Rebbe* may perform some version of gratitude interventions as part of his regular lessons, and the student's daily prayers involve thanking God multiple times a day. As supported by the Cunha et al. (2019) study's findings, given these daily gratitude lessons,

exercises, and prayers that are part of each group's routine, it could be argued that we would indeed expect to see no statistically significant difference between the intervention and control groups.

Additional post-hoc exploratory analyses were done to see if the three intervention groups combined fared significantly different than the control group on all of the dependent variables. Each of these 2 (pre- vs. post-intervention) x 2 (any intervention vs. control) were not significant, suggesting that the effects of intervention did not depend on whether you were receiving any gratitude intervention or were in the control group.

When reviewing this study's results, a critical factor to consider is the context of the current study. When the pretest was conducted at the end of February 2020, the students were in their physical classrooms and COVID-19 was not on their radar – therefore it is reasonable to assume that their levels of gratitude, life satisfaction, well-being, and religiosity/spirituality were normative. By the time the interventions were administered, in April and May 2020, New York had the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in the country. When post-testing was conducted in mid-May, New York schools had been closed since mid-March, students were quarantined with their families under a Stay-at-Home Order, and many of them had experienced the illness or death of family members and loved ones. The study population's emotional state was likely different both during and after the intervention due to the amount of pandemic-related stress, grief, fear, and anxiety.

Based on previous studies, there is evidence that crises often result in negative outcomes for children and adolescents, ranging from difficulties in academic to social-emotional domains (Abramson et al. 2008; Bonnano et al. 2010; Drury et al., 2008; Eaves, 2001; Kataoka et al., 2009; Love & Cobb, 2012). Some youth also show evidence of post-traumatic

stress reactions, including aggression, social avoidance, and difficulty self-regulating emotions (Cloitre et al., 2009). This context may provide insight into why this study did not find an increase in gratitude levels in the test population. Lyubomirsky (2013) points out that there is a connection between a person's affective state when they begin a positive intervention and the resulting level of change in their wellbeing. Fritz, and Lyubomirsky (2018) suggest that baseline affective state may actively contribute to contraindications of positive activities. They further explain that experimental evidence supports the notion that gratitude activities can have detrimental effects for depressed or dysphoric individuals, arguing that a person's baseline affective state can interact with the activity itself (in this case, expressing gratitude) and lead to person-activity misfit.

Based on their positive activity model, Fritz, and Lyubomirsky (2018) argue that a person-activity misfit can actually cause positive activities to undermine well-being, rather than increase it. Given the amount of sudden, unexpected stressors that affected this study's entire population, it would be reasonable to assume that they were experiencing some level of dysphoria during the interventions. Sin et al. (2011) found that dysphoric students showed a decrease in wellbeing after engaging in a gratitude letter writing intervention. Additionally, Fritz and colleagues (2018) argue that a person-activity misfit can occur when positive activities are performed under conditions of low or no autonomy, resulting in an undermining of well-being. This dissertation's test population agreed to participate in this study when they assumed that it would be incorporated into their daily routine in the physical classroom, before they had any inkling that COVID-19 would turn their lives upside down. Instead, they found themselves participating in classes via Zoom, which was often frustrating and stressful for them, due to technical glitches and being distracted by activities going on in their homes.

Indeed, many of the *Rebbes* reported difficulty with motivating students to participate in the gratitude interventions and post-testing.

Although there may be no definitive findings or statements that can be made, it is certainly possible that participating in gratitude interventions kept the students stable on the measures that were assessed. Indeed, only those in the gratitude letter writing condition demonstrated one significant drop in any of the positive outcome (i.e., a decrease in positive affect). Although this is possible, if it were true those in the control group might have fared far worse than those in any of the gratitude intervention groups. In only one occasion did outcomes for the control group appear to be negative, but the noted decrease in positive affect was also evident for those in the Ben David intervention group. Overall, ratings across outcome measures remained relatively stable for both the control and gratitude intervention groups.

Another explanation to consider is that the non-standard delivery of these interventions reduced their efficacy. Traditionally gratitude interventions are delivered live, but due to the pandemic they all were delivered remotely through Zoom. Efforts focused on developing greater levels of gratitude may have been overshadowed by the basic needs to receive an education and stay safe, as those around them succumbed to the deadly pandemic, becoming sick, or even dying. Even for those that did not experience the increased morbidity and mortality brought on by the pandemic may have reaped the negative consequences in other ways, such as in decreased parental employment, increased parental stress, social isolation, and difficulty adjusting to the “new normal” brought on by the realities of a new, dangerous, and

highly contagious disease. In particular, this study focused on the use of the *Rebbe*, a powerful personal role-model in the classroom. How the impact of the *Rebbe* persona via zoom vs. in person shifts has never been explored and may have impacted the study results.

Although some might argue for the use of gratitude based interventions during times of crisis in order to mitigate the negative impact (Krejtz et al., 2016), the work of Abraham Maslow (1970) and those that followed him have suggested that before we meet our higher order needs we must first satisfy basic needs of safety and security. Before we can reflect upon our greater psychological needs and our desire to better ourselves and those around us we need to know that we will be ok and feel like there is order, predictability, and control in the world and in our lives. This suggests that we may have limited capacity to focus on a growth orientation in the midst of great threats and that efforts to bolster gratitude may fall on deaf ears until a person can better achieve basic homeostasis.

It seems unlikely that the lack of findings can be attributed to measurement issues. However, the measures chosen for this study were seen as reliable and valid measures that appeared to be reliable and valid in the current study. As seen in Table 2, the measures demonstrated adequate internal reliability. Table 3 provides support for the convergent validity of the measures. For example, negative affect is negatively correlated with positive affect, gratitude, life satisfaction, and well-being. With the exception of negative affect, positive affect was positively correlated with every other main study variable. Furthermore, all the scales in the EPOCH are thought to measure interrelated aspects of wellness and were moderately to strongly, positively intercorrelated.

The third hypothesis was that gratitude and spirituality would be positive correlated, and that as gratitude increases, so would spirituality. Gratitude and spirituality were

significantly positively correlated at both pre and post intervention but changes in gratitude did not predict changes in spirituality. Overall, findings in this field demonstrate that spirituality and gratitude are interconnected (Tudder et al., 2017), particularly when it comes to prayer (Lambert et al., 2009), and that gratitude interventions positively increase spiritual and psychological wellbeing, daily spiritual experiences, as well as life satisfaction (Uher et al., 2017). Mishrai and Vashist (2014) found that, among adolescents, gratitude and spiritual intelligence increase concurrently and others (Miller & Barker, 2016) have reported that gratitude can help unlock an adolescent's capacity for spiritual development. McCullough et al. (2002) reported strong associations between spiritual practice and gratitude. However, given that there were little or no changes in either gratitude or spirituality, we were not able to predict changes in spirituality based on changes in gratitude. The lack of variability in ratings of gratitude or spirituality over the course of the interventions can cause an attenuation of associations because predictions of variability in one measure rely on variability of the predictor. For example, if we examine something as simple as the effects of dietary and exercise changes on weight loss, we will fail to find this well-documented effect if participants neither lose weight nor changed their dietary and exercise habits. Even well-established associations fail to be replicated when differences/variability in the variables being measured are minimal or non-existent.

The interventions took place over Zoom and may have negatively impacted their efficacy. In terms of spiritual growth, an additional aspect that could not be controlled was that students in the study normally pray as a group in the school building, but during the lockdown students were tasked with praying independent of their classmates. In speaking with the *Rebbers* many of them reported that they were skeptical about whether students

tasked with praying on their own actually did so, potentially limiting spiritual growth, given that prayer may play a pivotal role in religious and spiritual growth.

Even if students were able to overcome the obstacles brought on by the pandemic, this dissertation studied one narrow population that already incorporates a great deal of focus on spirituality into their daily lives, including daily prayers, weekly Sabbath observance, holiday observance, and daily religious education. Given that many students at orthodox Jewish day schools come from families that are committed to religious observance and spiritual growth it is possible that they were able to maintain many of the religious practices customary to their family, even if in altered conditions (e.g., praying with just family rather than the larger religious community or utilizing remote services). In other words, perhaps the intervention groups did not seem different from each other or the control because the overwhelming atmosphere and emphasis on gratitude impacted all participants. Cunha et al. (2019) found that when an entire test population engages in gratitude exercises as part of their daily routines, it can cause the intervention and nonintervention groups to show similar levels of gratitude. Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2010) explained that the effectiveness of gratitude interventions is dependent on the baseline condition; that is, if the sample group has high gratitude levels to begin with, the increase may be low or statistically insignificant. Similarly, this could explain why a population with a high baseline level of spirituality would not show a statistically significant increase in spirituality after participating in gratitude exercises. In a population where there is already a focus on spirituality, the likelihood of gratitude interventions causing a statistically significant increase in spirituality may be low. Upon examining the data, overall levels of religiosity and spirituality were substantially higher in the current sample than in a normative adolescent comparison group (Harris et al., 2008). Although not

all items in the original scale were included in this study, in the normative sample the mean of overall scores were below the midpoint of the scale, but in this sample the mean of overall scores were above the midpoint of the scale. Thus, a ceiling effect may have been present because of elevated initial levels of religiosity/spirituality for the adolescents in this sample.

The fourth hypothesis tested was that Ben David's (2016) soulful educator approach would have a greater impact on gratitude as compared to counting blessings or letter writing interventions. We failed to find evidence for the superiority of the Ben David method, or even evidence of its efficacy.

Many studies have compared letter writing and counting blessings. Anand and Anand (2014) examined the effectiveness of different interventions and found that the counting blessings approach produced the most statistically significant improvement in adolescents. Likewise, Emmons and McCullough (2003) and Anand and Anand (2014) both replicated the study by Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) and found that the counting blessings approach was the most effective intervention. Letter writing as an intervention also produces some benefits; Toepfer et. al, (2012) found that letter writing improved life-satisfaction, happiness and general wellbeing of students who used it. Layous et al., (2013) also noted that letter writing resulted in positive affect in the lives of those using the intervention. A more recent study by Dickens (2017) found that the counting blessings gratitude intervention resulted in the highest levels of gratitude compared to other types of interventions. Despite previous evidence of potentially differential effects of different types of gratitude interventions, no empirical studies have compared the effects of the Ben David method compared to other gratitude interventions or a control group. This appears to be the first study to formally compare the Ben David method with counting blessings and gratitude letter writing. It may be that this

method was not superior to the other methods but given that none of the groups demonstrated changes in gratitude, it is not a particularly meaningful comparison. Once again, in all of the above-mentioned studies the interventions took place face to face, between students and teachers, but in this study the interventions were provided over Zoom and may have resulted in reducing the efficacy of the interventions.

Implications, Contributions, and Areas for Future Research

The vast majority of the research hypotheses were not supported. Rather than supporting the efficacy of different gratitude interventions, this study highlighted key points to consider prior to conducting similar studies.

First, given the highly irregular method of intervention delivery and the unique stressors brought on by Covid-19, it is important that these interventions be reassessed under more normative conditions. The role of stress in potentially reducing the efficacy of gratitude interventions was not measured in this study but could be incorporated into future investigations. Despite the unforeseen obstacles, the *Rebbe* did report being able to deliver an online version of the interventions. This opens up the possibility of using non-traditional delivery methods to implement interventions. In addition, although the gratitude intervention groups did not show substantial improvements, there was no indication that these interventions had any negative effects, despite occurring within the context of incredible stressors.

This study's results demonstrate the importance of examining and measuring baseline states before introducing gratitude interventions. Cunha et al. (2019) found that when the intervention and non-intervention groups regularly engage in activities similar to those being tested, the results may not be statistically significant. It could be argued that the baseline spirituality levels for the intervention and nonintervention groups in the current study were

high prior to and during pretesting, which may explain why neither the control group nor the intervention groups experienced a statistically significant increase in their spirituality. Jewish Orthodox Day School students regularly engage in activities that are similar to the interventions. The students pray using common Jewish prayers like the *Amidah*, which is used as the basis of the Ben David Method, and they are encouraged to be grateful to God for everything in their lives, whether big or small, which is the basis for both the counting blessings and the letter-writing interventions.

This study is set apart from its predecessors by the extent to which the entire population's daily life, and likely their baseline affective state, abruptly changed after the pre-testing data was collected. When this study was initially proposed, it was expected that the intervention group would display statistically significant increased positivity and spirituality after performing the gratitude interventions. However, it was also assumed that the students would complete all phases of the study in their classrooms, and that they would experience only typical, expected stressors. The students were in their physical classroom and their lives were untouched by COVID19 at the end of February 2020; indeed, this study inadvertently gathered the data of this population's baseline affective state immediately before their daily lives were affected by the worst global pandemic in over a hundred years. It is impossible to know how the students may have been affected by the interventions, given the unexpected circumstances under which they incorporated them into their lives. It could be argued that the test population, and testing conditions, were so drastically changed by the effects of the pandemic, including being quarantined under a Stay-at Home Order and experiencing high levels of sudden fear and grief related to the pandemic, that the gratitude interventions and post testing did not measure the same population that was pre-tested. In retrospect, and for future

studies, if an entire test population experiences a drastic, unexpected change in their daily routine, pre-testing might need to be conducted again prior to introducing interventions.

The most significant factor impacting this study was its context. Additional research on the role of stress and crisis in intervention efficacy is clearly needed. Whether the current findings would be the same if all the data and interventions were carried out prior to the pandemic is unclear.

Study Limitations

Although the many of the main study limitations have been addressed there are a few other factors that may need to be considered. One limitation for this study was that it did not allow for generalization to other populations because the students were fairly homogeneous. The test population was very narrow; it was composed of all boys between 15-17 years old, with a similar level of observance to Jewish religious practices and rituals. It does, however, provide a potential template, to be used in JDS and other parochial high schools, that incorporates religious leaders in the delivery of gratitude-based interventions.

Additionally, this study was limited by the fact that its timing coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19, an unforeseen pandemic that caused a drastic upheaval in the test population's daily lives. When the initial data for the current study was collected at the end of February 2020, COVID-19 was not a concern to the test population. Within a few weeks, New York was Ground Zero for the pandemic; the test population's school was closed and moved online, they were under a Stay-at-Home order, and they were experiencing illnesses, hospitalizations, and even deaths of loved ones. The study population's lives, as well as the lives of their family, friends, and community changed drastically from the time pre-testing was conducted to when the interventions commenced; indeed, the 249 students participated in the

pre-testing only 108 participated in the post testing. This relates to another potential limitation, attrition.

The dropout rate is also a limitation and it seemed that the major reason for this attrition was due to students being asked to learn in a way that they have never been asked to learn, over zoom. The *Rebbes* reported difficulty in getting student compliant with the interventions and post measure follow up. In interviewing the *Rebbes*, they further reported that their own learning goals and the amount of material they covered was heavily compromised by this shift as well. They further reported that they too were experiencing some level of burn out, partially due to shifting to learning over a screen, as opposed to face-to face-learning. This study was conducted before, and during the first ten weeks of a time that required students and *Rebbes* to switch to online schooling without warning; given this, it would be reasonable to assume that a future study might be less affected by potential compliance issues.

Attrition may have also influenced the results. The original sample size was much larger, and many of the analyses became underpowered, meaning that only very large differences could be detected. The question of selective attrition is also relevant and it is possible that those who did not fill out post-test measures varied on some important unmeasured variable like level of stress or how directly the family was affected by the pandemic.

In summary, it is important that these interventions be re-evaluated under non-pandemic conditions and when learning is fully live and in-person, before making the assumption that these interventions are not effective in the JDS high school population.

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Appendix A
Parental Consent Form

DATE

Dear Parents,

My name is David Mark, and I am a Nationally Certified School Psychologist and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I am also a doctoral candidate at Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education & Administration. As part of the requirements towards receiving my doctoral degree, I am completing a research project. This research will focus on the enhancement of valued character strengths and those strengths that are frequently viewed as most important. It will also look at the cultivation of traits such as positive affect, life satisfaction, perseverance optimism, connectedness, and spirituality in high school boys. It will also focus on reducing characteristics such as negative emotions. Social and emotional learning has been a recent highlight in the research and the outcomes it offers to our students. It is well documented that building character traits in students and its benefits can increase a student's happiness but these benefits also extend into increased academic performance. As part of our school's mission we are committed to cultivating social emotional, spiritual and academic growth. I will provide The Rebbes with interventions that will be administered anywhere from 2 weeks to a months period of time. As part of these interventions students will be asked to complete writing assignments and given specific prompts. At the onset of the study your child will be asked to complete some questionnaires, and they will be asked to complete the same set of questionnaires at the conclusion of the study.

I am writing to request your permission for your sons' participation. Please contact me within one week of receiving this letter if you do not want your child to participate. I will assume that your child can participate if I don't hear from you within one week. There are no risks and discomforts associated with this type of research. Your child may withdraw at any point if he no longer wants to participate and he may withdraw from the study without any penalty. Students will NOT be identified by name in the study and will only be identified by a number in the results. The results will help benefit the lives of Orthodox Jewish students in all male high school settings.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at or my chairperson, Dr. David Pelcovitz, Gwendolyn & Joseph Straus Chair in Jewish Education. Please also feel free to contact me to learn about the results of this research.

Thank you for your time and support.
Sincerely,

MS, LCSW
EdD Candidate at Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration

Appendix B**Assent Form**

Dear Students,

Our thoughts and feelings matter and influence our behavior. I am interested in your thoughts and how you feel when given certain instructions by your Rebbe. You will be asked to answer a set of questions at two different time periods. There are no correct or incorrect answers and your answers will remain confidential. I will be the only one who sees your answers and I will not share them with anyone else. These sets of questions will only take you approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You can stop answering any questions at any time without any penalty. You may also be asked to complete an assignment in class based on instructions that will be given by The Rebbe. If you have any questions, you can ask me, if you have any further questions.

Thank you very much for your time and for your help.

I _____ have read the above information and agree to answer these surveys.

Sign _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Positive and Negative Affect Scale – for Children (PANAS-C)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then circle the appropriate answer next to that word. Indicate how much you have felt this way during the past few weeks.

	Not much or not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A lot
Interested	1	2	3	4	5
Sad	1	2	3	4	5
Frightened	1	2	3	4	5
Alert	1	2	3	4	5
Excited	1	2	3	4	5
Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
Upset	1	2	3	4	5
Happy	1	2	3	4	5
Strong	1	2	3	4	5
Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
Energetic	1	2	3	4	5
Scared	1	2	3	4	5
Calm	1	2	3	4	5
Miserable	1	2	3	4	5
Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5
Active	1	2	3	4	5
Proud	1	2	3	4	5
Afraid	1	2	3	4	5
Joyful	1	2	3	4	5
Lonely	1	2	3	4	5

Mad	1	2	3	4	5
Fearless	1	2	3	4	5
Disgusted	1	2	3	4	5
Delighted	1	2	3	4	5
Blue	1	2	3	4	5
Daring	1	2	3	4	5
Gloomy	1	2	3	4	5
Lively	1	2	3	4	5

PANAS-C SCORING SHEET

Instructions: Record the child or adolescents rating for each item in the appropriate blank. Ratings are from 1 to 5. To obtain the score for the positive affect (PA) scale, add the raw scores for the 12 items that compose the PA scale. Similarly, adding the raw scores for the 15 items that compose the negative affect (NA) scale results in the score for the NA scale.

Positive Affect (rated 1-5) _____	Negative Affect (rated 1-5) _____
Interested _____	Sad _____
Excited _____	Frightened _____
Happy _____	Ashamed _____
Strong _____	Upset _____
Energetic _____	Nervous _____
Calm _____	Guilty _____
Cheerful _____	Scared _____
Active _____	Miserable _____
Proud _____	Jittery _____

Joyful _____	Afraid _____
Delighted _____	Lonely _____
Lively _____	Mad _____
	Disgusted _____
	Blue _____
	Gloomy _____
PA Total _____	NA Total _____

Appendix D

Satisfaction with Life Scale-Child (SWLS-C)

For each of the following statements, please circle the number that describes you the best. Please read each sentence carefully and answer honestly. Thank you.

	Disagree a lot	Disagree a little	Don't agree or disagree	Agree a little	Agree a lot
1. In most ways my life is close to the way I would want it to be	1	2	3	4	5
2. The things in my life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am happy with my life	1	2	3	4	5
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5
5. If I could live my life over, I would have it the same way	1	2	3	4	5

SCORING: SWLS-C items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (“disagree a lot”) to 5 (“agree a lot”) then added together yielding a total score ranging from 5 to 25.

Appendix E

Gratitude Questionnaire – Six Item Form (GQ-6)

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6) is a six-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life.

Instructions: Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree 4 = neutral

5 = slightly agree 6 = agree

7 = strongly agree

___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.

___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.

___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.

___ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.

___ 5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.

___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

Scoring: Compute a mean across the item ratings; items 3 and 6 are reverse-scored.

Appendix F

EPOCH

Final 20-item EPOCH measure

Item Question

C1 When something good happens to me, I have people who I like to share the good news with.

P1 I finish whatever I begin.

O1 I am optimistic about my future

H1 I feel happy.

E1 When I do an activity, I enjoy it so much that I lose track of time.

H2 I have a lot of fun.

E2 I get completely absorbed in what I am doing.

H3 I love life.

P2 I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.

C2 When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me.

E3 I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else.

E4 When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed.

O2 In uncertain times, I expect the best.

C3 There are people in my life who really care about me.

O3 I think good things are going to happen to me.

C4 I have friends that I really care about.

P3 Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.

O4 I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem.

P4 I am a hard worker.

H4 I am a cheerful person.

Directions to participants: This is a survey about you! Please read each of the following statements.

Circle how much each statement describes you. Please be honest - there are no right or wrong answers!

Scaling: 1 to 5 scale: Almost never, Sometimes, Often, Very often, Almost always

Scoring EPOCH

Item Question

C1 When something good happens to me, I have people who I like to share the good news with. P1 I finish whatever I begin.

O1 I am optimistic about my future

H1 I feel happy.

E1 When I do an activity, I enjoy it so much that I lose track of time.

H2 I have a lot of fun.

E2 I get completely absorbed in what I am doing.

H3 I love life.

P2 I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.

C2 When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me.

E3 I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else.

E4 When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed.

O2 In uncertain times, I expect the best.

C3 There are people in my life who really care about me.

O3 I think good things are going to happen to me.

C4 I have friends that I really care about.

P3 Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.

O4 I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem. P4 I am a hard worker.

H4 I am a cheerful person.

Across domains, each item is scored on a 1 to 5 scale (almost never/ not at all like me = 1; almost always/ very much like me = 5). Scores are computed for each domain as the average of the four items, and results can be presented as a profile across domains (see sample image below). That is:

Engagement = mean (E1, E2, E3, E4). Perseverance = mean (P1, P2, P3, P4) Optimism = mean (O1, O2, O3, O4) Connectedness = mean (C1, C2, C3, C4) Happiness = mean (H1, H2, H3, H4)

Appendix G

Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS)

Values/Beliefs

1. I believe in a God who watches over me.

- 1 - Strongly agree
- 2 - Agree
- 3 - Disagree
- 4 - Strongly disagree

2. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.

- 1 - Strongly agree
- 2 - Agree
- 3 - Disagree
- 4 - Strongly disagree

Private Religious Practices

3. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?

- 1 - More than once a day
- 2 - Once a day
- 3 - A few times a week
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - A few times a month
- 6 - Once a month
- 7 - Less than once a month
- 8 - Never

4. How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature on your own?

- 1 - More than once a day
- 2 - Once a day
- 3 - A few times a week
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - A few times a month
- 6 - Once a month
- 7 - Less than once a month
- 8 - Never

Religious and Spiritual Coping

Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each of the following involved in the way you cope?

5. I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force.

- 1 - A great deal
- 2 - Quite a bit
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Not at all

6. I work together with God as partners.

- 1 - A great deal
- 2 - Quite a bit
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Not at all

7. I feel God is punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality.

- 1 - A great deal
- 2 - Quite a bit
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Not at all

8. I wonder whether God has abandoned me.

- 1 - A great deal
- 2 - Quite a bit
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Not at all

9. I try to make sense of the situation and decide what to do without relying on God.

- 1 - A great deal
- 2 - Quite a bit
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Not at all

Overall Self-Ranking

10. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?

- 1 - Very religious

- 2 - Moderately religious
 - 3 - Slightly religious
 - 4 - Not religious at all
11. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?
- 1 - Very spiritual
 - 2 - Moderately spiritual
 - 3 - Slightly spiritual
 - 4 - Not spiritual at all

Meaning

12. The events in my life unfold according to a divine or greater plan.
- 1 - Strongly agree
 - 2 - Agree
 - 3 - Disagree
 - 4 - Strongly disagree
13. I have a sense of mission or calling in my own life.
- 1 - Strongly agree
 - 2 - Agree
 - 3 - Disagree
 - 4 - Strongly disagree

Note: Fetzer Institute. (1999). National Institute on Aging Working Group: Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness, Spirituality for Use in Health Research. A Report of a National Working Group Supported by the Fetzer Institute in Collaboration with the National Institute on Aging. Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute.

Appendix H

Defining the Term 'Rebbe'

Response #1 - teacher of religious Judaic subjects, as well as a lifetime mentor

Response #2 - A teacher plus a spiritual and emotional mentor and role model

Response #3 - The chief religious mentor

Response #4- teacher mentor guide of spirituality. Teacher guide intimate friend

Response #5 - spiritual mentor perpetuating the chain of the Five Books of Moses from the revelation

Response #6 - An educator of Jewish traditions, moral and values, applying timeless principles to modern times

Response #7 - The teacher of Judaic studies whose primary responsibility includes religious and spiritual guidance of the students

Response #8 - A spiritual father to a student caring for that student as a son and trying their best to inspire that student to care about themselves and religion in their deepest of ways. Be responsible to teach the laws history and philosophy of the Jewish nation.

Response #9 - A cross between a guidance counselor and a priest

Response #10 - A teacher, a mentor a guide someone who teaches much more than content, a way of life a value system

Response #11 - a teacher of Torah and guidance of lifestyle

Response #12 - A teacher of Judaic studies whose job extends beyond scholastic pursuits into the realm, of social emotional and religious health

Response #13 - Someone who cares about their students' welfare and future

Response #14 - A teachers of Jewish law but more a spiritual guide and almost like an advisor counselor mixed into one

Response #15 - A Rabbi who has Torah knowledge who is skilled at teaching that knowledge in an inspiring way so the student will Himself be excited about the study of Torah and Jewish religion. So the student will learn it and enjoy it and be inspired and continue his growth as a Jew.

Response #16 - teaches students torah proper way to live life advisor to student, spiritual leader

Response #17 - A teacher mentor and a father who brings out the latent potential of an individual allowing him to shine

Response #18 - The teacher of Torah and related Judaic studies

Response #19- A teacher of Judaic studies and Jewish ethical behavior

Response #20- A spiritual advisor, inspiring through the lessons and messages of the Torah

Response #21 - A spiritual moral compass and guide for students

Response #22 - A spiritual leader, guidance of life

Appendix I

Treatment Integrity Interview

1. What are your thoughts and feelings on implementation of your intervention?
2. In your opinion do you think it is working?
3. Did you read the instructions that were given to you or did you modify them?
4. If you modified them how did you do so?
5. Did you teach about gratitude with your students prior to the study or during the study?