Global Day of Jewish Learning
Curriculum: Blessings & Gratitude

NOV•18•12
www.theglobalday.com
A Project of the Aleph Society
“Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the glory of children is their parents.”

– Proverbs 17:6

In honor of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren: their lives burnish the glory of those who perished in the Shoah.

For my parents, Benjamin and Charlotte Gottesfeld z”l, these children are the greatest reward…

▶ Chana Hanina
▶ Galia Hanina
▶ Sarah Rose Warren
▶ Joseph Nathan Warren

Children of Shira and Steve Stein
▶ Simcha Meir
▶ Tamara Yocheved
▶ Eliyahu Aryeh
▶ Eitan Yosef

Children of Aliza and Zev Ganz
▶ Shmuel Yoel
▶ Atara Rina
▶ Daniel Yomtov
▶ Yosef

Children of Tamar and Josh Heller
▶ Yakira Eliyana
▶ Gavriella Talia
▶ Yehuda Meir

Children of Laura and Adam Hanina
▶ Samuel Azriel
▶ Charlotte Eliora

And in tribute to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, whose work has opened the doors of Jewish learning to our generation and those to come.

– Fanya Gottesfeld Heller
Curriculum 2012: Blessings and Gratitude

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FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS

   What are you grateful for in your life? What is the connection between gratitude and prayer? Through shared text study, this unit explores the idea that it is gratitude that connects us to ourselves, our community and God.
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2. Gratitude and Birkhat HaMazon (Grace after Meals).
   Most cultures are thankful before the meal; Judaism emphasizes the blessings that we say when our plates are cleared. This unit centers on Birkat HaMazon, and explores the value of expressing gratitude both for the gift and to the giver of the gift.
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3. Is There a Recipe for Prayer?: A Lesson in Picking the Perfect Words.
   Some prayers are read from the book; others are spontaneous cries from the heart. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches?
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4. Blessing the Bad: How do We Relate to Bad Things?
   David, a well-known lawyer, is badly hurt in a car accident. Should he say a blessing? Must we believe that “everything is for the best”? This unit looks at the philosophical, religious and textual responses to the existential question of blessing the bad.
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5. Celebrating Differences: An Artistic Interpretation of Blessing Those Who are Unique.
   The Bible tells us that we are all created “in the image of God.” Yet we all look so different. How do blessings deepen our ability to appreciate the world around us? What are the differences between respect, honor and love? This unit includes texts and a graphic design art piece to explore celebrating the differences that surround us.
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   Our sages believed that every unusual sight deserved its own blessing—it was their way of savoring the moment. Did you know that when you hear thunder or see a beautiful view, traditional Judaism offers up different blessings to say? This unit helps us to appreciate how blessings can help us to slow down and appreciate the world around us.
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FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

The Wonderful World of some Wacky Blessings (Middle School)
   How do you truly appreciate a moment? Judaism offers some fairly unexpected blessings. Did you know that there is a blessing to say when you see a rainbow? hear thunder? There is even a blessing to say over a beautiful view! This unit introduces us to some of the more unique blessings we say. With activities, discussion and chevrutah study (paired learning), students will be encouraged to slow down and appreciate the world around them.
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Experience a Blessing! (Elementary School)
   There are blessings we say over food and blessings we say over experiences. In this class, we will explore different blessings that involve taste, sight, hearing, touch and smell. Our five senses can help us learn about blessings! Students are encouraged to think about when and why they say blessings. The idea of slowing down to appreciate the world around them will be explored through activities and class discussion.
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Preface

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has laid down a challenge to Jews everywhere: “to take a step ahead in Jewish learning and commitment.”

The Global Day of Jewish Learning is the collective response—a most successful one—by over 300 communities around the world.

Initiated in 2010 to celebrate the completion of Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz’s monumental translation and commentary on the Talmud, the Global Day has quickly become an internationally recognized annual event. As the study of Torah is one of the few things that the entirety of our people can share, the Global Day is a day for all Jews to celebrate and cherish.

The Global Day is the work of many hands, internationally and in communities large and small. We appreciate the work being done on the ground to organize events in synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, Federations, and other community organizations all around the world. The success of the Global Day is due to all of your collective efforts. Thank you.

The Aleph Society, which spearheads the Global Day of Jewish Learning, is an affiliate of the Shefa Institute, which promotes the work of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. We are grateful to Rabbi Menachem Even-Israel, Shefa’s Executive Director, for his guidance and creativity.

Several agencies and individuals were instrumental in the planning and outreach for the Global Day. Our deepest thanks go to our key international partner, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and our organizing partners the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. We are excited to have JAFI’s Partnership2Gether join us as a community partner this year. We are grateful to our 20+ supporting partners, including the rabbinic bodies of all the denominations, for promoting the Global Day to their constituencies.

Thank you to Dov Abramson (artist), Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, Channa Lockshin Bob, Yaffa Epstein, Rabbi Yehuda Jayson, and Devorah Katz for contributing pieces to this curriculum. And a special thank you to Devorah Katz for the dedication, passion and creativity she brought to her role as Curriculum Editor. We greatly appreciate our special partnership with the PJ Library and its work to prepare early childhood family programming units that fit with this year’s theme.

We wish you a wonderful day of learning on Sunday, November 18th and hope that the study of “Blessings and Gratitude” will be an inspiration to all of us.

Margy-Ruth Davis, Karen Klieger Sponder, & Lizzy Bentley
The Aleph Society
Aleph Society’s Mission & Ventures

The Aleph Society was founded in 1990 to further Rabbi Steinsaltz’s mission of “Let My People Know.” The Rabbi’s network of publishing ventures, scholarly work and schools span the globe. After completing a 45 volume Hebrew translation and commentary on the Talmud, he oversees translations of this masterwork into English, French, Russian and Spanish. He has written more than sixty other books that have been translated into a dozen languages. Over 1,000 youngsters—from kindergarten to those in post-army advanced studies—study in his Israeli institutions. All of the Rabbi’s affiliate organizations are under the umbrella of the Shefa Institute; its website, www.hashefa.com, offers a wealth of digital classes and lectures by the Rabbi and his colleagues.

The American-based Aleph Society sponsors informal education programs that reach a world-wide audience. The Global Day of Jewish Learning, now in its third year, is celebrated in over 300 communities, from Singapore to San Francisco and from Dallas to Djerba. Many, many thousands of Jews join together to study the same foundational texts and to be inspired to “take a step ahead,” as Rabbi Steinsaltz has challenged us. (www.theglobalday.com).

Complementing the Global Day with in-depth study opportunities, we’ve launched the Talmud Circle/Aleph Fellows initiative. This ten month study program is designed to encourage group study of the Talmud using the Steinsaltz lens. Articles by the Rabbi and more information on his North American activities can be found at www.steinsaltz.org.

Through social media, the Big Questions campaign reaches an international audience each month. We ask questions about the issues that matter to the Jewish people, provide Rabbi Steinsaltz’s perspective and invite readers to submit their own responses. To see more about the Big Questions, please visit www.theglobalday.com/big_questions.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz is internationally regarded as one of the greatest rabbis of this century and of the last. Teacher, mystic, scientist, and social critic—and hailed by Time magazine as a “once-in-a-millennium scholar”—Rabbi Steinsaltz founded the Institute for Jewish Studies in the Former Soviet Union, comprising Melamedia College, Lamed, the national Jewish teacher’s organization, and an extensive publishing program. In 1985 he established the acclaimed Mekor Chaim network of schools in Israel, which attracts students from across the spectrum of Israeli society.

Rabbi Steinsaltz recently completed his monumental 45-volume translation of and commentary on the Talmud. This historic achievement was commemorated in November 2010 by the inaugural Global Day of Jewish Learning. In 2012, Koren Publishers released the Steinsaltz English edition of the Koren Talmud Bavli. In spring 2012, PBS broadcasted a profile of the Rabbi featuring the new English Talmud edition on their Religion and Ethics Newsweekly program.

Rabbi Steinsaltz received Israel’s inaugural Israeli Presidential Award of Distinction in early 2012. Previous honors include the Israel Prize and the French Order of Arts and Literature. The author of many books, including the contemporary classic The Thirteen Petalled Rose, Rabbi Steinsaltz is widely known throughout the world as an extraordinary champion of Jewish literacy.
Introduction to the Curriculum

The Global Day of Jewish Learning is a day that unites the Jewish people and communities from around the world. This year's theme is Blessings and Gratitude. As a Jewish people, there are many things that divide us—yet our shared Jewish texts unite us.

We have developed a curriculum to reach all levels of adult learners. It includes a focus on the Talmud, especially sources from Tractate Berakhot (Blessings). Berakhot is the first tractate of the Talmud, and therefore was the volume used to launch the Steinsaltz English edition of the Koren Talmud Bavli in 2012. Excerpts from this publication are incorporated into the curriculum.

In a recent Times of Israel article about the importance of Talmud study (“Never Mind the Bible, it's the sanity of the Talmud you need to understand the world and yourself”—August 9, 2012), Rabbi Steinsaltz said:

> It’s a central pillar for understanding anything about Judaism, more than the Bible. The Talmud is not a divine gift given to people. The Jewish people created it. But on the other hand, it created the Jewish people. In so many ways, we’re Talmudic Jews, whether we believe in it or not.

Rabbi Steinsaltz describes the importance of blessings in his The Thirteen Petalled Rose:

> The task of the blessing is to remind one, to halt the process of habit and routine which draws man always into the realm of the mechanical and meaningless, and to set up at every moment of change in the flow of life the brief declaration that this particular thing one is doing is not for one's self or of one's self, but that at some point it is connected with a higher world. By these blessings, then, scattered throughout the entire day, in all manner of situations, one attains to an integration of the ordinary, habitual elements of life with a higher order of sanctity.

This year for the first time we are including lessons for middle school and elementary school students. These units introduce students to some of Judaism's more unusual blessings. Through activities and discussion, students are encouraged to see how blessings can help them to express gratitude and to appreciate the world around them.

This theme—Blessings and Gratitude—provides the opportunity to learn about the connections between saying blessings and expressing gratitude, between individual prayers and community building, and between different types of blessings. We have an opportunity to come together, to debate, challenge, and disagree; and, perhaps most significantly, to learn from colleagues and friends and to glory in our ability to grapple with each other and with our intellectual tradition, within the playground that is the Jewish conversation.
Introduction for Facilitators & Educators

The theme of Blessings and Gratitude offers important material for any Jew to explore. At the same time, we do not expect every Global Day participant to feel the same way about these ideas. Therefore, facilitators are challenged to approach the text with nuanced perspectives and to lead a pluralistic conversation, allowing participants to express their ideas. How can a facilitator manage this?

- Opening the text for conversation, rather than offering an authoritative interpretation.
- Allowing for different ideas to co-exist in the classroom, including different understandings about blessings and gratitude.
- Encouraging all involved to keep an open mind and allow themselves to be challenged by the ideas in the room and on the page.
- Encouraging participants to learn from each other.

The facilitator will also benefit from:

- Asking questions of participants, opening up questions for conversation; after reading a text, asking participants for “reactions” and “questions.”
- Stepping back, and calling on participants, rather than continually offering ideas.
- Allowing silence, letting people sit with ideas and mull over their thoughts.
- Ensuring that those in the room know each other’s names and use them; attributing ideas to those who first raise them.

Leading Global Day conversations requires a balance between facilitation and teaching. Those leading these conversations “facilitate” when they make room for participants to speak their minds, ensuring that the conversation has order. Teaching is also necessary. Through the Global Day, we hope that participants develop a commitment to and interest in Jewish texts, as well as an understanding that such texts are relevant to us today. We hope that they see that Jewish text-based conversations can enrich community work, that any of us can access texts—that they are not so frightening—and that Jewish study links each of us to the Jewish people as a whole. Facilitators are responsible for conveying these ideas to participants.

Facilitators can convey these ideas in a variety of ways:

- Facilitators can begin conversations by asking: Has anyone studied texts like this before? What is it like? What are our associations with Jewish text study? What would it mean to study more? Facilitators can also close conversations in this way, helping participants to debrief the experience and to validate each other’s positive experiences or concerns.
- Particularly if the group has relatively little experience studying Jewish texts, the facilitator can say directly: Studying Jewish texts is not so scary!
- Facilitators should feel comfortable sharing their own experiences with text study.
- If the group includes community agency leaders, or individuals who are leaders in their own synagogues, the facilitator might lead a conversation about how each person might introduce more text study into their different organizations.

Facilitators should keep in mind these educational goals, asking participants questions and challenging them in ways that will help them think about these ideas. The hope is that these goals will be realized and that the Talmud and Jewish texts will have gained thousands of students as a result of this great day.
The Classes

To delve into the theme and to help participants see both Blessings and Gratitude and Jewish texts as relevant to their lives, the classes address significant questions related to Blessings and Gratitude.

Each class reviews primary ideas in different areas, and the classes complement each other.

If you are new to being a facilitator, you may want to consider teaching the unit Finding God, Finding Gratitude, as it offers a greater level of detailed guidance for a facilitator than the other units.

We have chosen texts that will challenge participants, raising key questions and helping us to develop a richer understanding of Blessings and Gratitude, in ways that were relevant to the rabbis and will be relevant to us today. Each class contains a variety of texts that shed light on the theme— including texts from the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Medieval and Modern commentators, and Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz.

This year we are excited to note that many of the units containing texts from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot include excerpts from the new Steinsaltz English edition of the Koren Talmud Bavli.

Class format:

- Facilitators’ guides contain background information, texts, conversation questions and directions to help you structure and frame each class.

- This year, in an effort to make the curriculum more user-friendly, the materials for the participants—sourcesheets and any related supplementary material—immediately follow each facilitator’s guide unit (within this book).

- A breakdown of the classes’ timing is provided to facilitators. While we outline 60 minutes for the adult sessions, we expect the facilitator to have the flexibility to abridge or lengthen these classes based on time allotted and/or the participants’ interest.

As you put together your outline for the conversation that you will lead, keep in mind:

- Don’t feel compelled to use each text and activity. Rather, use what makes sense and feels natural to you.

- Connect one text to the other. Often, the hardest part of these conversations is making the links between texts. Before leading the conversation, create a mental outline of how one text leads to the next, and of the points you are trying to make in teaching/ leading.

- Feel free to share some of your own ideas and personal stories. Bringing yourself into the conversation helps participants see you as a genuine role model.

- Don’t be afraid to share your own questions about the texts. By sharing our questions, we assure students that one can live a rich Jewish life even with—and maybe only with—questions.

These texts have been chosen for their relevance to human experience, but in the end, the true purpose of the day is to increase students’ familiarity with and appreciation for Jewish text study and Blessings and Gratitude, their role in Jewish tradition, and their role in our lives. Each text is rich with nuance, and a serious reckoning with the text will certainly yield new perspectives and meaning.
Beyond a text-by-text class discussion, here are some alternative formats you might consider:

- Have the students prepare together in pairs, discussing the texts with questions you provide. Give them 20 to 30 minutes to prepare the sources and then bring them back together to share their insights. Monitor their progress so you know how many sources they have covered. Often you will find that they say they didn't have enough time to review all the sources (this is a good thing!).
- Divide the class into small groups and assign a source or two to each group. Give each group 10 to 15 minutes to work together and then reconvene the entire class and ask each group to share their insights.
- Divide the class into small groups and have the entire class learn one or two sources (depending on the length) for 5 to 7 minutes. Then bring them back for a debriefing which will also be five minutes at most. Do that for all the sources, leaving time for a five to seven minute summary at the end.

We hope you will consider other creative presentations using different media, which can be beneficial to understanding the text and finding it meaningful (for some ideas of different supplemental resources you may use, visit the Toolbox section of the Global Day website).

Video Classes:
In addition to the classes contained in this book, there will be three video classes taught by Rabbi Steinsaltz that will be available for download/online viewing. These classes will address the following topics: Blessing the Bad; Changing Prayer; and Dreams in Berakhot. The video classes will be approximately eight minutes long, and supplemental sourcesheets and discussion questions will be provided. The videos can either be incorporated into select classes, or used on their own. They will be available in October in the Toolbox section of the Global Day website.

Using the Curriculum Guidebook for All Levels

Beginning Adult Learners

- Study the unit Exploring Blessings, as the content of this unit is intended to be especially helpful for use with beginning learners.
- Base a class on Rabbi Steinsaltz’s essay, “What Is the Talmud?” (in the Supplemental Reading section).

You might want to split the paragraphs up among participants—give a few paragraphs to each two participants. After they read and parse the paragraphs, go around the room and create a summary of the essay from the participants’ feedback.

Use the following discussion questions.

1. What is unique about the Talmud, according to Rabbi Steinsaltz?
2. How does the Talmud work?
3. Why are the Torah and Talmud central to Jewish tradition? What do you learn from this essay?
4. What is interesting or challenging to participants about text study?

Close by asking participants about their experience of text study, debriefing and helping participants look forward to studying again.
Middle School Students

We are pleased to offer for the first time this year a unit for middle school students (grades 6–8). This unit includes worksheets to help these students explore specific blessings. Middle school students vary by age and educational needs, so this unit will need to be tailored to best fit the group of participating students.

Elementary School Students

We are pleased to offer for the first time this year a unit for elementary school students (grades 1–5). This unit includes worksheets to help these students explore specific blessings and experience them using their five senses. Elementary school students vary greatly by age and educational needs, so this unit will need to be tailored to best fit the group of participating students.
Opening and Introductions (6 minutes)

Today we are part of the Global Day of Jewish Learning. The theme is Gratitude and Blessings in our lives. Our particular session will focus on a piece of Talmud that deals with the direction that we face when praying, and how it is gratitude that connects us to ourselves, each other, and God.

Opening Hook

1. What are you grateful for in your life? What is one thing that happened in the last 24 hours that made you feel grateful?

Use this as an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other and introduce themselves.

Text #1: JFK’s Thanksgiving Proclamation (7 minutes)

Ask one of the participants to read aloud.

By The President Of The United States Of America

A PROCLAMATION:

Now, THEREFORE, I, JOHN F. KENNEDY, President of the United States of America, in accord with the joint resolution of Congress, approved December 26, 1941, which designates the fourth Thursday in November of each year as Thanksgiving Day, do hereby proclaim Thursday, the twenty-second day of November of this year, as a day of national thanksgiving.

I urge that all observe this day with reverence and with humility.

Let us renew the spirit of the Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving, lonely in an inscrutable wilderness, facing the dark unknown with a faith borne of their dedication to God and a fortitude drawn from their sense that all men were brothers.

Let us renew that spirit by offering our thanks for uncovenanted mercies, beyond our desert or merit, and by resolving to meet the responsibilities placed upon us.

Let us renew that spirit by sharing the abundance of this day with those less fortunate, in our own land and abroad. Let us renew that spirit by seeking always to establish larger communities of brotherhood.

Let us renew that spirit by preparing our souls for the incertitudes ahead—by being always ready to confront crisis with steadfastness and achievement with grace and modesty.
Let us renew that spirit by concerting our energy and our hope with men and women everywhere that the world may move more rapidly toward the time when Thanksgiving may be a day of universal celebration.

Let us renew that spirit by expressing our acceptance of the limitations of human striving and by affirming our duty to strive nonetheless, as Providence may direct us, toward a better world for all mankind.

Then ask:

1. What are the areas that JFK thought we needed gratitude in?
2. Why do you think that these are the things he wanted to tell his citizens to focus on?
3. Do you agree that appreciating what we have leads to community building? Why or why not?

You want your participants to notice:

- Thanksgiving—recognizing our abundance leads to sharing abundance with those less fortunate.
- This leads to building community.
- Humans are limited—The divine is necessary in order to achieve greater good.

Some background information:

**Wikipedia: Thanksgiving (United States)**

On Thursday, September 24, 1789, the first House of Representatives voted to recommend the First Amendment of the newly drafted Constitution to the states for ratification. The next day, Congressman Elias Boudinot from New Jersey proposed that the House and Senate jointly request of President Washington to proclaim a day of thanksgiving for “the many signal favors of Almighty God.” Boudinot said that he “could not think of letting the session pass over without offering an opportunity to all the citizens of the United States of joining, with one voice, in returning to Almighty God their sincere thanks for the many blessings he had poured down upon them.”

As President, on October 3, 1789, George Washington made a proclamation and created the first Thanksgiving Day designated by the national government of the United States of America.

**Wikipedia: John F. Kennedy**

John Fitzgerald “Jack” Kennedy (May 29, 1917 – November 22, 1963), often referred to by his initials JFK, was the 35th President of the United States, serving from 1961 until his assassination in 1963.
Chavrutah: Texts #2 and #3. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 30a and Exodus 25
(30 minutes)

Chavrutah (10 minutes)

- Explain the concept of Chavrutah and instruct them to begin.
  - Partnered learning.
  - Turn to the person, two people next to you.
  - Usually one person reads the text out loud and the other listens and then switch.
  - Why?
    - Allows you to come to an understanding of the text on your own first.
    - Allows you to hear the multiplicity of perspectives that exist in the text.

- Walk around the room and make sure participants are reading and understanding.

Discussion: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 30a (Text #2) and Exodus 25 (Text #3)
(20 minutes)

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 30a

- Introduce the text.
  - Explain what the Babylonian Talmud is—Discussions of Oral Law had over a 500-year period, codified c.700 CE.
  - This section comes in a larger chapter about the prayer of the Amida—the Shemonah Esre Prayer—or Silent Meditation.
  - Our larger topic is which direction to face when praying.
  - This section opens with the words—Our Rabbis taught—which is an indication of the Tanaitic (Mishnaic) time period—which means the years 0 – 200 CE.

  The temple is destroyed in 70 CE. Is this piece written before or after the destruction of the Temple? Is it likely that it is afterwards, in which case the use of the Temple here is not practical, rather metaphorical. How does this impact our understanding?

- Ask one person to read aloud.

The Sages taught in a Tosefta: A blind person and one who is unable to approximate the directions and, therefore, is unable to face Jerusalem in order to pray, may focus his heart towards his Father in Heaven, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to the Lord” (1 Kings 8:44).
Then ask:

1. What is the first case given?
2. What is the connection between a blind person and someone who doesn’t know which direction to face?
3. What are situations where one might not know which way to face?
   - Lost
   - On a ship
   - In a strange city
   - All cases where one is vulnerable—connects to blind person.
   - Is the text saying when vulnerable—turn directly to God?

Go over the entire text until you reach the Beit Hakaporet piece.

1. Notice the repeated terminology of חרב לבר—he should direct his heart. Are we speaking about physical turning or spiritual turning here?
2. Please notice the hierarchy being established. What is the primary value here?
3. What is the significance of asking people to turn towards a specific place when praying?
4. Why did we not simply say turn to face the Holy of Holies, and leave it at that? What is the value in listing each step?

One who was standing in prayer in the Diaspora, should focus his heart toward Eretz Yisrael, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to You by way of their land which You have given to their fathers” (1 Kings 8:48).

One who was standing in Eretz Yisrael, should focus his heart toward Jerusalem, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to the Lord by way of the city that You have chosen” (1 Kings 8:44).

One who was standing in Jerusalem, should focus his heart toward the Temple, as it is stated: “And they shall pray toward this house” (11 Chronicles 6:32).

One who was standing in the Temple, should focus his heart toward the Holy of Holies, as it is stated: “And they shall pray toward this place” (1 Kings 8:33).

One who was standing in the Holy of Holies, should focus his heart toward the seat of the ark-cover [kapporet], atop the ark, the dwelling place of God’s glory.

One who was standing behind the seat of the ark-cover, should visualize himself as if standing before the ark-cover and turn toward it.

Consequently, one standing in prayer in the East turns to face west, and one standing in the West, turns to face east. One standing in the South, turns to face north, and one standing in the North, turns to face south; all of the people of Israel find themselves focusing their hearts toward one place, the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

An allusion to this is found in what Rabbi Avin, and some say Rabbi Avina, said: What verse alludes to this? “Your neck is like the Tower of David, built with turrets [hulpiyot], one thousand shields hang from it, all of the armor of the mighty” (Song of Songs 4:4). He interprets the word hulpiyot as the hill [tef] toward which all mouths [piyyot] turn, i.e., the Temple Mount.
You want your participants to notice:
- That this is describing steps in the process of coming close to God.
- That prayer represents physical and spiritual work. Relationship with God is a process.

You may want to diagram this:

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God
Israel
Jerusalem
Temple
Beit Hakaporet
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1. What is the Beit Hakaporet?

Text #3: Exodus 25:17–22

Please notice that this piece comes in the section of the description of the vessels used in the temple.

Ask one person to read aloud.

(17) And you shall make a Kaporet (ark-cover) of pure gold:
   two cubits and a half shall be the length, and a cubit
   and a half the width.

(18) And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of
   beaten work you should make them, at the two
   ends of the Kaporet.

(19) And make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub
   at the other end; of one piece with the ark-cover shall
   you make the cherubim of the two ends.

(20) And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high,
   screening the Kaporet with their wings, with their faces
   one to another; toward the ark-cover shall the faces of
   the cherubim be.

(21) And you shall put the Kaporet above upon the ark;
   and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall
   give thee.

(22) And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with
   you from above the Kaporet, from between the two
   cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of
   all things which I will give you in commandment to the
   children of Israel.
Then ask:

1. What is the Beit Hakaporet?

You want your participants to notice:

- Place from which God spoke
- Most central place in the Temple

Now, the hierarchy actually looks like this:

God
Israel
Jerusalem
Temple
Beit Hakaporet
= God

God is at the bottom and the top of the hierarchy!

Ask:

1. What does it now mean to turn to face God? What kind of turning do I need to do?
2. How do I need to prepare myself to face God?
3. What does this teach me about what we are trying to accomplish with prayer?

Let them discuss this for a few minutes—let it sink in.

Back to End of Text #2

The conclusion of this piece is that the entire community is moving themselves in someway, and that in the end—they are all facing the same place—the place from which God speaks.

And yet, is that what really matters in this text—a physical place? No! Because we already began the hierarchy with those who do not know which way to face—they face God. It is not only God that is the point here, but actually the building of community.

No matter where I stand in the world, I can be confident that every other Jew in the world is physically turning toward the Temple, and is therefore also turning toward me.

Conclusions from these two pieces:

- Prayer is about turning to God when I am vulnerable.
- Prayer is about a physical and spiritual process of coming close to God.
- The value of turning towards a specific place is not only to show its importance, but also to create a central place to which all Jews can turn.
Prayer is about building Jewish community—even just by the physical direction that I face.
Ultimately prayer is about myself, my community, and God.
God is accessible wherever I am standing.

Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz Article (7 minutes)

*Ask one of the participants to read aloud.*

Adin Steinsaltz, Each of Us Has a Personal Relationship with God
The Jewish Week, September 3, 2010

It seems to me that every human being, not just religious (or exceptionally holy) people, experiences such moments of grace—these are moments when one feels the great Presence, how God is close, nearby. This feeling is actually far more frequent than people think, but we cannot always identify it. Some people get this feeling from seeing or feeling any kind of sublimity. Others may just suddenly experience, without any prior preparation or knowledge, the bliss and security of this closeness…

At the same time, no matter whether we acknowledge it or not, each of us has a personal relationship with God. My relationship is always personal and private; precisely because He is so infinite and unlimited, He relates personally and specifically to me. It always is a one-to-one relationship, when I am by myself as well as when I am in a crowd; *somewhere we are always alone together.*

That is why prayer, no matter the form, is so important. Prayer is always a conversation with God. It is the way we relate feelings, fears or aspirations, or make requests. *There is also prayer for one’s community, for one’s own nation or for the world as a whole. And prayer can also be a different sort of conversation: an urge to say thank you, to say: how good it is that You are there.*

*Then ask:*

1. What does Rabbi Steinsaltz think about our ability to connect to God? Do you agree or disagree?
2. Have you ever felt the sensation that he is describing—*“somewhere we are always alone together”?*
   - Do you see how this connects to what we saw in the Talmud earlier? That even though we are each standing in a different place, somehow we are actually together?
3. What is the connection between praying for my community and saying thank you?

*You want them to notice:*
- Prayer is said individually, yet there is an element of community building involved.
- Notice the threefold nature of prayer according to Steinsaltz here:
  - Prayer is a way to relate feelings and fears = blind man.
  - Prayer is for our community and our nation = all of us facing same place creates unity.
  - Prayer is the ability to recognize the blessings we have—and say thank you.
Connect back to JFK.
- JFK: Need God to help us build—to help us recognize what we have, and be grateful, and thus share it.
- Steinsaltz: Each of us has the ability to pray to God—and through this relationship to feel God in this world. This will ultimately lead us to appreciate what we have, and thus—build.

Text #5: Matisyahu—King without a Crown Lyrics (5 minutes)

Ask someone to read aloud.

You're all that I have and you're all that I need
Each and every day I pray to get to know your peace
I want to be close to you, yes I'm so hungry
You're like water for my soul when it gets thirsty
Without you there's no me
You're the air that I breathe
Sometimes the world is dark and I just can't see
With these, demons surround all around to bring me down to negativity
But I believe, yes I believe, I said I believe

1. What is the message of Matisyahu's piece here?

You want your participants to notice:
- Recognizing God allows us to feel satisfied in our lives. Feeling satisfied in my life helps me to give to others.
- Belief is the antidote to negativity.
- If we connect back to Steinsaltz's piece—we each can connect to God, we each have that potential.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Concluding thought questions: What am I taking home?

1. Does prayer bring me to gratitude?
2. How does gratitude help me in my prayer?
By The President of The United States of America

A PROCLAMATION:

Now, THEREFORE, I, JOHN F. KENNEDY, President of the United States of America, in accord with the joint resolution of Congress, approved December 26, 1941, which designates the fourth Thursday in November of each year as Thanksgiving Day, do hereby proclaim Thursday, the twenty-second day of November of this year, as a day of national thanksgiving.

I urge that all observe this day with reverence and with humility.

Let us renew the spirit of the Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving, lonely in an inscrutable wilderness, facing the dark unknown with a faith borne of their dedication to God and a fortitude drawn from their sense that all men were brothers.

Let us renew that spirit by offering our thanks for uncovenanted mercies, beyond our desert or merit, and by resolving to meet the responsibilities placed upon us.

Let us renew that spirit by sharing the abundance of this day with those less fortunate, in our own land and abroad. Let us renew that spirit by seeking always to establish larger communities of brotherhood.

Let us renew that spirit by preparing our souls for the incertitudes ahead—by being always ready to confront crisis with steadfastness and achievement with grace and modesty.

Let us renew that spirit by concerting our energy and our hope with men and women everywhere that the world may move more rapidly toward the time when Thanksgiving may be a day of universal celebration.

Let us renew that spirit by expressing our acceptance of the limitations of human striving and by affirming our duty to strive nonetheless, as Providence may direct us, toward a better world for all mankind.
The Sages taught in a Tosefta: A blind person and one who is unable to approximate the directions and, therefore, is unable to face Jerusalem in order to pray, may focus his heart towards his Father in Heaven, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to the Lord” (1 Kings 8:44).

One who was standing in prayer in the Diaspora, should focus his heart toward Eretz Yisrael, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to You by way of their land which You have given to their fathers” (1 Kings 8:48).

One who was standing in Eretz Yisrael, should focus his heart toward Jerusalem, as it is stated: “And they shall pray to the Lord by way of the city that You have chosen” (1 Kings 8:44).

One who was standing in Jerusalem, should focus his heart toward the Temple, as it is stated: “And they shall pray toward this house” (1 Chronicles 6:51).

One who was standing in the Temple, should focus his heart toward the Holy of Holies, as it is stated: “And they shall pray toward this place” (1 Kings 8:33).

One who was standing in the Holy of Holies, should focus his heart toward the seat of the ark-cover [kapporet], atop the ark, the dwelling place of God’s glory.

One who was standing behind the seat of the ark-cover, should visualize himself as if standing before the ark-cover and turn toward it.

Consequently, one standing in prayer in the East turns to face west, and one standing in the West, turns to face east. One standing in the South, turns to face north, and one standing in the North, turns to face south; all of the people of Israel find themselves focusing their hearts toward one place, the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

An allusion to this is found in what Rabbi Avin, and some say Rabbi Avina, said: What verse alludes to this? “Your neck is like the Tower of David, built with turrets [taypiva], one thousand shields hung from it, all of the armor of the mighty” (Song of Songs 4:4). He interprets the word taypiva as the hill [tel] toward which all mouths [piyyot] turn, i.e., the Temple Mount.
(17) And you shall make a Kaporet (ark-cover) of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length, and a cubit and a half the width.

(18) And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work you should make them, at the two ends of the Kaporet.

(19) And make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the ark-cover shall you make the cherubim of the two ends.

(20) And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high, screening the Kaporet with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the ark-cover shall the faces of the cherubim be.

(21) And you shall put the Kaporet above upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give thee.

(22) And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the Kaporet, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.
Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz Article

Each of Us Has a Personal Relationship with God
The Jewish Week, September 3, 2010

It seems to me that every human being, not just religious (or exceptionally holy) people, experiences such moments of grace—these are moments when one feels the great Presence, how God is close, nearby. This feeling is actually far more frequent than people think, but we cannot always identify it. Some people get this feeling from seeing or feeling any kind of sublimity. Others may just suddenly experience, without any prior preparation or knowledge, the bliss and security of this closeness...

At the same time, no matter whether we acknowledge it or not, each of us has a personal relationship with God. My relationship is always personal and private; precisely because He is so infinite and unlimited, He relates personally and specifically to me. It always is a one-to-one relationship, when I am by myself as well as when I am in a crowd; somehow we are always alone together.

That is why prayer, no matter the form, is so important. Prayer is always a conversation with God. It is the way we relate feelings, fears or aspirations, or make requests. There is also prayer for one's community, for one's own nation or for the world as a whole. And prayer can also be a different sort of conversation: an urge to say thank you, to say: how good it is that You are there.

Text #5: Matisyahu—King without a Crown Lyrics

You’re all that I have and you’re all that I need
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I want to be close to you, yes I’m so hungry
You’re like water for my soul when it gets thirsty
Without you there’s no me
You’re the air that I breathe
Sometimes the world is dark and I just can’t see
With these, demons surround all around to bring me down to negativity
But I believe, yes I believe, I said I believe
Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. This unit will focus on the trait of gratitude and its expression in *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals). The Talmudic text is from *Berakhot* 20b but our discussion begins with the biblical source for *birkat hamazon*.

Think of the last time you expressed gratitude to someone. When was it? What was it for? When do we say thank you?

**Challenge your students to come up with a list of five experiences for which they consistently express gratitude (e.g., health, employment, family etc.). You may want to put that list up on a board to reference throughout the class.**

### Part 1: The Biblical Source (15 minutes)

Jewish traditional practice includes many blessings, including blessings before we eat, but only one, the grace after meals, has a clear biblical source. The verse reads as follows:

**Text #1: Deuteronomy 8:10**

> דִּבְרֵיתוֹ פַּרְקֵי חַסְכּוֹן. אַף אֶכָּלְתָּ שִׁבְעֵת בָּרָכָת אַתָּה טַאְלִקְו על הָאָדָר הַתוֹבָה אָשֶׁר נָתַנְתָּ לָךְ.
>
> And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

**Discuss:**

1. Are you a foodie? Do you know someone who is? How does she or he approach food?
2. How does a poor person approach food?
3. What is the difference between the way an urbanite thinks about food versus a person who picks zucchini fresh from the field?

Should our blessing consist solely of simple thanks for our sustenance or does the verse imply the incorporation of other themes as well?

The verse’s focus on the land of Israel is unmistakable. In fact, Ramban (Nahmanides, 13th century, Spain) feels the need to emphasize that this commandment applies even to Jews living outside the land of Israel. For Jews in any location, gratitude for the food that sustains us creates an association with the land God granted to our ancestors. Thus, each recital of *birkat hamazon* begins with a thank you for our food, and turns in the next paragraph to gratitude for the land.
Gratitude and Birкат Hamazon

Text #2: Ramban Devarim 8:10

רמבה. דברי פרק ח פסוק י:

ונושם על הארץ שניה עלי הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה בכל על שמשבר על הש สิงหา ועל הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שمتבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה على כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה על כל על שמשבר על הארץ שניה, היא שמתבגרה на всё том, что сотворил Он для нас.

The meaning of “on the good land” is “and on the good land.” This verse commands us that whenever we are satiated, we should bless God for the food and for the land. This obligation applies in every location.

While one may think that the blessing is limited to food eaten within the land of Israel, Ramban makes it clear that wherever you are eating you need to appreciate the land that has produced your food.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz points out how awareness of one debt of gratitude often leads to another. People often struggle to express gratitude, perhaps because they do not like feeling beholden. Finding the wherewithal to say thank you for one thing helps us realize our need to give thanks for other things. In that sense, thanking God for sustenance brings us to acknowledge other debts towards our Creator. Therefore, in addition to mentioning the land of Israel, we also mention the giving of the Torah and the covenant of circumcision (both mentioned in the second paragraph of birкат hamazon).

Part 2: The Timing of this Blessing (15 minutes)

How does this mitzvah differ from the grace recited in other religions?

It is quite striking that many religious traditions encourage reciting grace before the meal, whereas this mitzvah requires a recital after the meal. While the rabbis did create blessings to be said before eating, the biblical commandment is situated specifically after the meal. We do bless both before and after a meal, but it is the blessing after the meal that has been mandated through a biblical commandment.

What would motivate such placement?

R. Meir Simcha Hakohen from Dvinsk (1843–1926, Rabbi and scholar from Eastern Europe) notes the constant possibility that material comfort can create a sense of complacency and arrogance. It is often easier to turn to God when hungry than after finishing a lavish meal. The Torah addresses this potential pitfall by placing the grace after the meal. In many ways, people have a much greater need for a reminder about God and our religious commitments after eating than before.
When a person eats and is satisfied, he is liable to reject God as the verse says: lest you eat and become satiated… and forget the Lord, your God (Deuteronomy 8:12-14). Therefore, God commanded that when one eats and is satiated, he should mention God with thanks and remember that “He is the one who gives you strength for accomplishments” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

**Part 3: The Amount of Food Requiring a Blessing** (12 minutes)

Let us consider another aspect of the question—when are we obligated to bless God for our food?

The verse in Deuteronomy speaks of being “satisfied,” implying that we only need to say *birkat hamazon* following a full meal. If so, a quick snack or even a sandwich would not create an obligation to say grace. Indeed, one gemara agrees with this reading:

**Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 20b**

After citing the *halakha* that one who eats a quantity of food that does not satisfy his hunger is obligated by rabbinic law to recite Grace after Meals, the Gemara cites a related homiletic interpretation. Rav Avira taught, sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Ami, and sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Asi: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, in Your Torah it is written: “The great, mighty and awesome God who favors no one and takes no bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17), yet You, nevertheless, show favor to Israel, as it is written: “The Lord shall show favor to you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:6). He replied to them: And how can I not show favor to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: “And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10), meaning that there is no obligation to bless the Lord until one is satiated; yet they are exacting with themselves to recite Grace after Meals even if they have eaten as much as an olive-bulk or an egg-bulk. Since they go beyond the requirements of the law, they are worthy of favor.
In this gemara, the angels point out two contradictory biblical verses. One states that God does not show favoritism; he is not “yissa panim.” The other, part of the priestly blessing, says that God is “yissa panim.” God explains to the angels that the Jewish people deserve special treatment because they chose to recite grace even when they just eat a smaller amount and are not fully satisfied. (Please note, in addition to the grace after meals, there are shorter blessings to be said after eating smaller portions or meals without bread).

Ask:

1. What is great about expressing gratitude even for a smaller gift and what does it say about our relationship with God?

The Hasidic thinker, R. Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (1765–1827, Poland), offers a profound explanation of this gemara. People express significant gratitude for one of two reasons, either due to the magnitude of the gift or due to admiration for the giver. When we receive a fantastic present, we want to express our thanks irrespective of who gave it to us. However, when we have reverential feelings towards someone, we are thrilled to receive any gift from that person since the gift establishes that we have a relationship with an individual we admire. Imagine receiving a present from our favorite athlete or musician or from an internationally renowned professor. The nature of the gift would be almost irrelevant.

The biblical commandment only demands that we thank God for food of sufficient quantity to create satisfaction. In other words, it emphasizes the magnitude of the gift. Over the course of Jewish history, we chose to thank God for any gift because we so value our relationship. Our response shifts the focus away from the gift to our connection with the giver.

Ask:

1. Can you think of examples of both types of gratitude—for the nature of the gift and for the connection to the giver—in your lives?

Part 4: The Connection between Gratitude and Divine Favor (12 minutes)

We now move to a different theme emerging from this Talmudic text. Showing favor refers to a divine bestowal that does not work through the avenue of absolute justice. Indeed, we often talk about God’s governance of the world combining strict justice and compassionate mercy.

Ask:

1. Why is there a need for such a mixture of modes of governance?

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook (1865–1935, first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of pre-State Israel) suggests a different reading of this gemara.
The principle of the attribute of justice in the world is not vengeance, God forbid, but a way of guiding people to completion which is the exalted goal....Sometimes, a general positive attribute can lessen the need for justice since the individual who acquires this trait will come to completion even though he senses that God gives him more benevolence than he deserves. A person who has truly acquired the trait of gratitude...and the more that God's bounty grows for him, the more he feels a debt of gratitude...this will not lead him to lack of concern about being good, rather he will add energy towards the good path since he now has a new cause for gratitude to God.

On the one hand, mercy and compassion are ideals employed by God that we strive to emulate. On the other hand, we also understand the need for justice. Absent justice, people would feel less urgency to do the right thing since God would then be communicating that He bestows bounty irrespective of human behavior.

How can God show compassion without the recipients falling prey to this trap? R. Kook explains that only those who truly understand gratitude avoid the danger. If a person gives me beyond what I deserve, I can either celebrate my good fortune or express profound thanks to the giver. Someone who responds the first way is in danger of losing a sense of justice and obligation. Someone who responds in the second way escapes the moral danger since he or she sees the gift as a source of a new moral obligation, as opposed to as a reason to feel a sense of entitlement or ignore responsibilities. Thus, it is only because we excel at gratitude, as manifest in our saying birkat hamazon for a smaller amount of food, that God can shine His face upon us and show us favor.
Part 1: The Biblical Source

Text #1: Deuteronomy 8:10

And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

Text #2: Ramban Devarim 8:10

The meaning of “on the good land” is “and on the good land.” This verse commands us that whenever we are satiated, we should bless God for the food and for the land. This obligation applies in every location.

Part 2: The Timing of this Blessing

Text #3: R. Meir Simcha Hakohen from Dvinsk, Deuteronomy 8:10

When a person eats and is satisfied, he is liable to reject God as the verse says: lest you eat and become satiated... and forget the Lord, your God (Deuteronomy 8:12–14). Therefore, God commanded that when one eats and is satiated, he should mention God with thanks and remember that “He is the one who gives you strength for accomplishments” (Deuteronomy 8:18).
Part 3: The Amount of Food Requiring a Blessing

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 20b

After citing the halakha that one who eats a quantity of food that does not satisfy his hunger is obligated by rabbinic law to recite Grace after Meals, the Gemara cites a related homiletic interpretation. Rav Avira taught, sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Ami, and sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Asi: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, in Your Torah it is written: “The great, mighty and awesome God who favors no one and takes no bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17), yet You, nevertheless, show favor to Israel, as it is written: “The Lord shall show favor to you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:26). He replied to them: And how can I not show favor to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: “And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10), meaning that there is no obligation to bless the Lord until one is satiated; yet they are exacting with themselves to recite Grace after Meals even if they have eaten as much as an olive-bulk or an egg-bulk. Since they go beyond the requirements of the law, they are worthy of favor.
The principle of the attribute of justice in the world is not vengeance, God forbid, but a way of guiding people to completion which is the exalted goal….Sometimes, a general positive attribute can lessen the need for justice since the individual who acquires this trait will come to completion even though he senses that God gives him more benevolence than he deserves. A person who has truly acquired the trait of gratitude…and the more that God’s bounty grows for him, the more he feels a debt of gratitude…this will not lead him to lack of concern about being good, rather he will add energy towards the good path since he now has a new cause for gratitude to God.
Is There a Recipe for Prayer?
A Lesson in Picking the Perfect Words

Written by: Channa Lockshin Bob

Introduction: A Quick Discussion About Innovative vs. Set Prayer
(12 minutes)

Start with a story:

Near a small village in Eastern Europe some 200 years ago, a young Jewish shepherd boy was orphaned and was adopted by some warm-hearted Gentiles. The boy, who knew he was Jewish but had no understanding of what this meant, would go out each day with the flock and with his flute.

As the Jewish Holidays neared he saw many people traveling on the road going to the nearby city of Berdichev. Their presence aroused the boy's curiosity.

As he sat out in the field playing his flute and watching the grazing flock, he felt a desire to go the synagogue in Berdichev for Yom Kippur. Alas, he did not know how to pray. He did not even know how to read Hebrew. What could he do?

Meanwhile, in the small town of Berdichev, in Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's synagogue, the congregation was deep in prayer. The holy tzaddik, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, was not happy. He sensed that the prayers of the congregation were not making their way into the heavens. He tried, but in vain, to elevate the prayers.

At this time, the young boy, who had decided to come to Berdichev, entered the synagogue. He was totally amazed at the sight of the townsfolk engaged in prayer. In their devoted concentration, they did not notice the young lad enter the synagogue.

The young boy felt unhappy. Each person in the synagogue was able to commune with God but not him. He felt an urge to do something, but what could he do? He could not read Hebrew, he knew no prayer. With streams of tears, he decided to play a tune to God. Unknown to him, playing music on this—the holiest day of the year—was forbidden. He pulled out his flute and in sincere concentration dedicated a soul-searching tune to God. As he began his melody, the entire synagogue turned in anger to look at this terrible desecration of the holiday. As they shouted at him to stop this terrible desecration, the boy looked terrified. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak came running to the boy, smiling and joyous.

"Ah," he laughed, "know that this boy's innocent mistake has saved our prayers. I saw that our prayers were not ascending to the heavens. We were not able to pray with purity and sincerity. Suddenly, this boy with his unknowing error but pure heart and tears began to play his flute. His purity was added to our prayers and the doors of heaven opened up and our prayers were accepted.

"We owe our thanks to this young man." He said to the boy, "You shall sit with me, for you have saved our prayers." (Credit: adapted from Simcha Rich, Jewish Magazine)
Discuss this story:

1. Is it better to pray by reading the words in a prayer book, or by spontaneously talking to God?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both of those models of prayer?
3. What do you think Jewish tradition has to say about this topic?

Some points to mention if they don’t:

- Jewish tradition seems quite fond of set prayer since we have so many set prayers, from full prayer services to blessings for specific occasions. It doesn’t seem to leave a lot of room for individual creativity.
- Set prayer may feel more authentic, may be easier for those who don’t know what to say, may be more appropriate—maybe people will say the “wrong” thing if they pray spontaneously.
- Set prayer also can be seen as a way to unify the Jewish people. There is something powerful about the idea that all Jews everywhere are saying the same words.
- Many people would be overwhelmed without words to pray and then perhaps would not pray at all.
- On the other hand, a set formula has potential to make prayer less spontaneous and genuine. What if you have to say something you disagree with? What if you have a genuine feeling that you’d like to express?

There is this preconceived notion that fixed prayer is somehow empty, that perhaps we are saying words that we don’t really mean. Today, we’re going to unravel that stereotype and explore why both fixed and personal prayer can have meaning.

Background to Our Sugya (Talmudic Passage) (19 minutes)

Introduction (2 minutes)

The Talmudic passages we’ll explore today are based on the text of the first blessing of the Amidah, the silent prayer at the center of any prayer service. It uses this phrase from Deuteronomy when it talks about God. Let’s take a look at the first blessing in the Amidah prayer.

Text #1: The first blessing of the Amidah prayer (2 minutes)

The first blessing of the Amidah prayer

... the great, mighty, and awesome God, God most high, who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all

The Source for this blessing, Deuteronomy 10:17

For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, mighty and awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe.
Is There a Recipe for Prayer?  
A Lesson in Picking the Perfect Words

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 33b (15 minutes)

With regard to additions to prayers formulated by the Sages, The Gemara relates that a particular individual descended before the ark as prayer leader in the presence of Rabbi Hanina. He extended his prayer and said: God, the great, mighty, awesome, powerful, mighty, awe-inspiring, strong, fearless, steadfast and honored.

Rabbi Hanina waited for him until he completed his prayer. When he finished, Rabbi Hanina asked him: Have you concluded all of the praises of your Master? Why do I need all of this superfluous praise? Even these three praises that we recite: The great, mighty and awesome, had Moses our teacher not said them in the Torah and had the members of the Great Assembly not come and incorporated them into the Amida prayer, we would not be permitted to recite them. And you went on and recited all of these. It is comparable to a king who possessed many thousands of golden dinars, yet they were praising him for silver ones. Isn’t that deprecatory? All of the praises we could possibly lavish upon the Lord are nothing but a few silver dinars relative to many thousands of gold dinars. Reciting a litany of praise does not enhance God’s honor.

Tangentially, the Gemara cites an additional statement by Rabbi Hanina concerning principles of faith. And Rabbi Hanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven. Man has free will to serve God or not, as it is stated: “And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His ways, to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:12). The Lord asks man to perform these matters because ultimately, the choice is his hands.

The verse says: What does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear the Lord your God. The Gemara asks: Is fear of Heaven a minor matter that it can be presented as if God is not asking anything significant? Didn’t Rabbi Hanina say in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: The Holy One, Blessed be He, has nothing in his treasury other than a treasure of fear of Heaven, as it is stated: “Fear of the Lord is his treasure” (Isaiah 33:6). The Lord values and treasures fear of Heaven over all else.

The Gemara responds: Indeed, for Moses fear of Heaven is a minor matter. As Rabbi Hanina stated: It is comparable to one who is asked for a large vessel and he has one, it seems to him like a small vessel because he owns it. However, one who is asked for just a small vessel and he does not have one, it seems to him like a large vessel. Therefore, Moses could say: What does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear, because in his eyes it was a minor matter.
Is There a Recipe for Prayer?  
A Lesson in Picking the Perfect Words

Discuss:

1. We know from our first source that in the Amidah we refer to God as “great, mighty and awesome.” Why, then, is the chazzan (prayer leader) adding all of these adjectives when he talks about God? “God, the great, mighty, awesome, powerful, mighty, awe-inspiring, strong, fearless, steadfast and honored.”

2. Do you think it is a good thing or bad thing for the chazzan to improvise in prayer? Why?

Continue with the rest of the first paragraph, and discuss further:

3. What is the problem here? We seem to be implying that this is all of God’s praise? Why can’t we add to standardized prayer?

We will continue to discuss this issue for the rest of the class, so no need to answer these questions now.

Continue with the second paragraph:

4. What is the connection to the first paragraph? What is the point?

On the surface, the connection is that both statements are made by Rabbi Hanina. But there seems to be an additional connection—notice how both paragraphs contain central images of a king’s treasury. In the first paragraph, it is the metaphorical king whose treasury contains gold coins. In the second paragraph it is the King of Kings (the one who the metaphor represented), whose treasury contains fear of heaven.

Perhaps these two images should be read in light of each other. The chazzan in the first part was wrong because he did not properly describe the contents of the king’s storehouse. In the second part, we learn what the contents of the king’s storehouse actually are: fear of heaven. In other words, the chazzan in the first part thought he was acting out of fear of heaven, but in fact he was not. According to that reading, the chazzan would perhaps be guilty of false piety, of misunderstanding what it means to fear God.

Counterpoint to Our Sugya: Source #3 (12 minutes)

One thing that makes this story all the more difficult to understand is the fact that another story exists in the Talmud that also deals with the issue of making changes to the phrase the great, mighty, and awesome God.

The background to this source is that Jeremiah and Daniel both used phrases that sound quite similar to the Torah’s (here described as Moshe’s) phrase the great, mighty, and awesome God.

Jeremiah (32:18): God, the great and mighty, Lord of Hosts is His name

Daniel (9:4): God great and awesome
Is There a Recipe for Prayer?
A Lesson in Picking the Perfect Words

Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Yoma 69b

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi stated: Why were they called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they returned the crown to its original state. [How so?]

Moshe referred to [God as] “the Great, the Mighty, the Awesome.” Jeremiah came and said, “Strangers are ravaging His sanctuary; where is His awesomeness?” He therefore omitted the phrase, “the Awesome.”

Daniel said, “Strangers are enslaving His children; where is His might?” He therefore omitted the phrase, “the mighty.”

Then came the Men of the Great Assembly. They claimed, “To the contrary: this is the strength of His might, that He can subdue His inclination and award clemency to those who are evil, and this is His awesomeness, for without the Divine awe, how could one nation survive while enveloped by nations that are hostile and violent?”

But how could those sages (Jeremiah and Daniel) have done so? Rabbi Elazar said: because they know that the Holy One, Blessed be He, insists on truth, therefore they could not falsify before him.

In this section, Jeremiah and Daniel make changes to the formula הביל את מקהלת יומא: ארם נאני ותשנמא: נתם רבי עקיבא שעשה נכסת אתא ותנורא 입ר בלחון 집יר אסף לרשעין: אתא ותנורא - שאלמאו חוריא על חקית יבודו ויהב אמרו לה eiusmod תחתה ברךを作ת נטיא החבורים星际 נאameleon: א CLR): לא אמור לך. רבי אלעזר: מנה שדעתם בהכובס ברוך הושמה לא שם המלך לא כובס.

In this section, Jeremiah and Daniel make changes to the formula הביל את מקהלת יומא: ארם נאני ותשנמא: נתם רבי עקיבא שעשה נכסת אתא ותנורא - שאלמאו חוריא על חקית יבודו ויהב אמרו לה eiusmod תחתה ברךを作ת נטיא החבורים星际 נאameleon: א CLR): לא אמור לך. רבי אלעזר: מנה שדעתם בהכובס ברוך הושמה לא שם המלך לא כובס.

Discuss:

1. How can we possibly resolve these two Talmudic passages with each other?
2. In the first passage, a man at prayer adds more praise to the phrase הביל את מקהלת יומא: ארם נאני ותשנמא: נתם רבי עקיבא שעשה נכסת אתא ותנורא - שאלמאו חוריא על חקית יבודו ויהב אמרו לה eiusmod תחתה ברךを作ת נטיא החבורים星际 נאameleon: א CLR): לא אמור לך. רבי אלעזר: מנה שדעתם בהכובס ברוך הושמה לא שם המלך לא כובס.
3. Is there a reason that subtracting from the description of God’s glory might actually be better than adding?

Some solutions to propose if they don’t:

➤ Perhaps it is the personal greatness of Jeremiah and Daniel that allow them to alter the text. Perhaps an anonymous chazzan cannot take the liberty to change the text of the Amida.
➤ Perhaps there is a difference between changing the text when one is the prayer leader versus when one is praying individually.
➤ Both texts are about being honest. In the first one, the chazzan is making a big show of piety he doesn’t actually have. In the second one, both Jeremiah and Daniel refuse to not be true to themselves.
Is There a Recipe for Prayer?  
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Commentaries on Our Sugya. Sources #4–#5 (12 minutes)

Text #4: Beit Yosef, Orach Hayyim chapter 113

I found it written in the name of the Ra’ah that even though silence is preferable towards Heaven, that refers to listing praises of God Himself, such as great, mighty, awesome and brave, since we lack understanding to list His praises. But to tell God’s wonders and miracles and mighty deeds, anyone who adds is praiseworthy; that is the entire book of psalms and praises!

Perhaps we’re offering a compromise. The real problem is the excessive use of adjectives, which may be construed as false flattery. We shouldn’t be providing our own adjectives. We most certainly can describe God’s great acts, as we see in the Book of Psalms.

Text #5: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: The Thirteen Petalled Rose


If a person has a fleeting thought of love or fear of God, and he takes that thought and sings it, repeats it again and again until he makes it a rhapsody, a tapestry, then he has turned an initial spark into a fervent flame. The power in this way of prayer lies in continuity. We engage in the work of prayer by taking a topic and working on it—not at random, not by happenstance, but together with the prayer—guiding the prayer in a specific direction over a period of time, whether that be an hour, a week, or a month. Within that time frame and within those words of prayer, this topic is woven into the words of prayer, and it not only touches but is carved into one’s soul. Slowly, as truth is carved free of illusion— that which is permanent is carved from that which is transitory—one no longer has simply a single point of emotion and fervor, but a line that leads one from one rung to the next on the ladder of prayer.

Discuss:

1. What is the value in repetition?
2. Can you think of something in your life that has improved after you’ve done it many times (a sport or a skill perhaps)? Can that same parallel be drawn with the repetition of prayer?
Conclusion (5 minutes)

At the heart of this last solution is the difference between flattery and gratitude. Heaping adjectives upon adjectives is not, either with God or with humans, the appropriate way to express gratitude—it just ends up coming off as sycophantic. The way to express gratitude, on the other hand, is by thanking God—or a human to whom you are grateful—for specific actions: by describing their actions that were good to you, and by describing the effect that those actions have on you.

This distinction also explains why the first chazzan who adds is criticized, while the prophets who subtracted were praised. Both of those cases are about avoiding flattery—in the first, adding many new adjectives is flattery, and in the second, saying even the adjectives that may be said, if you personally did not believe them, would also be just empty flattery.

Actual gratitude, on the other hand, is never a problem. In fact, specific personal expressions of gratitude appear all over Masekhet Berakhot. Let’s end this class with one example of truly expressing gratitude.

Text #6: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 28b

In addition to the halakhot relating to the fixed prayers, the Gemara relates: Rabbi Nehunya ben Hakana would recite a brief prayer upon his entrance into the study hall and upon his exit. They said to him: The study hall is not a dangerous place that would warrant a prayer when entering and exiting, so what room is there for this prayer? He said to them: Upon my entrance, I pray that no mishap will transpire caused by me in the study hall. And upon my exit, I give thanks for my portion.

Again, we have an individual who innovates a prayer and is questioned about it. But his defense is that he is giving thanks for the ability to learn Torah. And therein lies the truth: there can never be too much gratitude.
Text #1: The first blessing of the Amidah prayer

... the great, mighty, and awesome God, God most high, who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all...

The Source for this blessing, Deuteronomy 10:17

For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, mighty and awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe.

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With regard to additions to prayers formulated by the Sages, The Gemara relates that a particular individual descended before the ark as prayer leader in the presence of Rabbi Hanina. He extended his prayer and said: God, the great, mighty, awesome, powerful, mighty, awe-inspiring, strong, fearless, steadfast and honored.

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Tangentially, the Gemara cites an additional statement by Rabbi Hanina concerning principles of faith. And Rabbi Hanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven. Man has free will to serve God or not, as it is stated: “And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His ways, to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:12). The Lord asks man to perform these matters because ultimately, the choice is his hands.
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[How so?]

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Opening and Introductions (8 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. In today’s class we are tackling the age-old philosophical question about how to react when bad things happen. It is interesting to note that Jewish tradition actually gives us a blessing to say when we receive bad news. Today, we will explore why.

Begin your class with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz’s insight into blessing the bad. Discuss what motivates someone to bless the bad.

Text #1: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz Article

It feels easier and more natural to give thanks when everything seems to be going well, when we have peace and security, health and bounty. But when we are in a situation of war and fear, of sickness and poverty, when our inclination is to cry and curse, it is much more difficult—but it is still possible and necessary. When he was poor and starving, the famous Reb Zushya is said to have thanked God for giving him such a good appetite! It is no coincidence that Reb Zushya’s profound capacity for gratitude was matched by a deep relationship with God. (Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, Thankful for Thanksgiving. November 2002.)

Opening Discussion

Meet David. David is a well-known lawyer. One night he is badly hurt in a car accident. His life falls to pieces. He has difficulty moving his hand and has nightmares. As a result, he leaves his job and sits at home doing nothing.

Ask:

1. How should David relate to his accident? How should he feel when he hears that his friends from work are being promoted and becoming partners in the law firm? Is it fair when bad things happen to people for seemingly random reasons? When you think about such an example, do you feel that there is order to the world? How do you feel about God in such situations?
2. Is there any way in which bad things that happen to us can be seen in a positive light?
3. This complex question lies at the basis of our human experience. How do we relate to bad things that happen? How should we relate to such events?

Leave the questions open, they are triggers and will accompany us during the different stages of our learning.
Text #2: Isaiah source vs. Prayer book: Mentioning Evil (10 minutes)

It’s interesting to note that the blessings before Shema are based on a verse from the book of Isaiah (45:7). The verse reads:

וִיצָר אָרוֹן בְּנוֹרָם חָשָׁש, עֶשֶׂה שָלֹם בְּנוֹרָם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם: אִי אִי, אִי אִי, עֶשֶׂה כָל בְּנֵיהֶם.

I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the LORD, that does all these things.

And yet in the prayer book the prayer reads:

(בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יָבֹרְא הָעָדָן, הָעָנָן שָלֹם בְּנוֹרָם יְרוּשָׁלִיָּה).

(Blessed are you God, our Lord, King of the universe) who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things.

Ask:

1. What is the difference between the verse in Isaiah and the prayer we say?

In the verse God describes Himself as “I make peace and create evil…” whereas in the prayer we say “who makes peace and creates all things.” The “evil” is censored!

2. Can you suggest a reason why the Rabbis made such a change when they formulated the prayer?

Maybe it was deemed not humanly possible to make a blessing over “evil”? Maybe the actual idea of relating to the evil in the world directly was too daunting?

Despite these options and the tension that exists, we will continue to delve into this primary existential issue.

Imagine that as part of his physical and psychological therapy David starts to paint and finds that he has unusual talent. In light of this turn of events, do any of the answers you gave to the opening questions change? Was the accident a good or a bad thing for David?

Lead an open discussion. It’s likely students will suggest that the accident was a positive event for David.

Ask:

1. What if David had no talent for painting? Is it possible to find any positive benefit from something bad that happens to someone, when there is no “happy ending”?

2. And even if there is a “happy ending,” was it worth it for David? Should he embrace his pain and suffering?

Lead an open discussion.

Even if one is not expected to embrace suffering or pain, it is possible that one grew through such an experience. One discovered or developed traits of character they had not encountered before, one discovered an ability to deal with setbacks, to persevere and sometimes just the strength to continue to live.
Blessing the Bad

Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 54a (12 minutes)

The Mishna (basic codex of Oral Jewish Law, 200 C.E.) discusses different blessings we make on different occasions. While reviewing this mishna from the tractate of Berakhot (blessings) below, consider all the contexts in which blessings are made. When do we make a blessing?

» Explore the mishna with your students, asking them how they understand each phrase and the connection between the two ideas.

תלמוד בבליא מסכת ברכות דף נ
משנה: ... רב יהודה אמר: ...על הגשמים ועל בשורות טובות, אמר: ברוך讳ו והמשיח. על בשורות
רעות, אמר: בורוכ דו יין האמת.

Rabbi Yehuda says: ...For rain and other good tidings, one says: Blessed... Who is good and Who does good. Over bad tidings, one recites: Blessed (are you) the true Judge.

It is interesting to note that we make blessings for any number of reasons: to give thanks (on new clothes, when we hear good news), to praise God (when we see wondrous natural phenomenon) or to connect the spiritual to the physical (before food or drink). But this mishna raises an unusual point.

» Emphasize: The mishna discusses what blessing one makes over “bad things” (bad tidings). One wonders, why would we ever want to make a blessing in such a situation? It is this question that lies at the focus of our learning today.

» Ask: Let’s go back to David (our well-known lawyer).

1. Having learned the mishna, which blessing should he make?
2. This seems to depend on how he defines his accident, or does it?

How to define an event as bad or good is a complex issue. If we continue to learn the mishna, we can see that it deals with this question.

» Learn the next part of the mishna with your students.

בנה בית חסן, וקנו כלים חשים, אמר: ברוך讳ו וקימנו ויהיו לנו למד חוה. [ב] 머כר על
חיה מעני על חשהו, על חשהו מעני על חורת.
[ג] ... חות חוא לברך על חזרה שעמה חמודי על חזרה, אמר: (דברים י") "אתה הוא ר" אלכיך
בכל לברך וגו". בכל לברך בשני יazole, ביצי טוב ותא saat הורע; בכל פמש, אף על הוא נטול את פעם,
ובכל מחמד. בכל ממון. [כ] דבר אחר: בכל מחמד, בכל מחמד שמה מחמד, וכלי מחמד, ויהי מחמד, ויהי מחמד.
When one builds a new house or purchased a new vessel, he recites: Blessed...Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time. (The mishna articulates a general principle,)[b] Over bad things a blessing is said similar to that over good and over good a blessing is said similar to that over evil.

[a] ...One recites a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he does for the good... as it is stated: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all you might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). (The mishna explains this verse as follows): “With all your heart” means with your two inclinations, with your good inclination and your evil inclination, both of which must be subjugated to the love of God. With all your soul means even if God takes your soul. “And with all your might” means with all your money, as money is referred to in the Bible as might. [c] Alternatively, it may be explained that “with all your might” means with every measure that He metes out to you; whether it is good or troublesome, thank Him.

After reading through the mishna, focus on the marked parts:

1. Read the part of the mishna marked [a]. How do you understand it?

   Maybe we should use the same words when blessing the bad, maybe the words are not important but the same mindset is what counts. Ask: If so, what should that mindset be when you are offering up a blessing over something bad?

2. Now, read the phrase marked [b]. How do you understand it? What words should we actually say?

   Do you believe that we should make the same blessing over events, either good or bad, since everything is from God? Can you think of another way to understand the expectation?

3. Read the part marked [c]. According to this directive, should one differentiate between good and bad things that happen to us?

   The Gemara is a compilation of Rabbinic discussions of Oral Law that took place over a 500-year period and was codified around 700 CE. Its focus is to understand and clarify what the Mishna is teaching us.

   Learn this part of the gemara’s discussion about the mishna with your students. It is important that they understand the question and the answer and their ramifications.
Blessing the Bad

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 60b (7 minutes)

(We learned in the mishna): One is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he recites a blessing for the good that befalls him. (The gemara asks): What does it mean: One is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad just as for the good? If we say this means that just as one recites a blessing for a positive event, “Who is good and does good”, so too one recites a blessing for a calamity with the formula: “Who is good and does good”, didn’t we learn in our mishna that “over good tidings one recites “Who is good and does good” while over bad tidings one recites “Blessed…the true Judge”? Rather, Rava said: The mishna’s statement was only necessary to instruct us to accept bad tidings with (the same) joy (with which we accept good tidings).

Rav Aha said in the name of Rabbi Levi: What is the verse that alludes to this? “I will sing of loving-kindness and justice; unto You, O Lord, will I sing praises” (Psalms 101:1). Rav Aha explains: If it is loving-kindness, I will sing, and if it is justice, I will sing. (i.e. I will thank God in song for the bad just as for the good).

Ask and discuss each of the following questions:

1. Does the gemara suggest that we make the same blessing, regardless of circumstance?
2. Rava seems to believe that we accept bad findings and good findings with joy and acceptance. What do you think he means?
3. With which part of the mishna we learned does his opinion fit?
4. Is he talking about what we say or our mindset as we relate to the event?
   If the mindset—what is that mindset?
Blessing the Bad

Text #5 (Continuation of Text #4, 60b-61a): Everything God Does, He Does for the Best (18 minutes)

The gemara continues with a directive, followed by a story.

אמר רב חננה אמר רב מ簡単 רבי מאיר, וכתה مماית דרבי עקיבה: לולא רחש הוא רזר מלמר כל
דעביד דרמאי לשב עבד. כי הוא דרבינא דרמאי קאויול בברור, ומשה תורה מצא, בטא אוספי לא
ייחי לח. אמר: כל דרבינא לשב. אול יבר בברמא, והות ברהית תרנגולו והמר ושמ. דאתי דיקא
כנניה לשרגא. דאתי שונא אכלייה תרנגולו, דאתי אריך אכלת הלמר. אמר: כל דרבינא לשב. בה
כלליא אנתני ניסיא. שביתי לומת. אמר לח: לא אמיי לך כל מה שועשה הקדוש בורח והיה חכל לשובו!

Rav Huna said that Rav said that Rabbi Meir said: and so it was taught in a baraita (a tradition in the
Jewish oral law not incorporated into the Mishna) in the name of Rabbi Akiva: One must always accustom oneself to say: Everything God does, He does for the best.

(The Gemara relates): Like this incident, when Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city, he inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. That night, an army came and took the city into captivity. It turned out that Rabbi Akiva alone, who was not in the city and had no lit candle, noisy rooster or donkey to give away his location, was saved. He said to them: Didn’t I tell you? Everything that God does, He does for the best.

Ask:

1. What message is the story about Rabbi Akiva teaching us?
2. In light of this story, how does the gemara think we should relate to bad things?

It seems that the gemara is suggesting that we should accept that everything is from God who ultimately is benevolent. We need to believe that things are in our best interest even if we cannot understand that at the time. That said… Rabbi Akiva was saved and felt gratitude to God for this. However, all inhabitants of the village were killed.

Ask:

3. Should this affect Rabbi Akiva’s perspective? Assuming that he is not totally callous and insensitive, how can you understand his philosophy on life?

If relevant to the level of the class and time restraints—connect Rabbi Akiva’s philosophy to the story of his death (flaked to death as a martyr, while reciting the Shema and accepting God’s decree —Tractate Berakhot 61b).

4. How does that directive (accepting everything that God sends our way, be it good or bad) fit in with what we learned in the mishna?
It could mean that we say the same blessing over both bad and good since, ultimately, we are praising God for running the world in the best possible way. It seems to fit the opinion we learned before, marked [c], and Rav Aha’s perspective.

5. After what you have learned here, what blessing should David make? What difficulty arises?

According to this directive, there is nothing that can be defined as “bad” so when would one make the blessing “Dayan haEmet” (The true Judge)?

Later on, the gemara presents the following scenario: Your field is flooded. This is bad news now, all the crops are ruined. On the other hand, floods improve the quality of fields. They bring alluvial deposits and all fresh earth. So, when all the bad is over it is going to be good. You know this at the time you see the flood. You know it is bad now but it is good in the future.

Ask:

1. What blessing should you make? The Gemara answers that this is the example of מברך על הורע מאי הטובות (blessing the Bad as one does the Good). He says "דיי רואים" (The Judge of Truth), even though his mindset should be the same as when he makes a blessing over good news.

2. Based on this gemara, which blessing do you think David should make?

3. Why did the gemara think that one could understand the mishna to mean that even over bad news one would say הטוב והאמרות (Who is good and does good)?

Like Rabbi Akiva—whatever happens is for the best, so I should give thanks for it.

Challenge your students: Try to think of something unpleasant that happened to you. How did you feel at the time? With perspective, can you see anything positive that happened as a result? How would you describe the event today?

At the crux of our learning lies a central philosophical quandary. If we believe everything is from God and that God is all-powerful and benevolent and is behind everything and has “a plan,” are there really “bad things” in the world? Is it legitimate to be upset? To feel that something terrible has happened. What do you think?

Despite the expectation that we acknowledge God being behind everything and running the world in the best possible way, the story about the flooded field takes a clear stand that contrasts Rabbi Akiva’s perspective. It seems that although we should believe that God is behind everything and that ultimately, “things are for the best,” we are not expected to pretend or negate our legitimate feelings. When bad things happen, we are allowed (and maybe obligated) to acknowledge the unpleasantness. This is the integrity that lies at the basis of our faith.
Conclusion (5 minutes)

» Summing up. Remind the students of the path our learning took (opening question, mishna, gemara, different opinions). Bring together the main points of discussion.

We began by thinking about the different contexts in which we make a blessing. The mishna directed us to think about whether one should make a blessing on a bad event as well as a good event. We debated how one defines a “bad event” and also pondered the philosophy behind God’s running of the world. In that context, we wondered whether someone who acknowledges God's omnipotence and benevolence is also justified to have subjective feelings of suffering or pain.

We opened with David the lawyer. As he accompanied our learning, the blessing he should make changed. At first it seemed absurd to thank God for what befell him. Through Rabbi Akiva's perspective, maybe he was expected to, thanking God for the accident and pain assuming it was for the best. Taking into account that in the end his life became more significant as a result of his accident, maybe this seems logical.

But then the Gemara taught us an important lesson. Beside our faith in God and His just running of the world, Jewish law and philosophy does not expect us to negate our feelings or perspectives. If things are perceived by us to be bad, then that is a legitimate way to relate to them. We also touched on the sensitive topic of finding value in the way we deal with travesty, even as we fight and reject it. Sometimes as we struggle to deal with hardship and are at odds with our Creator, we find strengths or character traits that surprise even us and sometimes inspire those around us. Maybe this dialectic is hinted to in our prayers. We are not able to openly praise evil but we acknowledge that everything, including evil, is from God. And on some level, which we may not even be able to articulate, we manage to integrate that knowledge into our lives.

This lesson goes beyond the specific topic we learned here. It seems that although from our human perspective we are supposed to put God in the center of the world, maybe from God’s perspective Man and Woman, with all their weaknesses and fallacies and subjective feelings, are the focal point.
**Text #1: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz Article**

It feels easier and more natural to give thanks when everything seems to be going well, when we have peace and security, health and bounty. But when we are in a situation of war and fear, of sickness and poverty, when our inclination is to cry and curse, it is much more difficult—but it is still possible and necessary. When he was poor and starving, the famous Reb Zushya is said to have thanked God for giving him such a good appetite! It is no coincidence that Reb Zushya's profound capacity for gratitude was matched by a deep relationship with God. (Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, Thankful for Thanksgiving. November 2002.)

**Text #2: Isaiah Source vs. Prayer Book**

It's interesting to note that the blessings before Shema are based on a verse from the book of Isaiah (45:7). The verse reads:

נוצר אור ובורא חכמה, עשה שלום ובורא רע: אני יהי, עשה כל ניב.

I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the LORD, that does all these things.

And yet in the prayer book the prayer reads:

נוצר אור ובורא חכמה, עשה שלום ובורא את וכל.

(Blessed are you God, our Lord, King of the universe) who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things.

**Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 54a**

רבי יהודה אומר: ... førain וother good tidings, one says: Blessed...Who is good and Who does good. Over bad tidings, one recites: Blessed (are you) the true Judge.
When one builds a new house or purchased a new vessel, he recites: Blessed...Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time. (The mishna articulates a general principle.) Over bad things a blessing is said similar to that over good and over good a blessing is said similar to that over evil.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 60b

We learned in the mishna: One is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he recites a blessing for the good... as it is stated: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all you might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). (The mishna explains this verse as follows): “With all your heart” means with your two inclinations, with your good inclination and your evil inclination, both of which must be subjugated to the love of God. With all your soul means even if God takes your soul. “And with all your might” means with all your money, as money is referred to in the Bible as might. Alternatively, it may be explained that “with all your might” means with every measure that He metes out to you; whether it is good of troublesome, thank Him.
Rav Huna said that Rav said that Rabbi Meir said; and so it was taught in a baraita (a tradition in the Jewish oral law not incorporated into the Mishna) in the name of Rabbi Akiva: One must always accustom oneself to say: Everything God does, He does for the best.

(The gemara relates): Like this incident, when Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city, he inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. That night, an army came and took the city into captivity. It turned out that Rabbi Akiva alone, who was not in the city and had no lit candle, noisy rooster or donkey to give away his location, was saved. He said to them: Didn’t I tell you? Everything that God does, He does for the best.
Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Today in Jewish communities around the world, people are studying texts on blessings and gratitude. In this class, we’re going to explore a Talmudic passage that asks us to bless those who are different.

How many of us have been in this situation? You’re walking down the street with your young child. She suddenly points to someone coming toward you and makes a loud (and embarrassing!) declaration commenting on the height, weight, clothing or facial features of the person. Whatever it is that she is pointing at, it is clear that she is surprised by how different that person is from those she is used to seeing. While our first inclination is to sink through the floor, this is actually the perfect teachable moment for our child: there are differences everywhere, and we can choose to embrace them or to fear them.

Ask your students to share their experiences feeling different or encountering differences.

Text #1: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 58b (20 minutes)

Hand out print and sourcesheets.

Jerusalem-based artist Dov Abramson created a print based on the passage in the Tractate of Berakhot (blessings) that teaches us not only to embrace differences, but to bless them. At the very moment that we may choose to fear the different or the unknown, we are told to do just the opposite, to offer up a blessing.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees spotted people recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different. The gemara raises a challenge: One who saw a person with unusually black skin, a person with unusually red skin, a person with unusually white skin, an unusually tall and thin person, a dwarf, or one with warts recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different.

Using the above source as your guide, you can uncover the person Dov is alluding to in each square of his print. Take a moment to truly understand the diversity that we are blessing.
Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

Ask:

1. Match the words in the Talmud to each square.
2. Why has Dov chosen this way to represent differences?
3. What role does color and shape play in Dov's print?
4. What other ways could Dov have chosen to present this piece of Talmud?

Meet the Artist Dov Abramson discusses the inspiration behind his piece:

I remember a teacher of mine, when teaching this mishna, felt that it could be translated in one of two ways. On the one hand, the Hebrew term “mishane” can mean strange, but my teacher, a man I respected deeply, thought differently. “Mishane” can be defined simply as different. That motivated me to look more deeply at this mishna.

As an artist, I like deconstructing lists. I like lists that need explanations. I see it as a code waiting to be cracked or a puzzle that needs to be pieced together.

Here, I wanted to bring this mishna back to basics. We are all the same, so I searched to find a common denominator. That common denominator was represented in this piece by variations on a square. Each person begins as a square but then I build in the differences, or the nuance to each person.

I want people to walk away from this piece realizing that we do not lament differences; we celebrate them.

Text #2: Genesis 1:27 (6 minutes)

We’re told that when God created the world, He created man in His own image.


And God created man in God’s own image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them.

At the start of humanity, the Torah makes it clear that God had a plan when creating humankind. All of humankind, no matter what shape or size or look, are made in God’s own image. And by virtue of that fact, all of mankind deserves our respect.

Ask:

1. Who is someone you respect? What are actions you take to convey that you respect him or her?
Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

Text #3: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: Biblical Images: Men & Women of the Book (8 minutes)

Adam and Eve represent the complete course of human life: in other words, they project an image not of men in their individuality and particularity, but of man as a species, of humanity as humanity. So it is that mystics taught that all human souls are not only descended from Adam but are actually dependent upon him, are components of his being. Adam is that man who includes all men. Adam and Eve are not merely archetypes but the very stuff of mankind, and their story is the story of the human race.

Rabbi Steinsaltz asks us to look at the very first man and first woman, Adam and Eve. Rabbi Steinsaltz believes that we are all descended from and dependent on Adam and Eve because they represent all of humanity. It seems then that we are all a variation on the same theme.

Ask:

1. How does this interpretation effect our reading of the original mishna?
2. How do we then look at differences?

Text #4: Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) 2:15 (5 minutes)

Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) chapter 2, verse 15 encourages us to honor everyone.

רבי אליעזר אומר: וי כדבר הוביב עליךشכל

Rabbi Eliezer said: “Let the honor of your fellow person be as dear to you as your own.”

Ask:

1. Who is someone you honor? What are actions you take to convey that you honor him or her?

The passage in Tractate Berakhot (Text #1) may be pulling ideas of respect and honor from the Bible and Ethics of our Fathers. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi takes the idea one step further and tells us of a blessing to give over one who is different.
We'll end with a piece from Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 26, a collection of midrashim compiled at the end of the 10th century.

This is what the Holy Blessed One said to Israel: “My children, have I deprived you in any way? I only ask that you should love each other, treat each other with dignity, and stand in awe of each other...”

Discuss:

1. What if we feel God did deprive us, does that mean we don’t need to love others?
2. In Ethics of our Fathers we are told to honor others, and here we are asked to love others. Are honor and love the same thing? Does love mean something different here?
3. How do you stand in awe of another? What would that require?

Conclusion (3 minutes)

What’s our ultimate goal? To treat all with dignity.

Dov's print, full of different colors and different shapes, always returns to the same basic shape, a variation on a square. We strive to find the common denominator among people while celebrating their differences.

Blessed...Who makes creatures different.
Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?
Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

- חולי
   a person with unusually black skin

- בועז
   a person with unusually red skin

- יהושע
   a flat-headed person

- לוחם
   a person with unusually white skin

- תמר
   a lame person

- קרפל
   an unusually tall and thin person

- מנחה ש˃ץ
   a person affected with boils

- נציץ
   a dwarf

- בזאג
   a spotted person

- שיניים
   a person with warts
Text #1: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 58b


Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees spotted people recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different. The gemara raises a challenge: One who saw a person with unusually black skin, a person with unusually red skin, a person with unusually white skin, an unusually tall and thin person, a dwarf, or one with warts recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different.

Text #2: Genesis 1:27

והיה אדם על הפוך, ובאלו הקד大酒店, ובאלו הקד大酒店, ברו כreature, ברו כreature: אומרים "ברוך מפגש 하나님의".

And God created man in God’s own image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them.


Adam and Eve represent the complete course of human life: in other words, they project an image not of men in their individuality and particularity, but of man as a species, of humanity as humanity. So it is that mystics taught that all human souls are not only descended from Adam but are actually dependent upon him, are components of his being. Adam is that man who includes all men. Adam and Eve are not merely archetypes but the very stuff of mankind, and their story is the story of the human race.
Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

Text #4: Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) 2:15

רבי אליעזר אומר: ויוכד חברך חביב עליך כלך

Rabbi Eliezer said: “Let the honor of your fellow person be as dear to you as your own.”

Text #5: Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 26

כפאמר לוה וחבח ילה入り, והנה, כולם יחלין לכם,硕士学位 עב, מה אנני מהקש מה, הוא אהיב

מבקש אלי אנמי שתחי את איתי, והני מקברני את אתי, והני יראתי את פנוי

This is what the Holy Blessed One said to Israel: “My children, have I deprived you in any way? I only ask that you should love each other, treat each other with dignity, and stand in awe of each other…”
Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Today in 300 different communities in 40 countries all over the world, people are taking a break from their daily activities to sit down and learn. It is such an exciting opportunity to join thousands of people around the world in a day of study.

Ask: What is a blessing?

According to the dictionary, a blessing could be praise or devotion or worship. After your students have created their working definition of a blessing, ask them—When was the last time you said a blessing? Point out that there are traditional and conventional blessings, but a blessing may be as simple as saying thank you or expressing gratitude.

When is the last time you said thank you? Maybe someone held the door open for you this morning? What about the person who served you your coffee? Or helped you solve a problem at work? Often, saying a blessing is a way to show gratitude.

Source #1: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35a (15 minutes)

The Talmud has an idea or two for you about showing appreciation. The Talmud is a collection of hundreds of years of Jewish wisdom. The “oral law” it contains is ancient and important, much like the Torah. The Talmud encourages thoughtful discussion and debate. It is a collection of discussions of Jewish law that took place over a 500-year period and was codified in c. 700 CE.

A person is forbidden to enjoy the pleasures of the world without first reciting praise to God.

Ask:

1. Why would the Talmud forbid us to enjoy the pleasures of the world without first praising God?
2. Does praising God mean saying a blessing? What else can it mean?
3. What is the value in showing appreciation or gratitude?
4. How can “reciting praise” help us to recognize the “pleasures of the world”?
Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz explains the beauty of saying a blessing and a philosophy for this practice.

The task of the blessing is to remind one, to halt the process of habit and routine which draws man always into the realm of the mechanical and meaningless, and to set up at every moment of change in the flow of life the brief declaration that this particular thing one is doing is not for one's self or of one's self, but that at some point it is connected with a higher world. By these blessings, then, scattered throughout the entire day, in all manner of situations, one attains to an integration of the ordinary, habitual elements of life with a higher order of sanctity.

Discuss:

1. What is the value of stopping?
2. Can you think of a time where you took a break from the regular routine of your life (a vacation, perhaps) and were able to appreciate more of the world around you?
3. How does saying a blessing allow you to connect to a bigger picture or a “higher world”?

Activity: Mindfulness (15 minutes)

Why is it important to stop and say thank you? What do we get out of truly slowing down and noticing and appreciating the world around us?

Hand out a candy (or a raisin) to every participant. (If you do not have candy, turn this activity into a deep breathing exercise with participants becoming aware of their breathing). Have them unwrap the candy at the same time and pop it into their mouths together. Challenge them to eat the candy slowly.

Ask questions as they are sucking on the candy:

1. Can someone describe the sensation of eating a candy?
2. What does the candy taste like?
3. Does the candy taste differently when you eat it without thinking about it?
4. How does it taste now that we’re totally focusing on the experience of eating a candy?

Here’s the answer: When we stop, slow down and are aware of our experiences, we truly come to appreciate them.

Did you know there is a blessing to say when you see a rainbow? How about when you see a really smart person? There’s even a blessing to say when you see a beautiful view!

Hand out the Blessings chevruta study to the class. Explain the concept of chevruta or partnered learning. Turn to the person next to you. Generally, one person reads the text out loud and the other listens and then they switch. This allows you to work off of one another, coming to an understanding of the text on your own and then hearing a different perspective.

Offer the chavruta pairs this guidance:

Read the mishna on the right side of the page and look at the additional examples of blessings that have been included.

Ask:

1. Why would we be mandated to say blessings over nature?
2. How can we be commanded to say a blessing when we hear bad news?
3. What’s missing from this passage? Over what else should we say blessings?
4. What is the most beautiful sight you have ever seen? Did it inspire you to say a blessing? Recalling it now, what words would you use in your blessing?
5. Which blessing surprised you?

Source #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, In The Beginning (4 minutes)

Every blessing has its own particular focus. There is a blessing for bread and a different blessing for vegetables; they are not interchangeable. There are also blessings for various mitzvot. All blessings have a certain structure consisting of a fixed core, which addresses the Divine Presence, and then a diverse content defining the object to be blessed. They all declare the same thing in many ways. I express gratitude and bless my existence, my condition of the moment, my food, or my performance of a mitzvah, and I adjust the contents of the blessing to suit the circumstance. The core, “Blessed Art Thou, O Lord,” is the essence of the blessing, its underlying message. The point of a blessing seems, therefore, to be the declaration of a certain relation to God. All the rest is detail relating to a specific situation.

Rabbi Steinsaltz gives us a clear look at different types of Jewish blessings. There are blessings we say over the foods we eat, over experiences we have, and over mitzvot that we do. The ultimate goal is to deepen the relationship—blessings connect us to God.

Summary (3 minutes)

Today we have explored blessings from many different angles. We have learned the motivation behind saying blessings and looked at several different types of blessings: over food, an experience, or seeing something unusual. Ultimately, blessings allow us to pause and truly experience life around us.
Source #1: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35a

A person is forbidden to enjoy the pleasures of the world without first reciting praise to God.

Source #2: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, The Thirteen Petalled Rose

The task of the blessing is to remind one, to halt the process of habit and routine which draws man always into the realm of the mechanical and meaningless, and to set up at every moment of change in the flow of life the brief declaration that this particular thing one is doing is not for one's self or of one's self, but that at some point it is connected with a higher world. By these blessings, then, scattered throughout the entire day, in all manner of situations, one attains to an integration of the ordinary, habitual elements of life with a higher order of sanctity.

Source #3: Mishna Berakhot 9:2. Specific Blessings.

(See following page)

Source #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, In The Beginning

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- On seeing a head of state (like a president).
- On seeing a person who knows lot of things about lots of things.
- On seeing a person who is really knowledgeable about Torah.
- On seeing lightning, shooting stars, mountains or sunrises.
- On seeing trees or creatures of unusual beauty.
- On seeing the ocean.
- On seeing trees blossoming for the first time in the year.
- On witnessing an assembly of 600,000 or more Jews.

The Visual Berakhot.

On comets, and on earthquakes, and on lightning and on thunder, and on storms say.
"Blessed be He whose strength and might fill the world."
On mountains, and on hills, and on seas, and on rivers, and on deserts say.
"Blessed be His works that He made in the beginning."
R. Yehuda says, "One who sees the great sea says, "Blessed is He that made the great sea. Only if he sees it occasionally."
On rain and on good news say.
"Blessed is He who is good, and does good."
And on bad news say, "Blessed are you the true judge."
(Mishna Berakhot, 9:2)
The Wonderful World of some Wacky Blessings

Written by: Devorah Katz

Resources you will need:
- One candy per student
- Paper and pencil
- Attached worksheets

Introduction (2 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Today in 300 different communities in 40 countries all over the world, people are taking a break from their daily activities to sit down and learn. It is such an exciting opportunity to join thousands of people around the world in a day of study. We’ve chosen to focus today on some of Judaism’s more unusual blessings. While blessings that we can say over food that we eat or to show gratitude to God may be more well known, there are actually some fairly unexpected blessings that we can say as well. Today we’ll discover what blessing to say over a good-looking person, a thunder storm or even a beautiful view.

Trigger (10 minutes)

Picture this. It’s full on pressure time in whatever sport it is you play: Soccer? It’s a tie game with only a few seconds left. And you’ve got the ball! Baseball? It’s the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded and you’re up! Basketball? You’re at the 3-point line with only 2 seconds left on the buzzer. Feeling the pressure? You bet. And you score! You win the game! Everyone is thrilled with you, cheering, chanting your name, hugging you and making you feel great.

What do you do? How do you savor that moment?

One more. You’ve just walked in the door from school. Actually, from school you ran to your piano lesson then stopped off at the library and you come home STARVING! And there, on your kitchen table, is your favorite dish—steaming hot, made just for you. You sit down and devour your meal, loving every bite of it.

How do you savor that moment?

Last one. You’re hiking with a couple of your good friends. You’ve spent the morning on a difficult trail working hard to reach the summit. Finally, as you get to a clearing, you look out on to a beautiful vista. The view is gorgeous. You’re staring at tall mountains and wide rivers. It is exquisite.

What do you do? How do you savor that moment?
The Talmud has an idea or two for you. The Talmud is a collection of hundreds of years of Jewish wisdom. The “oral law” it contains is ancient and important, much like the Torah. The Talmud encourages thoughtful discussion and debate. It is a collection of discussions of Jewish law that took place over a 500-year period and was codified in c. 700 CE.

A person is forbidden to enjoy the pleasures of the world without first reciting praise to God.

Ask:

1. Why would the Talmud forbid us to enjoy the pleasures of the world without first praising God?
2. Does praising God mean saying a blessing? What else can it mean?
3. What is the value in showing appreciation or gratitude?
4. How can “reciting praise” help us recognize the “pleasures of the world”?

Sometimes, by taking a step back and recognizing the experience, you increase your appreciation of it.

Activity #1: Mindfulness (5 minutes)

Ever notice how life passes you by? People are always telling us to stop and smell the roses. What’s the value in stopping? What do we get out of truly slowing our pace down and noticing and appreciating the world around us?

Hand out a candy to every student in the class. Have them unwrap the candy at the same time and pop it into their mouths together. Challenge them to eat the candy slowly. Ask questions as they are sucking on the candy:

1. Can someone describe the sensation of eating a candy?
2. What does the candy taste like?
3. Does the candy taste differently when you eat it without thinking about it?
4. How does it taste now that we’re totally focusing on the experience of eating a candy?

Here’s the answer: When we stop, slow down and are aware of our experiences we truly come to appreciate them. Perhaps that is what the Talmud is suggesting to us, the need to appreciate our experiences.
Activity #2: Chevrutah Study and Discussion (15 minutes)

**Explain the concept of Chevrutah.** It is paired learning. One person reads the text out loud while the other listens, and then they switch.

**Distribute the worksheets.**

The worksheet in front of you is from the Tractate Berakhot (Blessings). It discusses different blessings to be said over different occasions. Turn to the person next to you to review this piece of text and the questions on the next page. Learning with your friend gives you the opportunity to look at this source with a second pair of eyes. Share your opinions and insights together while learning.

**Bring your class back together and discuss their findings.**

1. Which blessings surprised them?
2. Which did they connect to?

**Summary**

Sometimes in life we need a yield sign. We need someone to suggest that we slow down, look around and truly feel grateful for the awesomeness around us. Blessings offer us that opportunity. Whether it is a blessing over food, over an experience or over a moment, blessings allow us to step back from the moment to appreciate it.

But don’t take our word for it...

**Activity #3: Create your own (8 minutes)**

Choose an experience you’ve had or a moment that you really wanted to savor. Create your own blessing! Create a drawing that represents your experience like the one on your worksheet, and write the words for your blessing underneath. Present your blessing and drawing to the class.
The Wonderful World of some Wacky Blessings

On seeing a head of state (like a president).

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On seeing a person who is really knowledgeable about Torah.

On seeing lightning, shooting stars, mountains or sunrises.

On seeing trees or creatures of unusual beauty.

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(Mishna Berakhot, 9:2)
The Wonderful World of Blessings

Worksheet

Why are we blessing God for giving knowledge? Why is knowledge considered so important? In the third blessing, we say a blessing when we see someone who is knowledgeable in Torah. Why?

Which blessings include beauty found in nature? What is the value in finding beauty in nature?

Why is there a blessing on seeing so many Jews in one place?

Which of these blessings surprised you?

Which of these blessings have you had the opportunity to say in your life?

Something to think about:

• What is an amazing thing I saw?

• What did I do when I saw it?

• What is an amazing experience I had?

• What did I do after the experience was over?

• How can blessings change my experience?
You come home from school to find a giant gift-wrapped box waiting on your kitchen table. You’re thrilled to discover that it is for you! You quickly rip off the wrapping paper. You can’t believe it! It’s exactly what you wanted! What is the first thing you do?

Today we are going to use the five senses to help learn about blessings.

» Ask:

1. What is a blessing?
2. What are some things you’d say a blessing over?

» Write their answers up on the board.

Answers may include:

- We say blessings over food that we eat.
- Blessings are a way to say thank you.

The traditional blessings that most of us are familiar with are blessings said over food. There are blessings for both before and after eating.

» Ask:

1. Why do you think that is?
2. What is the value in saying a blessing over food?

Some ideas your students may come up with (and feel free to help them reach these ideas):

- It is important to show appreciation for the food you receive. A blessing says thank you.
- There are places in the world where there isn’t enough food. We should appreciate having food.
- Instead of jumping into the meal, it is appropriate to stop for a moment and think about what we have just received.

Think of a blessing as a yield sign. We slow down to appreciate the moment, the experience and our good fortune.
Part One: Worksheet (12 minutes)

Hand out Worksheet #1 to your students. Give them a few minutes to complete the page and then ask them to share their drawings and experiences with the class.

Point out to your students that we don’t only say blessings over food. In fact, there are blessings that can be said over many experiences. That’s where knowing our five senses can help.

➢ Ask your students to list the five senses:

The five senses are:

- Sight
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste
- Hearing

Focus on: The Havdala Service (3 minutes)

Ask one of your students to describe the Havdala service. Which of your senses are involved?

Every Saturday night, as Shabbat ends, families gather together to say the Havdala service. The room is dark so you can see the flame of the candle. There is a blessing made over wine. There is a blessing made over beautiful smelling spices as they are passed around to everyone. There is also a blessing made over the light of the candle. Which senses are involved in Havdala? Sight, smell and taste!

Part Two: Meet the Senses (5 minutes)

Taste
The blessings that we may be the most familiar with are the blessings we say over food.

There are different blessings that we say over each food group. We have blessings for bread, fruits, vegetables, grains and everything else.

Sight
Ever seen a beautiful rainbow? Been awed by a lightening bolt? Seen a beautiful view? There are blessings for that too! We are offered a series of different blessings to say over awesome things that we see.
Experience a Blessing

**Ask:**

1. Why would we say blessings over things we see?
2. What is the value in saying those blessings?

**Hearing**

On Rosh Hashana, we say a blessing when we hear the shofar being blown. There is also a blessing we say when we hear thunder. Why do you think it is important to say a blessing over something we hear?

**Smell**

There is a special blessing we say over beautiful smelling spices. We say it weekly during Havdala, along with other times when we smell something delicious!

**Touch**

There are some objects that we consider to be special. For example, there are blessings we say when we put on tzitzit or a tallit.

**Part Three: Worksheet #2 (10 minutes)**

Hand out Worksheet #2 to your class. Ask them to connect the experience with the sense that it relates to on the page. Have them share their answers with the class.

**Part Four: Summary (3 minutes)**

**Did you know?**

Did you know that the Talmud suggests that we say 100 blessings each and every day? Why do you think that is?

**Pick your favorite blessing!** Which blessing did you like learning about? Was there one that surprised you? For which experience would you like to make up your own blessing?

Saying thank you is important—to your parents, to your friends and to your teachers. Blessings are a way to say thank you to God for the food you eat and the experiences you have with all five senses.
Experience a Blessing!

Worksheet #1

Draw some of your favorite experiences.

Here is my favorite meal!

Here is my favorite place to visit!

Here is my favorite activity!
Worksheet #2

Match the Blessing to the Sense.
Teaching it to our children means also making them partners in what is so very important.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz
All of Me
By Molly Bang

**THEME:** An Introduction to the Jewish Value of Gratitude  
2–5 year olds  
60–75 minutes

**GOALS**
In this program, families explore the wondrous abilities of their bodies and examine different ways of expressing gratitude for all that their bodies can do. The take-home project from this program is a beautifully framed Thank You sign, upon which children have dictated notes expressing thanks for specific body parts. Families are encouraged to display this sign at home and to continue to reflect on the miraculous powers of the human body.

**Plan in Advance**

**Prepare Thank You Pictures**

**MATERIALS**
- Dot paints
- Thank You signs (Sample Thank You signs appear at the end of this program guide)
- Pen/pencil for writing child’s name on back of sign
- Foam frames
- Small plastic baggie for each family filled with:
  - Body part pictures mounted on colorful circles
  - Foam feet, foam hands
  - A pen for writing
  - Glue stick
  - Foam stickers
  - Colorful jewels and sequins

In this joyous, colorful picture book, a boy, aided by a cuddly orange cat, enthusiastically thanks his many wondrous body parts for all which they can do. Starting with his feet and moving on to his hands and head, he shows readers each body part's basic value: “What great hands! Thank you, hands, /for gripping/and throwing/and patting and holding and for hugging.” Although not explicitly Jewish in content, this book can serve as a wonderful introduction to the Jewish value of gratitude and the closely related value of prayer. Children will delight in offering thanks for their many useful and interesting body parts.

This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.  
Submitted by Vivian Newman—Vivian@hgf.org
Introduce with an Activity

Decorate Thank You Pictures

Today we’re going to read a book about a little boy who loves to say “thank you.” He says thank you for all of his body parts. He thanks his feet for helping him jump; his hands for allowing him to hug and throw; and his mouth for helping him talk and sing. Later today, we’ll have chance to say thank you to many of our body parts. Right now, I’d like you to decorate a Thank You sign that we’ll later add picture to. We have several different types of Thank You signs for you to choose. Some display just the words thank you while some contain both the Hebrew and English words for thank you. Do you know the Hebrew word for thank you? (It’s todah!)

DIRECTIONS

1. Choose a Thank You sign
2. Decorate sign using dot paints
3. Remember to write child’s name on back of completed art work

Introduce the Story

Did you know that Jewish people love to say “thank you?” Do you know how to say thank you in Hebrew? (todah) In addition to todah, another Jewish way of saying thanks is by offering a blessing. Many Jewish blessings start with the exact same words—perhaps you’ve heard them before. They begin—Baruch Atah Adonai elohenu melech haolam—Thank you God, Creator of the World for… giving us bread, or vegetables, for creating beauty in the world. Many Jewish people like to say “thank you” as soon as they wake up in the morning. They like to wake up and say some special prayers called Birchot HaShachar—Morning Blessings. Included in these morning blessings are words of thanks to God for helping us see, for giving us strength, for providing us with clothes to wear. One morning blessing even says thank you for making our bodies with all the right openings and closings (some people like to say this prayer right after they’ve used the bathroom).

In All of Me, our book for today, we’re going to read about a little boy who loves to say thank you. He thanks his hands, his arms, his elbows, his knees. Which other body parts do you think he says thank you for? Let’s read and find out (read several pages straight through).
Read the Story

Encourage Participation
After reading several pages aloud, pause on the next several pages to ask children to predict for which body part the boy will be thankful. (What do you think he is going to say thank you for on this page? Why does he like his ________? Do you like your ________? What do you like to do with your _____?)

Follow Up Activities and Resources

Decorating Frames for Thank You Pictures

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Foam frames
- Small plastic baggie for each family

DIRECTIONS
Much of this activity can be done in your book reading circle. Families simply remain seated on the floor, in the same spot in which they listened to the story being read aloud.

Earlier this morning, you decorated Thank You signs. Now, I’d like you to work on decorating frames for your signs. I’m going to pass out baggies to everyone. In your baggie, you will find some pictures of different body parts. I’d like you to choose two or three body parts to glue onto your frame. On the pictures which you’ve selected for your frame, I’d like a grown-up to help you write why you are happy that you have that particular body part. Just like the boy in our book today, I’d like you to say thank you eyes for (you fill in the blank, perhaps you might say for helping me look at pictures in books…Or thank you feet for allowing me to climb and dance…) After you’ve written your notes and attached your body parts to your frame, you may add stickers and jewels to your frame. To complete the project, use a glue stick to attach your painted Thank You sign to your decorated frame.

A glue stick can be used to attach jewels and sequins to the frame. The jewels, however, will stick better if glue (rather than a glue stick) is used. So if time and space permits, you may want to set up separate stations that families can go to after they’ve completed the first part of their assignment—after they’ve written notes and attached body parts to frames. These additional stations can contain glue, q-tips, and a variety of materials to be glued to the frame for decorations.
Making Edible Bagel Faces

MATERIALS

- Mini bagels
- Soft or whipped cream cheese
- Small round fruits and vegetables (for example-blueberries, strawberries, grapes, etc.)
- Small thin sticks of vegetables (i.e. pepper sticks, carrot sticks, etc.)
- Spoons for spreading cream cheese

Do you remember some of the parts of the head which the boy in our book was thankful for? He said thank you for my mouth, and my lips, and my tongue, and…what else? Wow, there are so many parts of our face which are special. Right now, we’re going to use bagels and cream cheese and fruits and vegetables to make our very own edible bagel faces. As we eat our bagel faces, we can think about how lucky we are to have eyes and ears and noses. Not only do all of these parts help us see and hear and smell, but as we’re going to find out, they also taste delicious.

Singing Songs about Body Parts

Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes

Head and shoulders
Knees and toes (2x)
Head and shoulders
Knees and toes (2x)
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose
Head and shoulders
Knees and toes (2x)
If You're Happy and You Know It

If you’re happy and you know it,  
Clap your hands  
(Clap hands twice)

If you’re happy and you know it,  
Clap your hands  
(Clap hands twice)

If you’re happy and you know it,  
Then your face will surely show it  
If you’re happy and you know it,  
Clap your hands.  
(Clap hands twice)  
_Shake your head, show your tongue, wiggle your fingers… etc._

Look at Me

(From the CD _Look at Me_ by Rick Recht and Sheldon Low)


My af (nose) helps me smell things,  
My oznaim (ears) help me hear  
My eynayim (eyes) helps me see you when you’re far and when you’re near  
My yadim (hands) help me feel things  
My lashon (tongue) helps me taste  
My reglayim (legs) are for walking or for running in a race.  
Look at me, look at me  
I have a healthy body as you can see.  
I’m the proudest kid in the whole wide world,  
And I’m so lucky to be me.
Following the program, try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming and providing them with a list of Hebrew body parts (if you spent time at your program singing songs using the Hebrew names of body parts). Parents may also enjoy reading an article on ways of nurturing the value of gratitude within their children. The article listed below is by Wendy Mogel, author of *Blessing of A Skinned Knee*.

**Resources from Kveller (a Jewish Twist on Parenting)**
- “Gratitude: Encouraging your Child’s Natural Appreciation for the Little Things”

- **Link for Hebrew body parts**

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Thank You
Thank You Todah
**Boker Tov! Good Morning!**

**BY: Rabbi Joe Black**

**THEME:** *Beginning and Ending Each Day with Gratitude*

| 18 months–4 year olds | 45–60 minutes |

**Program Goals & Activities**

The primary goal of the program is to introduce families to the concept of beginning and ending each day with gratitude.

**During the program families will:**

- Create a fun, interactive boker tov/lilah tov sign to serve as a daily reminder to begin and end each day with gratitude.
- Learn the Hebrew expressions “boker tov” and “lila tov.”
- Discover additional developmentally appropriate activities to promote the daily expression of gratitude.

Additional activities include singing a variety of boker tov and lilah tov songs and making fresh squeezed orange juice (a tasty boker tov treat).

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:**

**Creating Boker Tov/Lila Tov Signs**

**Introductory remarks:** Today we’re going to read a book about some of the activities that one little boy likes to do every morning when he first wakes up. Every morning, the boy in our book likes to jump out of bed, take off his “jammies,” get dressed, eat breakfast, and dash off to school. This little boy also likes to say thank you. Every morning when he wakes up, he looks around and says thank you for all of the wonderful things which he sees. He says thank you for the sunshine, thank you for the yummy breakfast food, thank you for the earth, and even thank you for the hamster which he discovers in his classroom when he arrives at school. Right now we’re going to make a boker tov/lila tov sign—a good...
morning and good night sign—which will remind us to start and end each day by saying thank you, just as the boy in our book does. When we sit down to read our book, I’ll show you exactly how our signs work, but for right now I’d like you to work on making and preparing some of the pieces for your sign.

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Plastic plates
- Pipe cleaners
- Watercolor sets: Either tubes, bottles, or trays containing solid pallets of watercolor
- Small paint brushes
- Muffin trays for holding painting supplies and water (by using muffin trays, you will avoid the frequent overturning of bowls and cups of water which often accompany watercolor painting)
- Boker tov and lila tov cards (see end of program for a copy of these cards)
- Pony Beads
- Velcro
- Foam or poster board, cut in the shape of the moon and sun

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

1. Prepare the interactive sign from two plastic plates.
   - Cut one plate in half.
   - Place the half plate on top of the whole plate.
   - Staple around the edges of the half plate, thereby creating a pocket. This pocket will hold the individual pieces or attachments to the sign
   - Attach one piece of Velcro (teeth side up) to the top of the half plate.
   - Attach one piece of Velcro (teeth side up) to the top section of the full (whole) plate.
   - Attach matching pieces of Velcro (fuzzy side up) to the backs of the sun, moon, and boker tov and lila tov cards.
   - Place all pieces of sign (i.e. the sun, moon, and boker tov and lila tov cards) inside plate pocket.
   - Using a hole punch, punch a hole into the top of the full size plate.
   - Insert a pipe cleaner through the hole. Twist one end of the pipe cleaner to secure it to the plate.

2. Set up two work areas.
   This project works best with two separate work stations. One station will be for watercolor painting, while the second station will be for the stringing of beads.
**Watercolor Station**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Watercolors (liquid, tubes or watercolor pallets)
- Paint brushes
- Muffin trays/tins
- Pencil, pens for writing names
- Water
- Prepared plastic plates
- Newspaper or plastic bags or tablecloths for covering table
- Sheets of white paper (for those children who wish to continue painting even after they have completed their boker tov and lila tov cards)

**A Note on Preparing Watercolors:**

If using tube or liquid watercolors, fill the muffin compartments half full with water and squeeze in one or two drops of watercolor paint. Additionally, fill one or two muffin compartments with water but do not add color. These water-only compartments will be used for the rinsing of paint brushes. If using watercolor pallets, fill muffin compartments with water only. Pre-moisten watercolor pallets so that children can paint without delay.

**Bead Stringing Station**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Bowls containing pony beads
- Prepared plates

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Children string beads onto the open end of the pipe cleaner.
2. After children have attached as many beads as they desire, parents tie or twist the open end of the pipe cleaner to the section of pipe cleaner which is already attached to the plate. This forms a loop or a handle which will enable the sign to be hung on a door-knob within easy reach of a child.
Hints for Sharing the Book:

Introducing the Book

Today we’re going to read the book Boker Tov by Rabbi Joe Black, which shows what one little boy does when he first wakes up in the morning. Do you know how to say the word morning in Hebrew? Boker, can you say that word with me?

What do you do when you wake up in the morning?

As children offer suggestions, ask the group to pantomime each action.

What do you say when you wake up in the morning? In our book, the boy likes to say “boker tov.”

Let’s watch and listen and see what this boy does and says when he first wake up in the morning.

If possible, sing rather than read the book aloud.

Encouraging Participation

Ask children to describe what the dog is doing on several of the book’s pages.

On page 11, ask the children to guess what the new surprise in the classroom is (the hamster).

Ask children to join you in imitating some of the actions depicted on each page: pretend to get dressed, wave hello/boker tov to the letter carrier, dance in the classroom, etc.

Closing Remarks

Wow, sometimes there’s a lot to do in the morning. Every morning, the boy in our book gets dressed, eats breakfast, and says thank you. Let’s see what he says thank you for (review pp. 8 – 10; he says thank you for “the food he eats, for the earth beneath his feet and for the morning sunshine bright”).

Earlier today, you made a sign which you can take home and hang in your bedroom. This sign can help you remember to say thank you every morning, just as the boy in our book does. Every morning when you wake up, you can jump out of bed, run to your sign, reach your hand in the pocket, and pull out the sun and the card that says “Boker tov. Good morning! Today I am happy because....”

Demonstrate how to attach these items to the sign.
Once you’ve arranged your sign, try to think of one thing which you feel happy about. I bet that every day, you’ll think of something different to be happy about. One morning you might feel happy because the birds are singing. Another day you may be happy that the sun is shining, or you may be excited that you are going to have a play date with a friend, or that you are going to visit grandma.

At night, you can rearrange your sign again, just before you go to sleep. What shines in the sky at bedtime? That’s right—the moon. So at bedtime, you can take down the sun and put up the moon. You’ll also need to put up the lila tov card. The lila tov card asks you to think about one nice thing which happened during the day and say thank you for that person, place, or thing. So for example, one night you might say, “Thank you for the friends whom I played with today,” or you might say, “Thank you for the zoo that I visited today,” or “Thank you for the sun which kept me warm all day long”. What other types of thank-yous might you say at the end of the day? I hope that you’ll keep track of some of your morning and night time thank-yous because I really want to hear about them the next time I see you.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #1: Singing songs & performing finger-plays about waking up and going to sleep.

**This Little Girl All Ready for Bed**

This little girl all ready for bed,
down on the pillow she lays her head
*(Lay one finger down in the palm of the other extended hand)*

Wraps herself up in the covers so tight
*(Wrap fingers of the extended hand tightly around the sleeping finger)*

This is the way she sleeps all night

Morning comes, she opens her eyes
Back with a toss the covers fly.
*(Open the hand which was clasping the finger; Allow the opened hand to fly through the air)*

Up she jumps, she’s up and awake
*(Bounce finger up and down on the palm of the extended hand)*

Ready to play and have a good day
I Wake up in the Boker

“I wake up in the boker and I open my eynayim (eyes)

I jump from my mitah (bed) and clap my yadayim (hands)-

If You’re Happy in the Boker (To the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it”)

If you’re happy in the boker, shout Boker Tov (2x)
If you’re happy in the boker and you really want to show it,
If you’re happy in the boker shout, Boker Tov

Other possible verses: If you’re happy in the boker…
eat your breakfast, brush your teeth, and comb your hair…

Last verse: If you’re sleepy in the lila, close your eyes (2x)
If you’re sleepy in the lila, and you really want to show it,
If you’re sleepy in the lila, close your eyes and go to sleep.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #2: Squeezing fresh orange juice and preparing a boker tov treat.

Introductory Remarks

We’ve spoken a great deal today about waking up in the morning, in the boker. I have a question for you—What do you like to eat in the morning, in the boker, when you first wake up? Is there a special name for the meal which we eat in the morning? (Breakfast) What do you like to drink at breakfast? Right now we’re going to make a special morning breakfast treat. We’re going to make our own fresh-squeezed orange juice. Has anyone here ever made orange juice before? What will we need in order to make orange juice? What do you think we should say before we drink our juice? Should we say thank you to the oranges for giving us such good juice?
MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Oranges (sliced in half)
- Hand juicers (many, but at least 2 or 3)
- Paper bowls
- Paper cups
- A large pitcher for collecting the juice
- Carton of store-bought orange juice
- Cheerios

DIRECTIONS:
1. Pass out a handful of cheerios to each child (The cheerios will serve as a distraction, as the children await their turn with the juicers).
2. Distribute a small bowl and ½ orange to each child.
3. Ask children to wait for a turn with the juicer. Upon receiving a juicer, each child will twist his/her orange on top of the juicer, extracting as much juice as possible from the orange (those who can’t wait for the juicer can try hand-squeezing their orange into their bowl).
4. After each child has used the juicer, he/she should pour the collected juice into the large pitcher.
5. When all of the oranges have been squeezed, pour a little of the fresh-squeezed orange juice into each child’s cup.
6. Optional: Recite a blessing before drinking the juice, or simply offer a shout of “thank you.”
7. After serving the fresh-squeezed juice, offer children additional helpings of store-bought juice.

NURTURING THE FAMILY

Following the program try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming and providing them with the words to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Parents may also enjoy reading an article by Dr. Wendy Mogel on ways of nurturing the value of gratitude within their children. The article is posted on the Jewish parenting site kveller.com. Dr. Mogel is the author of Blessing of A Skinned Knee: “Gratitude: Encouraging your Child’s Natural Appreciation for the Little Things”

Boker Tov
Good Morning!!
Today, I am happy because...

Lila Tov
Good Night!
Tonight, I say “Thank You” for...
Plan In Advance

Space Set Up
You’ll need table seating for both children and parents, as well as enough empty floor space at the front of the room for the group to gather for story time. Set up craft tables with house decorating materials.

MATERIALS NEEDED & ADVANCED PREP

My “Special” Home Mobile

- Cut outs of paper homes (template attached) made from poster board, card stock, or scratch art paper (Scratch art works well with older children—http://www.scratchart.com)
- Circles cut from construction paper or craft foam (approx. 3.5 inches in diameter), with holes at top and bottom
- Pipe cleaners, cut in half
- “Who is Rich” sign for top of mobile (template attached)
- Plastic coat hangers
- To simplify the process, you may want to attach the “Who is Rich” signs to the hangers before the program begins
- Home decorating materials: dot paints, stickers, markers, glue sticks, tissue paper or construction paper shapes
- Craft sticks/styluses for decorating scratch art paper
- Pictures of meaningful activities for the home (samples attached)
- Markers
- Optional: Pony Beads
Storytelling Stick Puppets

- Cut out photos and pictures of animals, bicycles, and other items which are brought into the home in either *It Could Always be Worse* or *Terrible, Terrible*
- Glue each cut out onto the top portion of a popsicle stick

Graham Cracker House Snack

- Graham crackers (chocolate and cinnamon, if possible)
- Animal crackers
- Square waffle shaped pretzels (windows)
- Square cookies (doors)
- Ziploc sandwich baggies, with one corner snipped off, filled with several spoonfuls of cream cheese (sealed)
- Gallon size Ziploc bags with house building materials: 6 graham cracker squares, 5-6 animal crackers, 4 waffle pretzels, 1 small square or rectangular cracker/cookie—for door, baggie filled with cream cheese)
- Paper plates

Gratitude Grab Bag

- Large bag— (Laundry bags or pillow cases work well)
- Collection of small every day, inexpensive items which have values/benefits which can be easily overlooked (toothbrushes, Band-Aids, cups, broken crayons, glove, rubber bands/pony tail ties, scotch tape, small empty cardboard boxes)

Introduce Families and the Story

Greet Families

As families arrive encourage them to decorate their houses, explaining that these houses will be used to make a very special mobile which will help families express gratitude for their homes. Remind families to write child’s name on the back of their completed home.
Today we’ll be reading a book about a man/girl who, at the beginning of the book, does not like his/her house. By the end of the story, however, the man/girl loves his/her house. Do you like your house? I bet there are a number of things which make your home very special. Today, you’ll be making a mobile which will show just how special your home is. As a first step in making this mobile, you’ll need to decorate this paper house. Can you decorate this house in an extra-special way, making it look as wonderful as your own house really is? Remember to write your name on the back of your house.

Introduce the Story

Have everyone gather and introduce story:

Many of you have just decorated some very beautiful homes. I bet the houses in which you live are as special and unique as the homes which you just decorated. Can you raise your hand if you like the house that you live in? Today, as we read our book, we’re going to meet a man/girl who doesn’t’ think that his/her home is very special. In fact he/she really, really dislikes his/her home. The man in our book/Abigail, the girl in our book, thinks that his/her home is much too noisy and crowded. What would you do if you felt that your home was too crowded? Let’s read and discover what the people in our story do in order to obtain a quieter, more comfortable house.

Use Stick Puppets to Enliven Storytelling

Hold up stick puppets of each animal (or person or object) as it is being brought into the house. Ask the children to label the item and, if appropriate, make the noise of the specific animal/item that is being added to the house.

Post Reading Questions

- At the beginning of the story why was the man/girl unhappy?
- To whom did he/she go to for help and advice?
- What advice did the Rabbi give?
- What happened when the man/girl followed the Rabbi’s advice?
- Why did the man/girl keep on listening to the Rabbi if things were getting worse and worse at home?
- What happened when Abigail and her family took the bikes, animals, and extra cousins out of the house?
- How did the man/girl feel about his/her house at the end of the story? At the end of the story, the house is really not any different than it had been at the beginning of the story. In It Could Always Be Worse the man’s house still contains his mother, his wife, and his six children, and the house is still crowded. Why does the man now like his house?
In Terrible, Terrible, Abigail, at the end of the story, is still living in her stepfather’s house with her new stepsisters and brothers. There are still seven people who need to share the couches, TV, and bathrooms and there are still lots and lots of “stuff” in the house, but Abigail is happy. What changed for her? Was there a way for Abigail/the man in our story to have avoided bringing everything into the house? When the man/Abigail first began to dislike his/her house, what could she/he have done?

Jewish Values Discussion

In Judaism we learn that we should always search for the good in a situation. Do you know how to say “good” in Hebrew? The Hebrew word for good is tov. One way for us to make sure that we have a very happy life is to be careful to always look for the good. In Hebrew the term Hakarat Hatov—refers to recognizing/acknowledging the good.

Turn to one of the opening pages of the book which shows an image of the crowded house:

One way for us to look at this house is to say—it’s crowded, it’s noisy, it’s full of stuff. But what if we readjusted our eyes and tried to look for the good in this house. What good might you see in this house, what might make this house special?

In Pirkei Avot, a special Jewish book which teaches lessons about how to live a good life, we’re told that we should always try to be happy with what we have. The Hebrew words for being happy with what one has are: Sameach B’chelko. When we look for the good and feel happy about what we have, the Rabbis tell us that we’ll feel very rich. We’ll feel as if we have lots and lots of money and own the best things in the world.

Let’s see if we can readjust our eyes and look for the good in our own homes. What is special about your home?

Gradually direct the conversation away from listing all of the special toys, objects which children possess by using questions such as:

- It’s nice to own special toys and furniture, but could you be happy without those things?
- Let’s think about the people and activities which go on in your home. Who lives in your house with you? What do you like to do at home with your mom and/or dad or brothers or sisters or pet?

Wow, your homes do sound very special. Right now, we’re going to make a mobile which will show how special and rich your homes are. We hope that whenever you see this mobile, you’ll remember to look for the good in your home and appreciate what you have. Once you hang your mobile at home you may find that there are even more things which you’d like to add to it. As you’ll see, there will be lots of circles on your mobile and lots of places to add additional notes about what makes your home so special. In a minute, we’re going to stand up and go to the crafts tables. If you had a chance to decorate a house when you first came to the program, please find your home and bring it over to the crafts table. If you didn’t have a chance to decorate a home, don’t worry, there will be extra blank houses at the crafts table. (You can take some stickers home with you and decorate your house once you’ve brought your mobile home.)
Follow Up Activities and Resources

**My Special Home” Mobile—Part II**

**SET UP**
During the reading of the book and the follow-up discussion, volunteers/staff should clear away the house decorating materials and reset the table with the remaining mobile supplies (see material list above).

**DIRECTIONS**

1. String a pipe cleaner through the house cut-out, and attach the house to the hanger.
2. On a paper circle, draw a picture or write a note describing something which makes your home special (examples, There are 2 parents, and 3 children who live in my home; We have a pizza/movie night every Saturday evening; We grow tomatoes in our back yard).
3. **Adaptation for younger children**: Rather than drawing their own picture, younger children can glue pre-printed pictures onto their circles.
4. After you’ve decorated several circles, use pipe cleaners to attach the circles to the plastic hanger. You can create a chain of several circles, stringing pony beads in between the circles. Or you can attach circles individually to the hanger.

**Snack Activity**

Just for fun, let’s see if we can create edible homes for snack. We’ll put animal crackers inside our graham cracker houses so that our edible houses will be as crowded as the home we read about in our book. Before we eat our homes, let’s take a moment to note everything which makes our graham cracker house special.

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Hand every child a paper plate and Ziploc bag containing edible home building supplies (see materials listed above).
2. Squeeze cream cheese baggie and apply cheese (as glue) to edges of graham crackers.
3. Assemble graham crackers into the shape of a home.
4. Place animal crackers in the center of the home.
5. Create a roof, using graham crackers and cream cheese (optional)
6. Apply cream cheese to backs of pretzels (windows) and square cracker/cookie (doors).

**Before eating your home, see if you can offer up some words of praise. What’s special about your graham cracker home? What features/aspects of your edible home do you especially like?**
Gratitude Grab Bag

Have families return to the floor/book reading area for this activity:

*Before you go home, we want to give you even more practice in learning to search for the good and feeling happy with what you have. Right now, we’re going to play a game in which you’re going to reach into our bag and pull out a small object. At first glance, these objects may not seem special and you may feel disappointed that you pulled such an uninteresting item from the bag. Your challenge is to open your eyes and look for the good. Tell us why you’re happy that you picked this object. Tell us why this would be an important item to own. (If you’d like, you can even keep the item which you selected.)*

ADAPTATION FOR LARGER GROUP

Display items on a table. Ask families to briefly pick up one or two items and explain to one another something which is special / important about this item. Ideally, it would be great if each family could take one small item home with them, but if that’s not possible, simply ask families to pick up an item, discuss it, and then put it back down on the table.

*So, do you feel rich? Are you happy with the small present that you chose?*

Songs of Gratitude

*Today we learned all about being happy with what we have. Let’s sing a few songs to help strengthen our ability to appreciate and enjoy what we have, which will also give us a chance to offer thanks for everything which is good in our lives.*

Optional: ask families to make up their own lyrics to any of these songs:
Kobi’s Lullabye

words and music by Rick Recht (Free to be the Jew in Me CD)

Listen: http://www.rickrecht.com/music/index.php#album-18
Sheet music: http://rickrecht.com/resources/Kobi.pdf

Before I close my eyes at night and sleep
before I drift into my dreams
I give thanks for the blessings in my life
for the people who care for me

thank you G-d for my family
thank you G-d for my friends
thank you G-d for the earth and sea
thank you G-d for the trees
and the air I breathe
and thank you G-d for me

When I open my eyes
to the new daylight
before I rise and start my day
I give thanks for the music
and love in my life
for the freedom I have to say

thank you G-d for my family
thank you G-d for my friends
thank you G-d for the earth and sea
thank you G-d for the trees
and the air I breathe
and thank you G-d for me

thank you G-d for my hope
thank you G-d for my heart
thank you G-d for the strength to know wrong from right
thank you G-d for the faith I have in myself
and thank you G-d for me

Sh’ma Yisrael Ad-nai
El-heinu Ad-nai Echad
Thank You

words and music by Rick Recht (Look at Me CD)

Listen: http://rickrecht.com/music/

Yai dai dai dai yai dai dai dai dai dai
Yai dai dai dai yai dai dai.
yai dai dai dai yai dai dai dai dai dai
yai dai dai dai yai dai dai.
Thank you thank you
Thank you for this special time
Thank you thank you to walk and dance and run and climb
Thank you for my heart and my mind
Thank you thank you for my life

I Give Thanks

words and music by Sheldon Low (Look at Me CD)

Listen: http://rickrecht.com/music/
Sheet music: http://rickrecht.com/resources/IGiveThanks.pdf

I (I) I give thanks (I give thanks)
I give thanks (I give thanks) to you (to you)
Thank you for my parents we love love love
Thank you for the trees we hug hug hug
Thank you for doggies we pet pet pet
Thank you for the water so wet wet wet
Thank you for chocolate we eat eat eat
Thank you for the soil that tickles our feet
Thank you for the flowers we sniff sniff sniff
Thank you for this life we live live live
What Are You Thankful For

words and music by Elana Jagoda (Uri Uri CD)

Listen: http://www.zumgali.com/fr_listenbuy.cfm
Sheet music: Contact elanajagoda@gmail.com

What are you thankful for today?
Share with me the blessings that have come your way
What are you thankful for today?
Share with me the blessings that have come your way

I’m thankful that the sun is shining
I’m thankful I’ve got food to eat
I’m thankful for the songs I sing
I’m thankful for my dancing feet

What if you and a friend had a fight
Maybe you got hurt when you fell off your bike
Maybe mom and dad made a dinner you didn’t like
But be grateful
you have a plateful

I’m thankful that I’ve got clothes to wear
I’m thankful that I’ve got enough to share
I’m thankful for what the earth brings me
I’m thankful for my friends and family

What if your brother or sister didn’t share
Maybe you just couldn’t find anything to wear
Maybe you just had a really bad day for hair
When life’s distressing
just count your blessings
Resources for Parents, Teachers, Families

Follow-up Email to Families
Following the program, try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming, and providing them with the words and MP3 downloads to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Families may also enjoy receiving instructions on how to participate in additional values-based projects within their own homes. Some families may be interested in learning more about the values discussed at the program. Try sending families one or more of the following links:

Start a Family Gratitude Journal

Further Reading on Gratitude and Being Happy With What One Has
Nurturing Gratitude in Children

Who is Rich: The Tool for being Happy right now
http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/pirkei-avos-who-is-rich/

Gratitude-HaKarat Hatov
http://jewishvalueseveryday.blogspot.com/search/label/gratitude

Additional PJ Library Books about Gratitude
This lesson plan can be adapted to use with:

» Kishka for Koppel by Aubrey Davis
» Meshka the Kvetch by Carol Chapman
It Could Always Be Worse/Terrible Terrible
It Could Always Be Worse/Terrible Terrible
It Could Always Be Worse/Terrible Terrible
Who is Rich?

One who is happy with what one has
(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

I love my house because of all that goes on within it…

Who is Rich?

One who is happy with what one has
(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

I love my house because of all that goes on within it…

Who is Rich?

One who is happy with what one has
(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

I love my house because of all that goes on within it…
**Naamah and the Ark at Night**
By Susan Campbell Bartoletti
Illustrated by Holly Meade

**Goals**

This program will help families explore ways of adding elements of thankfulness and gratitude to their nightly bedtime routines. **Families will:**

- Create an interactive “Lila Tov” (good night) ark which will display lyrics for a simple bedtime song/prayer (Families will be encouraged to sing this song as they attempt to integrate gratitude into bedtime routines).
- Learn a few details of the Noah’s ark story.
- Prepare a delicious Noah’s ark snack.
- Generate a list of people, objects, occurrences, and activities for which they are thankful.

**Plan In Advance**

**Prepare Paper Plate Arks**

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Large brown paper plates (10.25 inches in diameter)
- Scissors
- Tape
- Lyrics to Naamah’s Good Night Song (see end of this program)

In this lyrical picture book, readers are introduced to Naamah, Noah’s wife, who plays a crucial role in managing and assisting Noah with the ark. When the people and animals aboard the ark have difficulties falling asleep, Naamah sings to each passenger, bringing peace and comfort to all. Young children will easily relate to this all too common occurrence of “bedtime problems.” Not only will children love naming the animals on the ark, but they will adore joining Naamah as she soothes and sings bedtime prayers to the large and ferocious, as well as the small and cuddly, animals of the ark.

This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.
Submitted by Vivian Newman—Vivian@hgf.org
DIRECTIONS

1. Make a crease down the middle of a large plate and cut a slit (approx. 3 inches wide) along the center portion of the fold line.
2. Using a second plate, cut out an arrow shape (approx. 3 inches in width and 4 inches in length).
3. Insert the arrow into the slit of the folded plate—the rectangular portion of the arrow should stand above the fold. The triangular portion of the arrow will remain below the fold, concealed by the bottom of the ark.
4. Crease plate along fold line, so that plate can stand upright and rock like a boat.
5. Tape the triangular portion of the arrow to the inside of either side of the folded plate.
6. Using a glue stick or glue gun, attach a copy of “Naamah’s Good Night Song” to the back of one side of the rectangular portion of the ark.

Prepare Animal Stick Puppets

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Popsicle sticks
- Foam cut outs of animals or simple photos or pictures of animals
  (You'll need 2 or multiples of 2—i.e. 4, 6, 8 of each type of animal)
- Glue or glue gun

DIRECTIONS:

1. Glue animals to Popsicle sticks
2. Arrange animals in pairs
3. Prior to program, hide animal pairs in somewhat visible locations in the room in which the program will be held—remember that very young children may become frustrated or disinterested in the activity if they cannot quickly find the animals so make sure that they're somewhat easy to find.
Introduce with Activities

Decorating “Lila Tov” Ark

As families arrive, hand them a pre-assembled ark and explain how to decorate their arks. The following is a sample introductory speech:

Later today we’re going to read a book about Noah’s ark. Do you know what an ark is? It’s a boat which floats upon the water. In the Torah, the special book of Jewish stories and rules, we learn that Noah and his wife, Naamah, built an ark and filled it with many animals, so that the animals could stay dry when it rained for 40 days and nights. Here is an ark (show empty ark), but it seems be missing its animals. Do you think you could use some stickers and fill your ark, so that it will look just like Noah and Naamah’s ark?

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Pre-assembled arks
- Animal stickers
- Magic markers
- Glue sticks
- Optional—small pieces of paper for children to draw their own animals or pictures of food for the animals

DIRECTIONS:
1. Ask children to decorate both sides of the ark with stickers and optional hand-drawn pictures.
2. Demonstrate how children can gently rock their ark from side to side.
3. Make sure child’s name is written on ark.

Finding Animal Pairs

As families complete arks, suggest that they begin to search for animal pairs:

Your arks look wonderful, but I think that there may be space for a few more animals. Did you know that Noah and Naamah made certain to bring 2 of every type of animal unto the ark? They invited 2 horses, one boy horse and one girl horse, to come aboard their ark. Similarly, they asked for 2 lions and 2 elephants, etc. to come aboard their ark. Let’s see if we can be like Noah and Naamah and find pairs of animals for our ark. Hidden around this room are all types of animals. Can you find some pairs of animals and put them in your ark?

DIRECTIONS:
1. Children and parents should search for animal pairs.
2. Once found, the animal pairs should be tucked into the ark.
3. Children should carry their completed arks over to the rug for circle/story time.
Families who have not had time to decorate their arks should be given an empty ark, with 2 stick puppets slipped inside. A number of stickers can be sent home with families who arrived late to the program, so that these families can decorate their arks at home.

**Introduce the Story**

*Today, we’re going to read the book Naamah and the Ark at Night, by Susan Campbell Bartoletti. This book uses beautiful pictures and poetry to describe what happened aboard Noah’s ark at night.*

- Does anyone remember the story of Noah and the ark? In the story, Noah built an ark.
- What is an ark? (Hold up one of the paper plate arks)
- Why did Noah build an ark?
- Who went on the ark?
- What do you think it was like to be on the ark?
- Was it quiet? Was it comfortable?
- According to our book, many of the animals and people aboard the ark had a hard time falling asleep at night. Naamah, Noah’s wife, does something special to help everyone sleep.
- What do you think she does?

*Let’s read our book and discover how Naamah helps everyone fall asleep.*

**Read The Story**

**Encourage Participation**

- Ask children to name the animals they see on each page. When appropriate, ask children to identify the sound each animal makes.
- Invite children to pantomime Naamah’s gestures (stroking the animals, pulling covers up, yawning as she gets into bed) where possible.
- As the animals fall asleep, ask children to briefly close their eyes (fake snores are always fun!)

**Post Reading Discussion Questions**

- Did you like the way in which Naamah helped everyone fall sleep?
- What did she do?
- What happens in your house when you’re having a hard time falling asleep? What helps you sleep?
- In our book, it says that Naamah sings a “bedtime prayer” at night. The book doesn’t tell us what tune or words Naamah uses in her prayer. What song do you think she sings?
- In our book, it says that Naamah sings a “bedtime prayer” at night. The book doesn’t tell us what tune or words Naamah uses in her prayer. What song do you think she sings?
- I like to imagine that she sings a song that sounds a bit like “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” Because her song is a prayer, I bet that she uses the words “thank you” in her song.
Sing Naamah’s Good Night Song, inserting your own words of thanks into the song. For example: “Thank you for good books and friends.”

If you were Naamah singing a song to the animals, for what would you give thanks?

Can you whisper some thank-yous into the ear of the grown-up who brought you to our program today?

Grown-ups, please share a few thank-yous with your children as well (Try to come up with a list of 5-6 thank-yous).

Saying thank you is a wonderful way to end the day. In Judaism we are encouraged to say thank you throughout the day. Some Jewish people try to say 100 blessings—100 words of thanks during the course of the day. Did you know that saying “thank you” is good for you? Some recent studies have shown that saying “thank you” once a day and/or writing in a gratitude journal on a daily basis can lead to better health, sounder sleep, less anxiety and depression, and kinder behavior toward others.

I hope you’ll take your arks home with you and remember to say thank you at bedtime. Every night before you go to sleep, maybe you can gently rock your ark and sing Naamah’s “Lila Tov” song. I wonder for how many different things you will find to say thank you.

Follow Up Activities And Resources

Making Edible Arks

It’s fun and important to say “thank you” at bedtime, but it’s also good to say “thank you” at other times of the day as well. Sometimes, it’s nice to say “thank you” before we eat. Let’s make a special ark snack, and let’s see if we can say “thank you” before we eat it.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Graham crackers (broken into individual squares)
- Deli flats, and/or small pita breads, cut in half
- Animal crackers
- Jam or spreadable fruit
- Plastic spoons
- Paper plates
DIRECTIONS
1. Pass out one half deli flat and a spoonful of jam to each child.
2. Ask children to spread jam on their deli flat.
3. Pass out animal crackers. Ask children to place animals on top of their jam.
4. Distribute graham cracker squares. Show how these can be tucked underneath the flat side of the deli flat to make the top of the ark.
5. Eat and enjoy.
6. While children are eating, ask them what they might want to say thank you for (What helped you make these arks? To whom or for what should we say “thank you”?).

Painting an Ocean

Once Noah and Naamah finished bringing the animals onto the ark, it began to rain and rain. The rain covered the land and made an ocean for the ark to float upon. Do you think that we should make an ocean for our arks to float upon? We have some funny paint brushes to help us paint our oceans.

ADVANCED PREPARATIONS
- Cover tables with plastic garbage bags (this is a fun but slightly messy activity).
- Pour diluted paint or food coloring into bowls.
- Create or purchase texturized paint brushes.

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Food coloring or paint (blue and green)
- Paper/plastic bowls for holding paints
- White paper plates
- Paper towels
- Paint brushes- texturized or regular

DIRECTIONS
1. Turn white plate upside down.
2. Ask children to paint the plate.
3. Use paper towels to blot up extra paint.
Singing Gratitude and Noah’s Ark Songs

Due to the young ages of the children for whom this program is intended, songs of gratitude are combined with some traditional animal songs. The animal songs are included because this is the type of music to which young children are attracted.

If You’re Grateful and You Know It

(To the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it”)

If you’re grateful and you know it say,
“Todah-Thank You”- repeat 2 times
If you’re grateful and you know it and you really want to show it,
If you’re grateful and you know it say,
“Todah-Thank You”
Additional verses: If you’re grateful and you know it . . . kiss your mommy....
. . . shout “Hooray”

I Give Thanks to You

(Rick Recht, on the Look at Me CD)

I (I) I give thanks (I give thanks) )
I give thanks (I give thanks) to you (to you) )

x2

Verse 1
Thank you for my parents we love love love
Thank you for the trees we hug hug hug
Thank you for doggies we pet pet pet
Thank you for the water so wet wet wet
Chorus

Verse 2
Thank you for chocolate we eat eat eat
Thank you for the soil that tickles our feet
Thank you for the flowers we sniff sniff sniff
Thank you for this life we live live live
The Animals Go Marching

(Traditional with special lyrics)

The animals go marching two by two! Hurrah! Hurrah!
The animals go marching two by two! Hurrah! Hurrah!
The animals marching two by two!
Old Noah stops to tie his shoe
And they all go marching down into the ark
To get out of the rain. Boom! Boom! Boom!

Two by Two

(To the tune of “Skip to My Lou”, Words by Lisa Litman.)

Clap your hands, two by two,
Clap your hands, two by two,
Clap your hands, two by two,
When Noah built the ark, YAHOO!
(Really throw your arms up and let loose!)

Hop like a bunny, two by two.
Hop like a bunny, two by two,
Hop like a bunny, two by two,
When Noah built the ark, YAHOO!

Brainstorm ideas for additional verses. Examples:

 Roar like a lion, two by two...
 Stretch your necks (giraffe), two by two...

Naamaah’s Good Night Song

(To the Tune of: Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

Lila, Lila, Lila Tov
Lila Tov, It’s Time to Sleep
We say Thank you,
Thank you for, Thank you for __________

(Lila Tov=Good Night)
Making Gratitude Journals (ages 4 and up)

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Stickers (optional)
- Piece of paper with words “My Family is Thankful For”
- Blank notebooks or writing journals
- Paper and glue stick (If journal cover is difficult to write on, you may need to paste a blank piece of paper on top of the cover)
- Markers
- Stickers (optional)
- Piece of paper with words “My Family is Thankful For”

DIRECTIONS
1. Ask children to decorate journal covers.
2. Find a place to glue on the journal’s title—“My Family is Grateful For” (optional).
3. Encourage families to write in the journal on a nightly or once a week basis.

Resources for Parents, Teachers, Families

NURTURING THE FAMILY

Following the program, try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming, and providing them with the words to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Parents may also enjoy reading articles on the importance of establishing routines with young children and ways of incorporating Judaism into daily routines.

- “Jewish Routines for Children: Creating positive educational experiences for your family” by Caron Blau Rothstein, PJ Program Professional, Portland, OR: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Relationships/Parents_and_Children/Routines_forChildren.shtml
Naamah’s Good Night Song
(To the Tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

Lila, Lila, Lila Tov
Lila Tov, It’s Time to Sleep
We say Thank you,
Thank you for, Thank you for __________

(Lila Tov = Good Night)

Naamah’s Good Night Song
(To the Tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

Lila, Lila, Lila Tov
Lila Tov, It’s Time to Sleep
We say Thank you,
Thank you for, Thank you for __________

(Lila Tov = Good Night)

Naamah’s Good Night Song
(To the Tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

Lila, Lila, Lila Tov
Lila Tov, It’s Time to Sleep
We say Thank you,
Thank you for, Thank you for __________

(Lila Tov = Good Night)
The Bible is the cornerstone of Judaism, then the Talmud is the central pillar, soaring up from the foundations and supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice. In many ways the Talmud is the most important book in Jewish culture, the backbone of creativity and of national life. No other work has had a comparable influence on the theory and practice of Jewish life, shaping spiritual content and serving as a guide to conduct. The Jewish people have always been keenly aware that their continued survival and development depend on study of the Talmud, and those hostile to Judaism have also been cognizant of this fact. The book was reviled, slandered, and consigned to the flames countless times in the Middle Ages and has been subjected to similar indignities in the recent past as well. At times, talmudic study has been prohibited because it was abundantly clear that a Jewish society that ceased to study this work had no real hope of survival.

The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of halakhah (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidations of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein. It is a conglomerase of law, legend, and philosophy, a blend of unique logic and shrewd pragmatism, of history and science, anecdotes and humor. It is a collection of paradoxes: its framework is orderly and logical, every word and term subjected to meticulous editing, completed centuries after the actual work of composition came to an end; yet it is still based on free association, on a harnessing together of diverse ideas reminiscent of the modern stream-of-consciousness novel. Although its main objective is to interpret and comment on a book of law, it is, simultaneously, a work of art that goes beyond legislation and its practical application. And although the Talmud is, to this day, the primary source of Jewish law, it cannot be cited as an authority for purposes of ruling.

The Talmud treats abstract and totally unrealistic problems in the same manner in which it refers to the most prosaic facts of everyday life, yet succeeds in avoiding abstract terminology. Though based on the principles of tradition and the transmission of authority from generation to generation, it is unparalleled in its eagerness to question and reexamine convention and accepted views and to root out underlying causes. The talmudic method of discussion and demonstration tries to approximate mathematical precision, but without having recourse to mathematical or logical symbols.

The Talmud is best understood through analysis of the basic objectives of its authors and compliers. What were they aiming at, those thousands of sages who spent their lives in debate and discussion in hundreds of large and small centers of learning? The key is to be found in the name of the work: Talmud (that is, study, learning). The Talmud is the embodiment of the great concept of mitzvat talmud Torah—the positive religious duty of studying Torah, of acquiring learning and wisdom, study which is its own end and reward. A certain talmudic sage who has left us nothing but his name and this one dictum had this to say on the subject: “Turn it and turn it again, for everything is contained in the Torah. Regard it and grow old in it and never abandon it, for there is no greater virtue.”

Study of Torah undoubtedly serves numerous practical purposes but these are not the crucial objectives. Study is not geared to the degree of importance or the practical potential of the problems discussed. Its main aim is learning itself. Likewise, knowledge of Torah is not an aid to observance of law but an end in itself. This does not mean that the Talmud is not concerned with the values contained in the material studied. On the contrary, it is stated emphatically that he who studies Torah and does not observe what he studies would better never have been born. A true scholar...
serves as a living example by his way of life and conduct. But this part of the general outlook of the Talmud; for the student poring over the text, study has no other end but knowledge. Every subject pertaining to Torah, or to life as related to torah, is worthy of consideration and analysis, and an attempt is always made to delve into the heart of the matter. In the course of study, the question of whether these analyses are of practical use is never raised. We often encounter in the Talmud protracted and vehement debates on various problems that try to examine the structure of the method and to elucidate the conclusions deriving from it. The scholars invested all this effort despite the fact that they knew the source itself had been rejected and was of no legislative significance. This approach also explains why we find debates on problems that were relevant in the distant past and were unlikely ever to arise again.

It sometimes occurs, of course, that problems or debates once thought impractical or irrelevant gain practical significance in some later age. This is a familiar phenomenon in the sphere of pure science. But this development is of little consequence to the Talmudic student, as, from the outset, his sole objective has been to solve theoretical problems and to seek the truth.

The Talmud is ostensibly constructed along the lines of a legal tract, and many people commit the error of thinking that it is legal in essence. It treats the subjects with which it deals—basic halakhah, biblical verses, or traditions handed down by sages—as natural phenomena, components of objective reality. When a man has dealings with nature, he cannot claim that the subject does not appeal to him or is unworthy of perusal. There are, of course, varying degrees of importance to issues, but all are alike in that they are—they exist and note must be paid to them. When the talmudic sage examined an ancient tradition, he perceived it, above all, as a reality in itself, and whether binding on him or not, it was part of his world and could not be dismissed. When the scholars discuss a rejected idea or source, their attitude resembles that of the scientist contemplating an organism that has become extinct because of its inability to adapt itself to changing conditions. This organism has, in a manner of speaking, “failed” and died out, but his fact does not detract from its interest for the scientist as a subject of study.

One of the greatest historical controversies was that between the methods of the “houses” (schools) of Shammai and Hillel, which lasted for more than a century. It was eventually resolved in the famous dictum: “Both are the words of the living God, and the decision is in accordance with the House of Hillel.” The fact that one method is preferred does not mean that the other is based on a misconception. It, too, is an expression of creativity and of “the words of the living God” When one of the sages ventured to say a certain theory was not to his liking, he was scolded by his colleagues, who informed him that it was wrong to say of Torah, “This is good and this is not.” Such a view is analogous to the case of the scientist who is not permitted to say that a certain creature seems to him “unappealing.” This does not mean to imply that evaluations (even of appeal) should never be made; they should, however, be based on a consciousness of the fact that no man has the right to judge or to determine that a certain object lacks beauty form the purely objective point of view.

This analogy between the natural world and Torah is ancient and was developed at length by the sages. One of its earliest expressions is the theory that just as an architect builds a house according to a blue-print, so the Holy one, Blessed be He, scanned his Torah in creating the world. According to this viewpoint, it follows that there must be a certain correlation between the world and Torah, the latter forming part of the essence of the natural world and not merely constituting external speculation on it. This way of thinking also engendered the view that no subject is too strange, remote, or bizarre to be studied.

The Talmud reflects so wide a range of interest because it is not a homogeneous work composed by a single author. When several people collaborate on a book, they have in mind a certain specific aim which lends the work character and direction. But the Talmud is the end result of the editing of the thoughts and sayings of many scholars over a long period, none whom envisages a final written work at the time. Their remarks were inspired by life, growing out of the problems submitted to them and the exchange of views between the various sages and their disciples. This is why
we cannot discern a clear trend of a specific objective in the Talmud. Each debate is, to a large extent, independent of others and unique, and each subject is the focus of interest at the time it is being discussed. At the same time, the Talmud has an unmistakable and striking character of its own, which does not bear the imprint of an individual, or of the editors, but is collective, reflecting the quality of the Jewish people over a given period. Not only where the thousands of anonymous views are concerned, but also in cases where the identity of the author or proponent is known, the differences between individuals are blurred and the general spirit prevails. However violently two sages may differ, their shared traits and likemindedness must eventually become evident to the reader, who then discerns the overall unity that overcomes all differences.

Since the Talmud is concerned with subjects, ideas, and problems, there evolved over the centuries the custom of quoting various views in the present tense: “Abbaye says, Rabba says.” This stylistic habit reflects the belief that the work is not merely a record of the opinions of the scholars of past ages, and it should not be judged by historical criteria. The Talmudic sages themselves distinguished between personalities and periods (clarification of such questions is, in fact, an integral part of study), but the distinctions are only cited when strictly relevant and are not employed for evaluation and discussion. For those scholars time is not an ever-flowing stream in which the present always obliterate the past; it is understood organically as a living and developing essence, present and future being founded on the living past. Within this wide-ranging process, certain elements take on more stable form, while others, pertaining to the present, are flexible and much more changeable; the process as such, however, is based on faith in the vitality of each element, ancient as it may be, and the importance of its role in the never-ending, self-renewing work of creation.

This process of renewal is closely connected to the centrality of the query in the talmudic debate. To a certain extent, the entire Talmud is framed by questions and answers, and even when not explicitly formulated, questions constitute the background to every statement and interpretation. One of the most ancient methods of studying the Talmud attempted to reconstruct the question on the basis of the statement that serves as a response. It is no coincidence that the Talmud contains so many words denoting questions, ranging from queries aimed at satisfying curiosity to questions that attempt to undermine the validity of the debated issue. The Talmud also differentiates between a fundamental query and a less basic inquiry, a question of principle and marginal query. Voicing doubts is not only legitimate in the Talmud, it is essential to study. To a certain degree, the rule is that any type of query is permissible and even desirable; the more the merrier. No inquiry is regarded as unfair or incorrect as long as it pertains to the issue and can cast light on some aspect of it. This is true not only of the Talmud itself but also of the way in which it is studied and perused. After absorbing the basic material, the student is expected to pose questions to himself and to others and to voice doubts and reservations. From this point of view, the Talmud is perhaps the only sacred book in all of world culture that permits and even encourages the student to question it.

This characteristic leads us to another aspect of the composition and study of the Talmud. It is impossible to arrive at external knowledge of this work. Any description of its subject matter or study methods must, inevitably, be superficial because of the Talmud’s unique nature. True knowledge can only be attained through spiritual communion, and the student must participate intellectually and emotionally in the talmudic debate, himself becoming, to a certain degree, a creator.

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