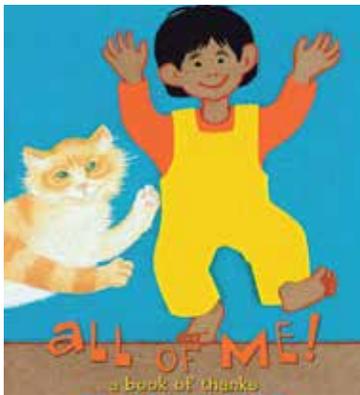


# Global Day of Jewish Learning

## Curriculum: Blessings & Gratitude



NOV·18·12

[www.theglobalday.com](http://www.theglobalday.com)

A Project of the Aleph Society

Written by: **Devorah Katz**

## Introduction (8 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.

➤ **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.

מסכת ברכות דף לה עמוד א:

מן התוספתא מביאים: תנו רבנן (שנו חכמים) אסור לו לאדם להנות מן העולם הזה שהוא רכוש הקב"ה בלא ברכה מקודם, כי כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה הרי זה כאילו מעל בקדשים.

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”?

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### Source #2: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose* (15 minutes)

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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)

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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.

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

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.



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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)

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

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שנתן מכבודו לבשר ודם:  
who has given of His knowledge  
to flesh and blood



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

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שנתן מחכמתו לבשר ודם:  
who has given of His honor  
to flesh and blood



On seeing a person who knows lot of things about lots of things.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שחלק מחכמתו ליראיו:  
who has apportioned from His  
knowledge to those who revere Him



On seeing a person who is really knowledgeable about Torah.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
עשה מעשה בראשית:  
who makes the work of Creation



On seeing lightning, shooting stars, mountains or sunrises.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שככה לו בעולמו:  
who has this in His universe



On seeing trees or creatures of unusual beauty.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
עשה את הים הגדול:  
who makes the great sea



On seeing the ocean.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שלא חסר בעולמו דבר, וברא בו  
בריות טובות ואילנות טובים  
להנות בהם בני אדם:  
who did not leave anything out in  
this world, and created in it good  
creatures and good trees, to benefit  
mankind



On seeing trees blossoming for the first time in the year.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם,  
חכם הרזים:  
Knower of secrets.



On witnessing an assembly of 600,000 or more Jews

### ברכות הראיה

#### The Visual Berakhot.

על הזקין, ועל הזעזועות, ועל הברקים,  
ועל הרעמים, ועל הריחות - אומר,  
ברוך שפחו וגבירתו מלא עולם  
על ההרים, ועל הגבעות, ועל היםים,  
ועל הנחרות, ועל המדברות, אומר -  
ברוך עושה מעשה בראשית  
רבי יהודה אומר, הרואה הים הגדול,  
אומר -  
ברוך העושה הים הגדול - בזמן שרואה  
אתו לפרקים  
על הגשמים, ועל הבשורות טובות,  
אומר -  
ברוך הטוב והמטיב  
ועל השמועות רעות, אומר -  
ברוך דין האמת:  
(משנה ברכות ט,ב)

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 are 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)