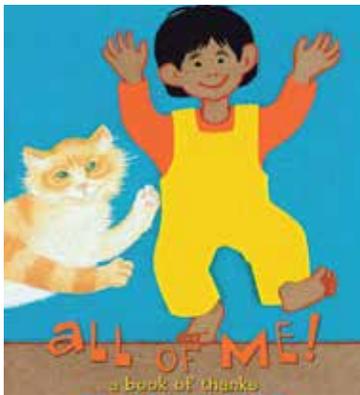


# Global Day of Jewish Learning

## Curriculum: Blessings & Gratitude



NOV·18·12

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

A Project of the Aleph Society



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**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 Wonderful World of some Wacky Blessings

### Source: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35a (5 minutes)

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.

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 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.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם  
שנתן מוכבודו 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 האיקון, ועל התעלות, ועל התקנים,  
ועל הרעמים, ועל הרוחות - אומר,  
ברוך שפלאו וקבירתו כולא עולם  
על ההרים, ועל התעלות, ועל תימים,  
ועל התהרות, ועל המוד פרות, אומר -  
ברוך עושה מעשה בראשית  
רבי יהודה אומר, הרוחה הים הגדול,  
אומר -  
ברוך העושה הים הגדול - בזמן שרוחה  
אתו לפתקים  
על הגשמים, ועל הששורות טובות,  
אומר -  
ברוך הטוב והפטיב  
ועל השמועות רעות, אומר -  
ברוך דין האמות:  
(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)



# The Wonderful World of some Wacky Blessings

## 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?

