



*Getting Great at
Being Grateful*

Hakarat Hatov, Gratitude

GRATITUDE

Jewish wisdom rigorously builds gratitude into our daily lives. It offers an array of rituals, blessings, and teachings to guide us towards an all-pervasive “attitude of gratitude.”

In fact, when we look at current science, we see just how wise Jewish tradition is in its insistence on fostering thankfulness.

Take the book, *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*. In it, author and neuropsychologist Dr. Rick Hanson explains that we are hardwired to remember negative experiences better than positive ones. This is because, as a species, our survival has depended on remembering where danger might lurk. Our biology does this to protect us, of course, but ironically, it actually causes us unnecessary and damaging anxiety and negativity.

Dr. Hanson says that, luckily, we can change our bodies’ innate tendency to focus on the bad by deliberately focusing on and savoring life’s good experiences. That simple shift in attitude can profoundly rectify our hardwiring.

Ample research has demonstrated the overwhelming benefits of gratitude. In one striking study,¹ researchers analyzed the medical records of American nuns. Sixty years earlier, as part of the process for entering the convent, each of them had written an

autobiographical letter about her life and why she wanted to become a nun. Close to seven hundred nuns gave permission to have their records and letters scrutinized. The letters were coded, among other things, for gratitude and other positive emotions.

Researchers contrasted the medical records of the elderly nuns, who had lived a stable and relatively similar lifestyle to one another, with how positively they described their lives in their twenties. The results were striking: nuns who expressed more positive emotions in their early autobiographies lived significantly longer – by an average of seven years – than those expressing fewer positive emotions.

We can be grateful that Jewish life guides us to fill our days with gratitude. From the moment we open our eyes, we are invited to start the day with the words, “*Modeh Ani* – thankful am I” – as the first utterance to grace our lips.

In this section, we’ll explore the centrality of the Hebrew notion of *hakarat hatov* – recognizing the good. We will see how our tradition directs us to build habits of focusing on the good in our lives. Moreover, we will see how being in that place of *hakarat hatov* helps us to better recognize those around us who are in need. We will explore how we can work to ensure that they, too, receive the blessings that we so enjoy.

1 Deborah D. Danner, David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen, “Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80.5 (2001): 804–13. Quoted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his wonderful article, “The Power of Gratitude” (*Ekev* 5775), <http://rabbisacks.org/the-power-of-gratitude-ekav-5775>.

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

What's the best way to start your day?

If we want to have a great and meaningful day, Jewish tradition invites us to have an “attitude of gratitude” from the moment we open our eyes. Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *What role does gratitude play in your life?*
- *In what areas of your life might you be taking things for granted and not readily recognizing goodness?*
- *How can you choose gratitude even in difficult circumstances?*
- *What is the connection between gratitude and responsibility?*

The following prayer was composed by **Rabbi Moshe Ben Reb Yehudah ibn Machir**, one of the Kabbalists who lived in Safed in the 1500s. He wrote that one should recite the prayer upon rising in the morning.

Modah² ani l'fanecha, Melech chai v'kayam, she-he-cheh-zarta bee nishma-ti b'chemlah; rabah emunatecha.

I thank You, living and sustaining Ruler, for returning my soul to me with compassion; great is Your faithfulness.

- *One message of this morning prayer is that life itself is a gift. What are the greatest gifts in your life, and how can reflecting on them affect your morning?*
- *What impact might it have for your children to start their day with gratitude?*
- *If we are so grateful, we might expect the prayer to end with our faithfulness and trust in God to whom we are expressing our gratefulness. What meaning might we draw from the wording at the end of the prayer that points to God's faithfulness and trust in us?!*



² Although the prayer is called *Modeh Ani*, a woman should say *Modah*, which is the feminine form of the Hebrew verb, “to thank.”

GOOD POINTS

What can propel us with enthusiasm and energy to make the most of our day?

The opening chapter of the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) states: “Arise like a lion to serve the Creator in the morning.”

Really? How do we do that? Think of the magnitude of the coffee industry and you’ll find that this is not as easy as it seems. So how do we get there?

Reb Noson of Breslov offers this guidance: Start the day by thinking of a “good point” – a personal appreciation, a good deed you’ve done, an acknowledgment of self-worth, an aspect of divinity, a strength.

When we focus on the good in ourselves in an honest, authentic way, even if it’s regarding something small, it can magnify the goodness. It’s not about delusional self-aggrandizement but about an honest look at the good that is in us, because there is good in each person. An honest point of inner appreciation sustains and awakens a person from sleep – both actual sleep and the heaviness that sometimes weighs us down from being fully alive and present.

Noticing your own goodness can fuel your engine. It might not come naturally, but it is suggested as a spiritual practice.

When we begin our day with appreciation for ourselves and our blessings, it’s easier to see the good in others and to approach challenges by looking for “bright spots.” This helps set a positive tone for the entire day.

- *What “good point,” strength, or inner gift do you possess that you can call upon to help you roar out of bed in the morning?*

Focusing on the Good in Others

Dr. John Mordecai Gottman, who conducted forty years of research with thousands of couples, found that focusing on the positive, especially during conflict, is central to marital stability.

While every couple argues, whether about laundry, intimacy, parenting, or money, Dr. Gottman found that the difference between happy and unhappy couples is the balance between positive and negative interactions during conflicts.

Get ready for this: In happy couples, the research showed that for every negative interaction during conflict, there were five or more positive interactions. Gottman writes, “We fail to fulfill the potential in relationships because we fail to appreciate what *is* working.”

Go easy on catching the other doing something wrong; instead, catch them doing something right, and appreciate them for it!

- *How might you build a practice of noticing and mentioning even the little things? I noticed your warm smile this morning. Thank you for bathing the kids. I enjoyed the salad you made for dinner.*

Focusing on Bright Spots when Facing Complex Challenges

When we deal with daily challenges, we naturally focus on the problems at hand. What’s broken and how do we fix it? This troubleshooting mindset can serve us well in solving simple or technical problems. However, when facing complex or engrained issues, focusing on what’s broken can keep our wheels spinning ineffectively. Bestselling authors Dan

and Chip Heath tell the following story in their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*.³

When Jerry Sternin of Save the Children arrived in Vietnam in 1990 to fight malnutrition, he got a chilly welcome. Sternin didn't speak Vietnamese, and had minimal staff as well as meager resources. It was clear he was not set up to deal with the underlying issues of poverty and lack of clean water.

Sternin was committed to doing whatever he could to help children, and he knew that mothers were the key. He traveled to a local village and gathered the mothers together. They were happy to help him find ways to better nourish their children.

First, Sternin had teams of mothers go from house to house to weigh and measure each child in the village. When they found children in very poor households who were bigger and healthier than the typical child, Sternin guided them to study what the mothers of those children were doing differently with regard to the typical eating practices of the village.

The village norms were to feed children twice a day along with the rest of their family, and they ate food that was deemed appropriate for children – soft, pure, highest-quality rice.

But by speaking with dozens of families, the volunteer mothers discovered that in the homes of the bright-spot children, the mothers deviated from these norms. They were feeding their children four meals a day, using the same amount of food but spreading it across four

smaller servings rather than two. It turned out that children's malnourished stomachs couldn't process a lot of food in one sitting, so the smaller portions meant more of the food was being properly digested.

There was also a difference in what the bright-spot mothers served their children and how they fed them. They were including bits of protein they collected and some sweet potato greens, which were considered a low-class food. And they were feeding the children more actively, not trusting them to feed themselves from the communal bowl as was the norm.

Focusing on the bright spots of the village's local wisdom, Sternin organized groups of mothers to cook together and learn these practices from their bright-spot counterparts. While dozens of experts had attempted to analyze the situation in Vietnam, agonizing over the problems, six months after Sternin's visit to the Vietnamese village, 65 percent of its children were better nourished – and they stayed that way. From there the success spread to other villages, eventually reaching 2.2 million Vietnamese in 265 villages.

- *Where in your life have you been challenged with seeking out bright spots in your field of vision? What is one thing that can help you develop a practice of seeking them out: in yourself, in others, and regarding complex challenges you are dealing with?*

³ Excerpt(s) from *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, copyright © 2007 by Chip Heath and Dan Heath. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Project: River of Life/River of Blessing

Using poster board and markers, draw your life path – starting from birth until now – as a flowing river, moving from one turning point to another. Highlight “gratitude/blessing points” along the way: times on your life journey where you have had key experiences – both challenges and opportunities – and consider what you can be grateful for at each key moment or turning point.

- *As you look back on your River of Life, how does it make you feel?*
- *Are there any points in your River of Life that felt like disappointments or obstacles at the time but that you now see as blessings?*
- *As you move forward in your River of Life, what practices might support you to appreciate the blessings that you have?*



GRATITUDE IN TOUGH TIMES

Our sages ask, “Who is rich?” They answer, “One who rejoices in their own portion.”⁴

How can we build the gratitude muscle in ourselves and in our children, so that even when things are hard we can be grateful for our portion – for what we have and who we are?

Genesis 29:32–35

God saw that Leah was unloved and He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben. She declared, “It means: ‘God has seen my affliction’; and: ‘Now my husband will love me.’” She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, “This is because God heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also”; so she named him Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, “This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons.” Therefore he was named Levi. She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, “This time I will praise God.” Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

וַתֵּהָרֵא לְאֵה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָהּ כִּי רָאָה
ה' בְּעֵינָי כִּי עָתָה יִאֱהָבֵנִי אִישִׁי. וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאְמַר
כִּי שָׂמַע ה' כִּי שְׁנֹאָה אֹכְלִי וַיִּתֵּן לִי גַם אֶת זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
שִׁמְעוֹן. וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאְמַר עָתָה הִפְעֵם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי
אֵלַי כִּי יִלְדֹתִי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים עַל כֵּן קָרָאת שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי. וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד
וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאְמַר הִפְעֵם אוֹדָה אֶת ה' עַל כֵּן קָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה
וַתַּעֲמֹד מִלְדוֹת.

After our forefather Jacob ran away from his home, he found refuge in the home of his uncle Laban. Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob immediately fell in love with Rachel and offered to work for his uncle for seven years in order to marry her. After seven years, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah as a wife instead, claiming that in his culture the older daughter must always get married before the younger. Jacob later married Rachel as well.

Leah always knew that Jacob preferred Rachel, and when she had her first three children, her names for them reflected her longing for her husband’s love. When her fourth son was born, though, she stopped focusing on what she did not have and expressed her gratitude instead. How do you think Leah is able to go from her sorrowful naming of her first three sons to her expression of gratitude when her fourth son is born? How is she able to shift her attitude?

- *Where have you seen someone shift attitude? Where have you shifted your attitude, or where would you like to?*
- *What practices can help you and your children grow habits of gratitude that can sustain you even in tough times?*
- *The words “Jew,” “Jewish,” and “Judaism” come from the name “Judah.” In Hebrew, “Judah” has the same root as today, “thank you.” Jews are essentially people of gratitude. Where can you see this meaning of “Jewish” in your life, in your community, or in the world? What might you do to enable others to see this aspect of what it means to be Jewish?*

4 Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers) 4:1.

100 BLESSINGS A DAY

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Babylonian Talmud, *Menachot 43b*

Rabbi Meir would say: A person is obligated to make one hundred blessings every day.

.....
 תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום

Making a hundred blessings each day is not meant to be merely a metaphor; many Jews actually strive for this. On Shabbat, when the prayer service includes fewer blessings than on weekdays, they search out extra

opportunities to make blessings in order to hit the one hundred mark.

Enjoy the process of looking for a variety of blessings in your life. Our sages teach that they can be found throughout our day-to-day lives: from beholding rainbows or hearing thunder, to talking with a wise person or seeing an important head of state.

- *How might your life and the lives of the people around you be affected by saying one hundred blessings a day? If this were the norm in a community, what might the community be like?*
- *What conflicts or complexities arise with gratitude? Research suggests that issues of independence or self-reliance can collide with gratitude for some people. Where have you encountered barriers to being more grateful?*

Rabbi Meir (Land of Israel, 2nd century) was one of the greatest sages of the Mishnah. Beruriah, his wife, was also a famous Torah scholar known for her great piety and wisdom.



GLOBAL CELEBRATIONS OF THANKSGIVING WITH *HAKARAT HATOV*

Ideas for your Thanksgiving

- Whether it's Kinrō Kansha No Hi, Erntedankfest, or Thanksgiving, many cultures select a day to focus on thankfulness. Go around the room and ask everyone to share with the group what they are grateful for at this time.
- If your country or culture doesn't have a specific Thanksgiving day, consider establishing an annual family thanksgiving tradition.
- Recite Psalms chapter 100 as a Jewish expression of gratitude at your Thanksgiving table.
- Think of people in your neighborhood who might not have a place to go for Thanksgiving dinner. Call and invite them to your meal.
- Instead of preparing another dish for your meal, set aside the amount of money it would have cost to buy the ingredients, and donate that amount to others as a *tzedakah* offering.

Psalm 100

A song for a thanksgiving. Shout to God, everyone on earth.

Serve with joy, come before Him with song.

Know that the Lord is God; He made us and we are His, people and the flock of His pasture.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courtyards with praise; give thanks to Him; bless His name.

For God is good; His kindness is eternal and His faithfulness is everlasting from generation to generation.



LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Spotlight on Israel



What can happen when we practice gratitude even in moments and times that are unsettling? When things fall apart, are unjust, or just plain nasty? When we feel depleted or drained? What if even then we are thankful for being alive? If we look around, see beauty, and are thankful again and again for a sound, a scent, a smile?

Could this grow within us a realization that we are not alone? Could it help us realize that what we have is a gift? Could it give us perspective on how we are continually gifted by the generosity of other people and God?

Being thankful for what we have can actually offer a clarity that helps us figure out and set priorities. It can energize us toward pursuing what we want.

Here's the story of Hannah Senesh (1921–1944), who grew up in Budapest but left Hungary for the Land of Israel in 1939.

The Walk to Caesarea (“Eli Eli”) by Hannah Senesh

My God, My God,	אלי, אלי
May these never end:	שלא יגמר לעולם
The sand and the sea	החול והים,
The rush of the waters	רשרוש של המים,
The flash of the heavens	ברק השמיים,
The prayer of Man.	תפילת האדם.

Hannah Senesh wrote her famous poem, “The Walk to Caesarea” (commonly known as “Eli Eli”), while living at Kibbutz Sdot Yam. Ten days earlier, she joined a group planning to establish an agricultural settlement at Caesarea. In fourteen words, the poem captures her appreciation of and love for the world around her.

Several months later, Hannah enlisted in the British Air Force. In 1944, she parachuted into Yugoslavia near the Hungarian border to rescue Jews. She was caught by the Hungarian police and tortured over the next several months. Despite these conditions – and the Hungarian police imprisoning her mother to force her to talk – Hannah refused to divulge any information about her mission. Throughout her ordeal she remained steadfast in her courage, and when she was executed by a firing squad on November 7, 1944, she refused the blindfold, staring squarely at her executioners and her fate. Hannah was only 23 years old.

In 1945, Israeli composer David Zehavi set “The Walk to Caesarea” to music, and it has since become a virtual second anthem in Israel. In 1950, Senesh’s remains were brought to Israel and re-interred at the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.⁵

- *What are the things that you are so grateful for that you wish they would never end?*

- *How might have Senesh’s attitude in this poem given her the courage to resist the Hungarian police?*
- *Who are your heroes, and how do they inspire you?*
- *Whose hero do you want to be?*
- *What concrete action in terms of developing an “attitude of gratitude” can you take this week, inspired by Hannah Senesh and other heroes?*

Gratitude Can Lead to Acts of Courage

Studying Jewish history, many young Israelis are inspired to guard and protect Israel and the important role it has for Jews all over the world. The organization, Thank Israeli Soldiers, offers different ways to thank these soldiers and engage others to do so as well: www.thankisraelisoldiers.org.

- Send emails to your family and friends to publicize the project.
- Organize package drives in your synagogue, school, and community.
- Publicize the care package program with bar/bat mitzvah students and *chesed* organizations.
- Raise funds and collect donations of supplies.

⁵ Text adapted from: http://israelforever.org/interact/multimedia/eli_eli/ and <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/poem-of-the-week/1.643772>. Watch Ofra Haza perform “Eli Eli” at: <http://bit.ly/2cG8fjz>, and Lior Ben Hur and Sol Tewel perform an updated version at: <http://bit.ly/2cIQwJw>.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Gratitude and Responsibility

When we experience the blessings in our lives, we are called to think of others who are in need and to share our blessings with them.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Festivals 6:18

When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed strangers, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. By contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is [not indulging in] rejoicing associated with a *mitzvah*, but rather the rejoicing of his stomach.

וכשהוא אוכל ושותה, חייב להאכיל לגר ליתום ולאלמנה עם שאר העניים האמיללים. אבל מי שנועל דלתות חצרו ואוכל ושותה הוא ובניו ואשתו, ואינו מאכיל ומשקה לעניים ולמרי נפש--אין זו שמחת מצוה, אלא שמחת כרסו.

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides or the Rambam, was a prolific medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher and physician, and was one of the most influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

- What is the connection between rejoicing as a “mitzvah” and including those who are less fortunate? What does this connection teach us about gratitude?
- Can you think of a time when a meal or a party felt like “rejoicing of the stomach”?
- Can you think of a time when a meal or party felt like true rejoicing? Like true rejoicing that was spiritually meaningful in addition to fun? Where participants took pleasure in both the food and the deeper meaning of the celebration?
- Will you be hosting any events or meals in the near future? Whom might you reach out to and include? It isn’t always straightforward to find and invite those in true need; what strategies and help might you seek to find those who might benefit from a good celebratory meal? They might be closer than you think – someone going through illness, divorce, job loss, or the like. How might you involve your children in the experience?

HUNGER BY THE NUMBERS

1 in 9

People in the world struggle with hunger

That's 821 million people⁶

1 in 5

Israelis live below the poverty line

That's 1.6 million Israelis, including 638,000 children and 162,900 seniors⁷

- *What are the hunger statistics in your community?*
- *Who in your community helps those in need?*
- *What ideas might you have to include feeding the hungry in your next celebration?*
- *How might you involve your children?*
- *With whom can you partner to take action?*

⁶ 2018 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics, in *Hunger Notes, 2018*, World Hunger Education Service: Washington, DC, worldhunger.org.

⁷ Information taken (November 2019) from *Hunger By the Numbers*, <http://mazon.org/the-reality-of-hunger/hunger-by-the-numbers>.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Become a Connoisseur of Joy

By Adrienne Gold Davis

In Jewish life, there seems to be a blessing for everything! There is a blessing for seeing a rainbow, a blessing after using the bathroom, a blessing for seeing a beautiful person. But my favorite blessing is about 6 inches wide and 4 inches deep, made of fine ceramic and edged in gold leaf. It is a beautiful ceramic “prayer bowl,” handmade by the artist Marla Buck. Engraved on the inside bottom of this gorgeous bowl is the word *Todah*, Thanks, in Hebrew and English... but you don't see it until your bowl is emptied. There is a deep Jewish message in this concept. While it is easy to feel grateful for the food you are given when you are hungry, it is more of a challenge to offer thanks and feel true gratitude once your hunger has been sated. This is why we Jews say a blessing after a meal as well as before. And the after-blessing is the longer one. This helps us develop our gratitude muscle.

Grateful people are happy people. Gratitude helps us maximize life's pleasures and become connoisseurs of joy. And we were created to experience deep pleasure. The challenge, it seems, is to find reasons for thanksgiving in all experiences, both when we have our needs met with that steaming bowl of soup and, even more so, when we are replete! Perhaps that is why it is easier to say “please” than “thank you.” And that too is tied into the magic of the Hebrew word for thank you. The word *todah* comes from the word

hodayah, which means “acknowledgment,” or “to admit.” What is the connection? When we say thank you, we admit and acknowledge that we have received a kindness from another. We admit we had a need that they filled for us.

One of my best friends is a tremendous athlete and a fitness fanatic. She also has an unquenchable thirst for activity and productivity, and gets by on very little sleep. Her self-concept has always been tied to her ability to get the job done, to climb that mountain on her bike, to help others with her tireless energy. And then she quite literally broke her back.

In her personal relationships she struggled with accepting help or assistance. And then she suffered this accident, followed by surgery, which felled her for three full months. Thank God, she recovered fully and is back to her old self – except for one key piece. Being forced “out of action” required her to allow those who love her to give to her, to help her. And this, in turn, enabled her to find the blessing and the gifts of embracing vulnerability. Today she says a deep thank you to God for “knocking her flat.”

Sometimes life's blessings come hidden in struggle, and sometimes they are obvious. My friend said she was in so much agony before her surgery that she “couldn't hear over the pain,” but once she could stand again, there was a



stillness and a silence that she had previously taken for granted. She said she had never heard that silence before.

Being thankful often means silencing the noise in our heads and listening for that “still, small voice” inside. May all of our gratitude come in easy and pleasurable bowls of joy. But let’s not forget to search for the blessings that sometimes are only uncovered when all the food is gone!

- *When have you placed expectations on yourself that prevent you from experiencing vulnerability?*
- *How might it feel to quiet the voices whispering those expectations, making space for vulnerability and allowing others to offer you their support?*
- *In what ways can opening yourself to vulnerability help you develop your “gratitude muscle”?*

TRY IT OUT

PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Practical ideas for bringing the value of Hakarat Hatov, Gratitude, into your family life

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on MomentumUnlimited.org.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases to consider:
 - I'm grateful for who I am and what I have; *dayeinu* (it's enough!)
 - I focus on good points in myself and others
 - "It's good to thank God" (Psalm 92)
- Place a small notebook by your bed. Before going to sleep each night, write three things that went well that day and what you see as the causal explanation for each good thing.
- Choose someone you are having a difficult time appreciating. Choosing yourself is also an option. Commit to verbally thank or appreciate that person once daily or weekly for a certain period of time.
- Set 10–20 minutes a week, in the next few weeks, with a Momentum sister or another trusted person to talk about your gratitude practice and/or explore a Learn with Your Sister piece in this chapter.

- *Hakarat hatov* is bigger than gratitude; it's recognition for the things we have and the people we sometimes take for granted. Check out this video made by a mother of two (and start-up founder) as she shares how Judaism can help us count our blessings, literally, in our families and with young kids: "What's Jewish About Gratitude?" <http://bit.ly/2ccR8nB>.
- Before a festive gathering, or a Shabbat or holiday meal, consider asking guests to email or text you five things they are grateful for. Print them out and cut out each one as a separate strip of paper. Then put them into a pretty glass on the table, a Gratitude Goblet. Guests can read them. This activity helps set an appreciative and open mindset for your gathering.

For Families with Children of All Ages

- Read the story, *The Curse of Blessings*, by Mitchell Chefetz together, available at www.bit.ly/2bVwfkC, and discuss its message.
- Write thank you notes to family members, teachers, and friends who have helped you.
- Give everyone in your family a small notebook or journal. Encourage them to write

down, every night, three things for which they are grateful from that day.

- Create with your family a list of one hundred blessings for which you are all grateful. Hang up the list of blessings on the front door, in the kitchen, or on the bathroom mirror to remind yourselves of your blessings every day!
- Volunteer at a local organization that helps others who do not enjoy the blessings that you have.
- Call someone whom you never thanked and tell them why you are grateful to them.
- Consider reading and sharing Abraham Lincoln's "Thanksgiving Proclamation" from October 1863. The brief but moving speech establishes the third Thursday in November as the United States' Thanksgiving holiday and gives thanks to God for all the blessings the nation is experiencing, even in the midst of war. It reminds all its readers to cultivate gratitude on Thanksgiving and any time of year.

For Families with Young Children

- Mornings are hectic times in any household with children. Routine helps children

navigate the morning more successfully. Just as you feed your child's body with breakfast, feed your child's soul with wonder, awe, and blessings: adding the *Modeh Ani* blessing to your morning routine, nurturing spirituality, meaning, and connection.

Cuddle before the morning rush begins, share something you are grateful for, and invite your child to do the same. After you've both shared, recite or sing *Modeh Ani* together. Here are a few *Modeh Ani* melodies to try:

- Modeh Ani #1: www.bit.ly/2ccRiLO
- Modeh Ani #2: www.bit.ly/2bWLPUM
- Beautiful song based on Modeh Ani: www.bit.ly/2ca0QVS
- Watch the Shaboom! episode "Everything is Amazing-*Hakarat Hatov*-An Everyday Jewish Idea for Kids," with your young children to help them learn how to be more thankful. The video shows them how to turn disappointment into gratitude by seeing the good in life and being thankful for what we have, rather than wishing for what we don't have.

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session, we explore the value of hakarat hatov, gratitude

The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *What role does gratitude play in your life?*
- *In what areas of your life might you be taking things for granted and not readily recognizing goodness?*
- *How can you choose gratitude even in difficult circumstances?*
- *What is the connection between gratitude and responsibility?*

Meaningful Vocabulary

tov	טוב	good
hakarat hatov	הַכָּרַת הַטּוֹב	recognizing the good
modah ani (said by a female)	מוֹדָה אֲנִי	thankful am I
modeh ani (said by a male)	מוֹדֵה אֲנִי	

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Hosting the event
- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Leading the River of Life/River of Blessing Soul Spark activity (p. 160)

Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Optional: Be in touch with participants several days in advance, and ask them to prepare for this session by reading Mitchell Chefitz's short story, "The Curse of Blessings" (www.bit.ly/2bVwfkC). Let them know you'll use this story for inspiration and discussion during the session.

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs. Our **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room by arranging the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need to facilitate your **Soul Sparks** activities, and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. We suggest engaging the women in a short stretching exercise, or in focusing on taking deep, relaxing breaths.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro and Inspiration

Optional Introductory Activity: Invite each woman to think of a time someone noticed a need she had and acted on it in a way that made her grateful. Then have the women reframe the act, not as something for which they are merely grateful, but rather as an actual gift. Invite them to consider and appreciate the cost (not necessarily financial) incurred by the person extending the gift, and to recognize the personal value of the gift they received.

Tell participants: If there was a new wonder drug that got children to feel happier, improve their grades, and avoid risky behaviors, many parents would be eager to acquire it. Happily, Jewish tradition has advocated such a product, which has no ill side effects and is available to anyone at any time. It's called gratitude. Indeed, the word Yehudi, "Jew," shares the same Hebrew root as the word for thanking, as we'll see in this session.

In the past few decades, researchers, too, have discovered gratitude to be a miracle cure. The reframing exercise we began with comes from research presented in the book, *Making Grateful Kids: The Science of Character Development*, by Jeffrey J. Froh and Giacomo Bono. The research

indicates that focusing on gratitude, with activities such as this reframing one, and such as the activities in this session, improve well-being for children and adults alike.

Discuss with participants:

- How would your life change if you had a strong practice of seeing and recognizing good throughout your life?
- Have you ever had an experience where a regular practice of gratitude had a deep impact on you?
- What practices have you seen or tried in order to bring gratitude into your life or the lives of your children?

Introduce the Hebrew phrase for gratitude, *hakarat hatov*. Ask the women to share with the group three words they associate with gratitude. After everyone has shared, think together about the themes, longings, and conflicts that emerged. Make a note for yourself about which of these themes are connected to this session, and which themes you would like to follow up on in future meetings.

6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

River of Life/River of Blessing (p. 160)

- Engage participants in this activity.
- When participants have completed their River of Life/River of Blessing boards, consider whether to have everyone share, or to ask for volunteers to share their pieces with the other participants.
- Discuss with participants the questions on pages 160–161.

100 Blessings A Day

Read 100 Blessings a Day together (p. 162). Ask participants to reflect for a few moments on a blessing they already know, or to create their own blessing to express their gratitude. Go around the room and have each woman explain the blessing she is about to make, and then recite her blessing.

- Watch the 3-minute video, “Grateful for the Partial,” by Diva Communications.
- Ask participants why they think people should make one hundred blessings a day. Wouldn’t ten or twenty suffice? What happens to a family that is constantly looking for something to bless?
- If you did not have participants read “The Curse of Blessings” in advance, consider reading it to them here to underscore the power of making blessings.

7. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

Ask participants to think about the following: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “A *hakarot hatov* idea or practice that I would like to begin with my family is....” Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts with the group. Point them to the chart at the end of the unit where they can set goals for *hakarot hatov* (pp. 172–173). Encourage sisters to support each other in the coming weeks, making time to share and celebrate their progress in your sessions.

Direct the women’s attention to the Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families section (pp. 170–171). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Suggest that everyone do one thing before the next session that will lead to more *hakarot hatov* (e.g. keeping a gratitude journal, reciting *Modeh Ani* or other blessings, creating a list of one hundred blessings with the rest of the family). Ask them to come prepared to talk about it at the next session.

Provide participants with the opportunity to schedule a time with their learning partner before they leave the session today (see *Learn with Your Sister*, pp. 164–169). Let all the women know when you'll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, you may consider the following activities:

Gratitude Journal

- Give out small notebooks, journals, or scrapbooks to participants.
- Have them write one takeaway from the session and three things for which they are grateful right now.
- Encourage them to write every night (either individually or as a family activity) three things for which they are grateful from that day. Participants should continue to fill in the gratitude journal every night, and to observe the difference that *hakarat hatov*, gratitude and awareness of blessings, will make in their lives.

The Dawn of a New Day (p. 157)

- Ask a sister to learn *Modeh Ani*, the prayer that Jews recite when we first open our eyes in the morning, and to teach the words to the other participants
- Encourage her to find different musical versions of *Modeh Ani* online to share with the group, and consider learning a new melody together (see also p. 171).
- Have the sister facilitate a discussion by asking, “How would it change your life to start every day with gratitude?”

Hakarat Hatov and Family Practice

- Ask a sister to lead a conversation with the women about bringing the value of *hakarat hatov* into their families, possibly through an annual thanksgiving celebration (see also p. 163).



Proceeds from the sales of Year of Growth are used entirely to cover costs of creating, producing, distributing, and supporting the successful use of this educational resource.

We'd value hearing from you about how you are using *Year of Growth*. You can share ideas and suggestions at <https://momentumunlimited.org/year-of-growth>

Momentum Unlimited

6101 Executive Blvd, Suite 240, Rockville, MD 20852

240-747-7080 | info@MomentumUnlimited.org