

Attitude of Gratitude

טוב להודות ליי It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord.
—Psalms 92:2

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.

—Cicero

מודה אני לפניך, מלך חי וקים, שהחזרת בי נשמתִי בחמלה, רבה אמונתך.

I am grateful to You, living, enduring Sovereign, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure.

—Siddur

Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 35a-b

ת"ר אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה וכל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה מעל מאי תקנתיה ילך אצל חכם ילך אצל חכם מאי עביד ליה הא עביד ליה איסורא אלא אמר רבא ילך אצל חכם מעיקרא וילמדנו ברכות כדי שלא יבא לידי מעילה אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל כל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה כאילו נהנה מקדשי שמים שנא' (תהילים כד) לה' הארץ ומלואה ר' לוי רמי כתיב לה' הארץ ומלואה וכתוב (תהילים קטו) השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם לא קשיא כאן קודם ברכה... אמר רבי חנינא בר פפא: כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה כאילו גוזל להקדוש ברוך הוא וכנסת ישראל.

The Rabbis taught in an old teaching (baraita): It is forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing. And whoever derives benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing has committed an act of Me'ilah (unauthorized use of Temple property). What is the remedy? One should go to a sage.

One should go to a sage? What can the sage do for him now? Why, he has already committed the transgression! Rather, Rava said: the teaching means that one should go to a sage initially, and the sage will teach him the laws of the blessings, so that this should not happen.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, whoever derives benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing is regarded as if he has derived benefit from the consecrated property of God in Heaven, for it is stated: "To Hashem belongs the earth and its fullness." (Psalms 24:1)

Rabbi Levi brought another verse to contrast: "As for the heavens – the heavens are Hashem's, but the earth He has given to mankind." (Psalms 115:16) We must say that there is no contradiction: the first verse refers to the moment before one recites a blessing, whereas the second one refers to after one recites a blessing...

Rabbi Hanina Bar Papa said: Anyone who enjoys anything from this world without a blessing, it is as if they have stolen from God and the community of Israel.

Dayenu, Haggadah, 9th century

So many good things came from God to us, *Dayenu!*

כמה מעלות טובות למקום עלינו

Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 58a

בן זומא ראה אוכלוסא על גב מעלה בהר הבית, אמר: ברוך חכם הרזים, וברוך שברא כל אלו לשמשני. הוא היה אומר: כמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא פת לאכול: חרש, וזרע, וקצר, ועמר, ודש, וזרה, וברר, וטחן, והרקיד, ולש, ואפה, ואחר כך אכל, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלו מתוקנין לפני. וכמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא בגד ללבוש: גזז ולבן ונפץ וטוה וארג, ואחר כך מצא בגד ללבוש, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלה מתוקנים לפני.

Ben Zoma saw many people on the steps of the Temple mount. He said: “Blessed is One who knows secrets, and blessed is the One who created all these to serve me.”

He would say: “How many labors did primordial Adam have to work at until he found bread to eat?! He plowed, planted, harvested and stacked the sheaves. He threshed, winnowed, sorted, ground, and sifted, kneaded, baked and after all this he ate. And I wake up and find all these done before me. And how many labors did primordial Adam have to work at until he found clothes to wear?! He sheared, cleaned, combed, spun, weaved, and then he had clothing to wear. And I wake up and find all these prepared for me.”

Shmuel Hanaggid (993-1056 CE)

Ingratitude to man is ingratitude to God.

First Thanksgiving Proclamation, George Washington, October 3, 1789, NY

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor – and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be – That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks – for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation – for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war – for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed— for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted – for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually—to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed – to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord – To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us – and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

Mishna Brachot 9:5

חַיֵּב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ עַל הַרְעָה כְּשֵׁם שֶׁהוּא מְבָרֵךְ עַל הַטּוֹבָה, שְׁנֵאָמַר (דְּבָרִים ו) וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכֹל מְאֹדְךָ. בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ, בְּשֵׁנֵי יִצְרֶיךָ, בְּיִצֵּר טוֹב וּבְיִצֵּר רָע. וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ, אֶפְלוּ הוּא נֹטֵל אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ. וּבְכֹל מְאֹדְךָ, בְּכֹל מְמוֹנְךָ. דְּבַר אַחֵר בְּכֹל מְאֹדְךָ, בְּכֹל מְדָה וּמְדָה שֶׁהוּא מוֹדֵד לָךְ הֵי מוֹדָה לֹו בְּמֵאֵד מְאֵד.

One is obligated to bless for evil just as one blesses for good, as it is said “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul/life and all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5) “All your heart” means with both hearts, your good inclination and your evil inclination. “All your spirit” means even at the cost of your life. “All your might” means with all your material possessions. Another interpretation of “all your might” is that whatever treatment God metes out for you, thank God very, very much.

Mekhilta, 20:20

Rabbi Akiva said: Be not like those who honor their gods in prosperity and curse them in adversity. In pleasure or pain, give thanks.

Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 54b

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: There are four [classes of people] who have to offer thanksgiving: those who have crossed the sea, those who have traversed the wilderness, one who has recovered from an illness, and a prisoner who has been set free.

What blessing should they say? Rab Judah said: ‘Blessed is He who bestows loving-kindnesses’. Abaye said: And he must utter his thanksgiving in the presence of ten, as it is written: Let them exalt God in the assembly of the people. Mar Zutra said: And two of them must be rabbis, as it says, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. R. Ashi disagreed: You might as well say that all of them should be rabbis! — Is it written, ‘In the assembly of elders’? It is written, ‘In the assembly of the people’! — Let us say then, in the presence of ten ordinary people and two rabbis [in addition]? — This is a difficulty. (Quotes are from Psalm 107:23-31)

Leviticus Rabbah 9:7

In the future, all sacrifices will be abolished, except that of thanksgiving.

Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 53b

The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Lord of the universe, show Your gratefulness unto me for making You known in the world'. God replied. 'My gratefulness is not with you,' (Psalms 16:2) but with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who first made Me known in the world, as it is said, 'With the holy that are in the earth; they are the mighty ones in whom is all My delight.' (Ps. 16:3)

The Odyssey, Book 6 lines 262-8

This man comes to us a wanderer and unhappy, and to him our cares are due. The stranger and the stranger and the poor are sent by Jove, and slight regards to them are grateful. Maidens, give the stranger food and drink, and take him to the river-side to bathe where there is shelter from the wind.

Aesop's Fables, Androcles

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering about there he came upon a Lion lying down moaning and groaning. At first he turned to flee, but finding that the Lion did not pursue him, he turned back and went up to him. As he came near, the Lion put out his paw, which was all swollen and bleeding, and Androcles found that a huge thorn had got into it, and was causing all the pain.

He pulled out the thorn and bound up the paw of the Lion, who was soon able to rise and lick the hand of Androcles like a dog. Then the Lion took Androcles to his cave, and every day used to bring him meat from which to live. But shortly afterwards both Androcles and the Lion were captured, and the slave was sentenced to be thrown to the Lion, after the latter had been kept without food for several days.

The Emperor and all his Court came to see the spectacle, and Androcles was led out into the middle of the arena. Soon the Lion was let loose from his den, and rushed bounding and roaring towards his victim. But as soon as he came near to Androcles he recognized his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog.

The Emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told him the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.

—*Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.*

Parents who expect gratitude from their children (and there are some who insist on it) are like usurers who gladly risk their capital if only they receive interest.

—Kafka, *Diaries*

If a Jew breaks a leg, he says "praised be God that I didn't break both legs." If he breaks both legs, he says "praised be God that I didn't break my neck!"

—Yiddish folk saying