

GRATITUDE /HAKARAT HATOV

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 wisdom is in its insistence on fostering a sense of thanks.

Take the book *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science* of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence. In it, neuropsychologist Dr. Rick Hanson explains that we are hard-wired 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 advises that, luckily, we can change our bodies' hardwired 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 study¹, 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. Almost 700 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 – an average of 7 years longer - than those expressing fewer positive emotions.

Apparently, 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 "Thankful am I" - "Modeh Ani" - 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 Danner, Deborah D., 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 a fabulous article: The Power of Gratitude (Ekev 5775).

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

What's the best way to start a day? If you want to have a great and meaningful day, how should you start it?

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Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- What role does gratitude play in your life? Are there areas in your life where you might be taking things for granted and not readily recognizing goodness?
- How can I 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 Tsfat in the 1500's. He wrote that one should recite the prayer upon rising in the morning.

Modeh/ Modah ani l'fanecha, melech chai v'kayam, she-he-cheh-zarta bee nishma-ti b'chemlah, rabah emunatecha.

Thanks I offer before You, living and sustaining ruler, for returning my soul to me with compassion; great is your faithfulness.

מודָה / מודָה / אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךְּ מֶלֶךְ חֵי וְקַיָם, שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אמונתר:

- 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!?

Reb Noson was the chief disciple and scribe of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the founder of the Breslov Hasidic dynasty.

Good Points

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

"One should wake in the morning like a lion to serve the Creator . . ." is an idea discussed in the opening chapter of the Code of Jewish Law (Shulchan Aruch).

Really? How do we do that? Does that come naturally to most of us? Think of the magnitude of the coffee industry. No. So how do we get there?

Reb Noson of Breslov offers this guidance:

Start the day with 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. It is *hakarat hatov* – the recognition of goodness – starting from the inside out. An effective first step to tackling the challenges in your day is to begin with personal awareness, attending to your inner diamond, recognizing your good.

 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?



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 asked "Who is rich?" They answered that it is "One who rejoices in one's own portion."

How can we build the muscle of gratitude 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?

Bereishit Chapter 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'; it also means: '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.

וַתַהַר לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אֶמְרָה כִי רָאָה ה' בְּעָנְיִי כִּי עַתָּה יֶאֶהָבַנִי אִישִׁי .וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאִמֶר כִּי שְׁמַע ה' כִּי שְׂנּאָה אָנֹכִי וַיִּעָּן לִי גַם אֶת זָה וַתְּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן. וַתַהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר עַתָּה הַפַּעַם יְלָנָה אִישִׁי אַלַי כִי יָלַדְתִיּ לוֹ שְׁלשָׁה בָנִים עַל כַן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי. וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אוֹדֶה אֶת ה' על כַן קַרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יָהוּדָה וָתַעְמֹד מִלְּדָת. 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 always needed to 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 is born, though, she stops focusing on what she does not have and expresses her gratitude.

- 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 do you think she is 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 even in tough times?
- The words "Jew," "Jewish," and "Judaism" come from the name "Judah." These words are about gratitude; in Hebrew, "Judah" has the same root as the word for "thank you," Todah. So, Jews essentially are 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?

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."

- Albert Einsteinl



Babylonian Talmud Menachot 43b

Rabbi Meir used to say, A person is bound to say one hundred blessings daily.

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

Making 100 blessings a day is not meant to be only a metaphor - in fact many Jews actually strive to say 100 blessings a day. On Shabbat, when the prayer service includes fewer blessings than on weekdays, they search out extra excuses to make blessings so that they can hit the 100 mark.

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

• What might be the purpose of saying 100 blessings a day? Wouldn't 10 or 20 suffice? How might your life and the lives of the people around you be affected by saying 100 blessings a day? If this were the norm in a community what might the community be like?

Rabbi Meir was one of the greatest Sages of the Mishnah and lived in the Land of Israel in the 2nd century. Bruriah, his wife, was also a famous Torah scholar known for her great piety and wisdom.

GLOBAL CELEBRATIONS OF THANKSIVING WITH HAKARAT HATOV

Ideas for your Thanksgiving

- Whether you celebrate 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 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 them 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.

Psalms Chapter 100

A song for a thanksgiving offering. Shout to the Lord, all the earth.

Serve the Lord 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.

Come into His gates with thanksgiving, [into] His courtyards with praise; give thanks to Him, bless His name.

For the Lord is good; His kindness is forever, and until generation after generation is His faithfulness.



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 plain nasty? When we feel depleted or drained? What if even then we are thankful for being alive, we look around, see beauty, and are thankful again and again for a sound, a scent, a smile?

Could this grow with in 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 of how we continually are gifted by the generosity of other people and God?

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

Here's the story of Hannah Senesch (1921-44), who grew up in Budapest but left Hungary for the Land of Israel in 1939.

The Walk to Caesarea ("Eli Eli") by Hannah Senesch

אלי, אלי
שלא יגמר לעולם
החול והים,
רשרוש של המים,
ברק השמיים,
תפילת האדם.

Hannah Senesch wrote her famous poem "The Walk to Caesarea" (commonly known as "Eli Eli") while living at Kibbutz Sdot Yam. Ten days earlier, she had been approved to join a group planning to establish an agricultural settlement at Caesarea. In thirteen words, the poem captures her appreciation 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 Senesch 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, she refused the blindfold staring squarely at her executors and her fate. Senesch 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, Senesch's remains were brought to Israel and re-interred at the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.***

- What are the things that you are so grateful for that you wish they would never end?
- How might have Senesch'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 can you take this week, inspired by Hannah 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. Thank Israeli Soldiers offers different ways to thank these solders and volunteer to engage others:

www.thankisraelisoldiers.org

- Send emails to your family and friends to publicize the project.
- Organize package drives in your temple, synagogue, school and community.
- Publicize the care package program with Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and chesed organizations.
- Raise funds & collect donations of supplies.

^{***} 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 Tevel 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, Hilchot Yom Tov 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. In 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.

Maimonides was a prolific medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher and physician, who became 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/party felt like "rejoicing of the stomach"?
- Can you think of a time when a meal/party felt like true rejoicing? ...like true rejoicing that was spiritually meaningful in addition to fun? Taking pleasure in both the food and the deeper meaning of the celebration?
- Do you have any events or meals that you are hosting in the near future? Who 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 most benefit from a good celebratory meal? Sometimes they may 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

I in 9

People in the world struggle with hunger

That's 795 million people***

1 in 5

Israelis live below the poverty line

That's 1.8 million Israelis, including 873,000 children and 162,900 seniors ****

- What are the 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?

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, 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 in English...but you don't see it until your bowl is cleared. 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 "acknowledgement", 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 condition, followed by a 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 loved 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 would say a deep thank you to God to "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 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

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 you could 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." (Psalms 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.
- Read the story The Curse of Blessings by Mitchell Cheifetz together, available at www.bit.ly/2bVwfKC, and discuss its message.
- 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 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 spread 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
- For a festive gathering, a Shabbat or holiday meal, consider inviting guests to share in advance five things they are grateful for. Ask them to email or text them back to you. Print them and cut each idea on a separate strip of paper and put them into a pretty glass on the table, a Gratitude Goblet. Guests can read them. The 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 Cheifetz 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 100 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 who 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 of its readers to cultivate gratitude on Thanksgiving and anytime of year. https://bit.ly/2JIW9DM

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. Try adding the Modeh Ani 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 this Shaboom! episode with your young children to help them learn how to be more thankful by turning 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.
 - Everything is Amazing Shaboom! http://bit.ly/2c1PcBr

Use this chart to plan and track your progress regarding *hakarat hatov*.

Acknowledgment (Vidui)	Vision (Kavanah)
In what areas of your life do you express gratitude? In what areas of your life might you possibly be taking things for granted and not expressing feelings of gratitude?	In your ideal world, what role does gratitude play in your life? How does it show up? Consider different relationship: family, friends, work, community.

Goals (Kabbalah)	Accountability
What might be holding you back from manifesting your vision? How can you remove roadblocks? What are practical steps to help you reach your vision?	What evidence can you collect to know you are making progress? Who can help hold you accountable on your goals? How? When?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Getting Great at Being Grateful

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?

Meaning-ful Vocabulary

Good	tov	טוֹב
Recognizing the good	hakarat hatov	הַכָּרַת הַטוֹב
Thankful am I	modah ani (said by a female) modeh ani (said by a male)	מוֹדָה אֲנִי מוֹדֶה אֲנִי

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

In advance, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading the session such as:

- · Hosting the event
- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see Extra! Program Ideas for suggestions).
- Facilitating an opening discussion on "The Curse of Blessings" (Optional activity in the Intro & Inspiration section)
- Leading the River of Life/ River of Blessing Soul Spark activity

**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 Chefetz's short story "The Curse of Blessings." Let them know you'll use this story for inspiration and discussion during the session.

Note You can read "The Curse of Blessings" via this link: *https://www.kindspring.org/story/view.php?sid=8630*

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 helping the hostess put out food and drink. Think about what materials you will need to facilitate your Soul Sparks activities and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome & 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 your participants in a short stretching exercise or focusing on deep, relaxing breaths.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

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

5. Intro & Inspiration

Optional Introductory Activity: Lead into the topic of gratitutde, *hakarat hatov*, by asking for one of the participants

to briefly summarize Michael Chefetz's short story, *The Curse of Blessings*, for those who were not able to read it.

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?
- Why do you think gratitude and blessing were the key to keeping the officer alive each day? What is the connection between gratitude and life?

Introduction: Introduce the Hebrew phrase for gratitude, hakarat hatov. Ask the women to share with the group three words that 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



River of Life/River of Blessing

Give out poster board and markers and invite women to draw their life paths — starting from their birth until now. Suggest that they illustrate their life paths as a flowing river, moving from one place to another, sometimes shifting course. Ask participants to highlight "gratitude/ blessing points" along the way — times on their life journey where they had experiences for which they are grateful.

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 what they have done with the other participants.

Discuss with participants:

- 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, how can you continue to appreciate all the blessings that you have?

100 Blessings A Day

Read 100 Blessings A Day together. Ask participants to reflect for a few moments on a blessing they already know, or to create their own blessings 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.

- Suggest to participants that they create with their families a list of 100 blessings for which they are grateful. Participants could hang up the list of blessings on the front door, in the kitchen, or on the bathroom mirror!
- Ask participants why they think one should make 100 blessings a day. Wouldn't 10 or 20 suffice? What happens to a family that is constantly looking for something to bless?
- If you did not have participants read the Curse of Blessing story in advance, consider reading it to them here to underscore the power of making blessings.

7. Reflection & 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 hakarat 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 hakarat hatov. Encourage the sisters to support each other in the coming weeks, and make time to share and celebrate their progress in your sessions.

Direct the women's attention to **Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families**. These suggestions will help them bring the learning they have done today home to their families in interesting and fun ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and come back next time and report on how it went.

Suggest that everyone do one thing before the next session that will lead to more *hakarat hatov* (e.g. keeping a gratitude journal, reciting Modeh Ani or blessings, creating a list of 100 blessings with the rest of the family). Ask them to come prepared to talk about it at the next session.

Give them an opportunity to schedule a time with their learning partner before they leave the session today. (See **Learn With Your Sister**, pages XX). 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 activity:

Gratitude Journal

• Give out small notebooks, journals or scrapbooks to participants.

- Have them write one take away from the session and three things for which they are grateful right now.
- Encourage them to write every night (either individually or as a whole-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.

"Modeh Ani"

- Ask a sister to learn the "Modeh Ani," the prayer that Jews recite when we first open our eyes in the morning. Ask her to prepare 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
- 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.



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.

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