

Gratitude from the Torah

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Parashat Bereishit

Exploring the Gifts of Creation

Why I Choose the Theme of Gratitude from the Torah

I'm grateful for a new beginning on so many levels. After riding on the waves of Sukkot we are landing on a fresh new start of the regular year routine. I treasure the renewed excitement of starting the school year with new students. On a personal level, my husband and I are regrouping and finding new ways of filling the gap left by our second and youngest son who recently flew out of the nest. Ahh a new beginning – offering new possibilities. How motivating to gaze at a blank new screen contemplating my new blog title, "Gratitude from the Torah." I hope and pray that Hashem will enlighten me to find inspiring points of gratitude to share from each weekly Torah portion. I decided on this theme because we live in a time of entitlement. We – who grow up spoiled with material overflow – are raised to believe that we deserve everything we desire, even the slightest. When we don't get what we want we become frustrated, upset, and depressed. I personally know women who broke up families not for any legitimate reason such as an abusive husband. One such woman chose to become a single mother of three for no other reason than she found her husband to be boring! We make our lives miserable with our high expectations and demands. We can live much more fulfilled lives when we learn to lower our expectations and realize how everything is a gift. We aren't the center of the world and others aren't created to serve us and fulfill our every whim. Rather, it's the other way around, we are created to serve Hashem and His world. Instead of focusing on getting our own needs met, we can train ourselves to pay attention to how to best serve others. By focusing on the goodness Hashem perpetually bestows upon us, we will become more fulfilled and have more to share with the world.

Valuing the Gift of Light

Let's begin with the beginning:

ספר בראשית פרק א פסוק א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: (ב) וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתֵה תֵהוּ וְבָהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אור וַיְהי אור:

“In the beginning of G-d’s creation of the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was desolate and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water. And G-d said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.’ Then G-d saw the light that it was good, and G-d separated between the light and between the darkness (*Bereishit* 1:1-4).

When we open our eyes in the morning the light will be noticeable if we are endowed with the gift of sight. Yet for those who are blind, everything remains in the dark. Let us keep this in mind when we bless Hashem daily for “opening the eyes of the blind” in the morning prayers. Before the six days of creation, the world – actually, there wasn’t yet a world – but whatever existed was a dark, murky mess. Then Hashem began to make order in the mess by speaking everything into being step by step. This teaches us that the primordial, ‘natural’ state is void of light. Hashem created the first light of the world to share His goodness with us (Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*). Thus, we can never take any light for granted whether physical or metaphorical. Any illumination – whether strong and clear or in the form of the light at the end of the tunnel – is G-d’s first gift of creation to us.

What is so Special about Being Created in the Divine Image?

Everything in creation led up to the creation of humanity and is for our sake. [G-d created the world] for the sake of the Torah, which is called “the beginning of His way,” (*Mishlei* 8:22) and for the sake of Israel, who are called “the first of His grain.” (*Yirmeyahu* 2:3); (Rashi, *Bereishit* 1:1). Hashem waited till the end to create us human beings, because He had to first ensure that all our needs would be met. The water, trees, grasses and flowers, the sun, moon and stars, the birds and the fish, and all of the animals were created first to ensure the perfect environment and ecosystem suitable for human life.

ספר בראשית פרק א פסוק כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ: (כז) וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

“Then G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the heaven and over the animals and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth.’ And G-d created man in His image; in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them” (*Bereishit* 1:26-27).

The first thing Hashem granted us is the gift of creation – the gift of life, yet not just any life like the animals who are also alive, but with the gift of being created in the image of G-d. What does it mean to be created in the image of G-d? First of all, it means that in a certain sense, we resemble Him, for we are the only ones in creation imbued with a divine soul. We can emulate G-d to impart goodness to others. Therefore, we are special and treasured by Him. and it follows that if we respect G-d, we must value ourselves as well. In order to be able to appreciate others we must first learn to appreciate ourselves. Just as Hashem supervises and benefits His creations, so is our mission in life to benefit others. We are all seeking to know for what purpose we are placed on the planet. Instead of focusing on how to get our own needs met – which will never lead to happiness – let us notice who needs us, and what we can do for them. This is the personal mission of our life for which we are created.

Fruitful Blessings of Increase

(כח) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹשׁוּהָ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיַּי הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ: (כט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת כָּל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ פְרִי עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: (ל) וְלִכָּל חַיַּי הָאָרֶץ וְלִכָּל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכָּל רֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת כָּל יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי כֵן:

“Then G-d blessed them, and G-d said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the sky and over all the beasts that tread upon the earth.’ And G-d said, ‘Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing herb, which is upon the surface of the entire earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; it will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and to all the fowl of the heavens, and to everything that moves upon the earth, in which there is a living spirit, every green herb to eat,’ and it was so” (*Bereishit* 1:28-30).

No sooner were we created than Hashem blessed us profusely, and granted us permission to use the abundance of His creation for our personal needs. First impressions are important and whenever a word is used for the first time in the Bible it sets a precedence. The very first blessing in the Torah is for humanity to be fruitful and multiply. The essence of a blessing is to increase.

The more we notice the blessings of our lives and express gratitude for them, the more our blessings will increase. The first interaction Hashem had with us was to bless us. Similarly, rather than being critical of others, we can bless them and thereby increase their goodness.

Expressing Our Appreciation in Words

ספר בראשית פרק א פסוק לא

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשֵּׁשִׁי:

“Then G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good, and it was evening, and it was morning, the sixth day” (*Bereishit* 1:31).

Throughout the story of how G-d created the universe, we read seven different times some variation of, “And G-d saw that it was good.” Why is this repeated so often? Of course, G-d knows that His creations were good, He created them! This repetition is to teach us gratitude.

The continual focus on G-d’s creation being “good” in *Bereishit* also teaches us gratitude for the natural order and even for our ability to emulate our Creator by creating, sharing, and blessing. While it is depressing to always look for happiness, constantly reflecting on what we are grateful for will generate perpetual joy. G-d was not just thinking that His creations were good, He expressed it loud and clear. We can learn from this to express words of gratitude and declare our thankfulness to anyone and everyone. We mustn’t underestimate the power of words, after all, G-d created the entire universe through speech.

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Bereishit

- Light – For which points of light in your life can you be grateful?

Notice the light in your life, even if it is only dim or fading. Treasure the glimpses of light when you sense Hashem’s presence and supervision, and cherish the rays of the sun when they warm and energize you.

- Being Created in the Image of G-d – For what part of your existence are you especially thankful? Meditate on the wondrous creation of humanity and your own creation. Recite the blessing after using the bathroom mindfully paying attention to the meaning of the words. What does this blessing thank G-d for? How does this relate to having been created in G-d’s image? What else does G-d provide us with? Think about how reciting a blessing is like saying thank you to someone you know. Marvel over the privilege of being created in the Image of G-d with a divine soul and the divine potential to impart goodness to others.

- Blessings of Fruitfulness – Search for the fruits of your life whether you are gifted with physical or spiritual children, or perhaps a brainchild or more.

Any new invention, idea, insight, or way of doing something can be called a fruit. Thank yourself and Hashem for empowering you with your particular fruitfulness.

- “It is not good for the human Being to be alone” (*Bereishit* 2:20) – For which people in your life are you grateful and what do you especially appreciate about them?

Notice the good points in others and make a habit of expressing them often. There are some things that are beneficial to repeat over and over again.