

# הכרת הטוב והכרת המטיב

From Mindful Appreciation to Environmental and Social Activism

*Beit Midrash Limmud in honor of Tu Bishvat*

YarOkay Committee, Congregation Shaarei Tefillah 5776

presented by Rabbi Benjamin J. Samuels & Leora Mallach, MEd., Co-founder, Ganei Beantown

## 1. Ben Zoma's Guide to a Life of Wisdom, Power, Wealth and Honor

*Please study this famous Mishnah. Discuss each teaching.*

Does each stand independent of the others or might they be interrelated?

Do you believe Ben Zoma arrived at these teachings through wisdom generated by study or experience? Why?

Are these teachings analytic descriptions or attitudinal prescriptions?

בן זומא אומר: **איזהו חכם?** הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט), מכל מלמדי השכלתי כי עדותיך שיחה לי.

Ben Zoma would say: **Who is wise?** One who learns from every person. As is stated (Psalms 119:99): "From all my teachers I have grown wise, for Your testimonials are my meditation."

**איזהו גבור?** הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר (משלי טז), טוב ארך אפים מגבור ומשל ברוחו מלכד עיר.

**Who is strong?** One who overpowers his/her inclinations. As is stated (Proverbs 16:32), "Better one who is slow to anger than one with might, one who rules his spirit than the captor of a city."

**איזהו עשיר?** השמח בחלקו, שנאמר (תהלים קכח), יגיע כפיך כי תאכל אשריך וטוב לך. אשריך, בעולם הזה. וטוב לך, לעולם הבא.

**Who is rich?** One who is satisfied with his lot. As is stated (Psalms 128:2): "If you eat of toil of your hands, fortunate are you, and good is to you"; "fortunate are you" in this world, "and good is to you" in the World to Come.

**איזהו מכבד?** המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר (שמואל א ב) כי מכבדי אכבד ובזי יקלו:

**Who is honorable?** One who honors the creatures, i.e., other human beings. As is stated (I Samuel 2:30): "For to those who honor me, I accord honor; those who scorn me shall be demeaned."

**Mishnah Avot 4:1 - משנה אבות ד:א**

**Please keep this Mishnah in mind while considering the next text from BT Berakhot 58a.**



## 2. Knowing From Where Our Food Comes

Please study the Talmudic passage below.

Discuss the blessing upon seeing multitudes of Israel and its profound insight.

Consider Ben Zoma's additional blessing and its attendant meditation.

How does Ben Zoma understand the blessing for human differences?

Is his additional blessing a selfish or selfless expression?

Why do you think Ben Zoma so appreciates the blessing of a division of labor?

2000 years ago, what were the issues that he faced in getting food to eat?

Were his issues the same as ours?

How does Ben Zoma's teaching about a good and bad guest add to our awareness as a consumer?

תנו רבנן: הרוואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר: "ברוך חכם הרזים". שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה, ואין פרצופיהן דומים זה לזה. בן זומא ראה אוכלוסא על גב מעלה ביהר הבית, אמר: "ברוך חכם הרזים," ו"ברוך שברא כל אלו לשמשני".

The Sages taught in a *Tosefta*: One who sees multitudes of Israel recites: Blessed... Who knows all secrets. Why is this? He sees a whole nation whose minds are unlike each other and whose faces are unlike each other, and He Who knows all secrets, God, knows what is in each of their hearts. The Gemara relates: Ben Zoma once saw a multitude [*okhlosa*]<sup>1</sup> of Israel while standing on a stair on the Temple Mount. He immediately recited: Blessed... Who knows all secrets and Blessed... Who created all these to serve me.

הוא היה אומר: כמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא פת לאכול: חרש, זרע, וקצר, ועמר, ודש, וזרה, וברר, וטחן, והקיד, ולש, ואפה, ואחר כך אכל, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלו מתוקנין לפני. וכמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא בגד ללבוש: גז ולבן ונפץ וטוה וארג, ואחר כך מצא בגד ללבוש, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלה מתוקנים לפני. כל אומות שוקדות וזבאות לפתח ביתי, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלו לפני.

Explaining his custom, he would say: How much effort did Adam the first man exert before he found bread to eat: He plowed, sowed, reaped, sheaved, threshed, winnowed in the wind, separated the grain from the chaff, ground the grain into flour, sifted, kneaded, and baked and only thereafter he ate. And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me. Human society employs a division of labor, and each individual benefits from the service of the entire world. Similarly, how much effort did Adam the first man exert before he found a garment to wear? He sheared, laundered, combed, spun and wove, and only thereafter he found a garment to wear. And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me. Members of all nations, merchants and craftsmen, diligently come to the entrance of my home, and I wake up and find all of these before me.

הוא היה אומר: אורח טוב מהו אומר - כמה טרחות טרח בעל הבית בשבילי, כמה בשר הביא לפני, כמה זין הביא לפני, כמה גלוסקאות הביא לפני, וכל מה שטרח - לא טרח אלא בשבילי. אבל אורח רע מהו אומר - מה טורח טרח בעל הבית זה? פת אחת אכלתי, חתיכה אחת אכלתי, בוס אחד שתיתי, כל טורח שטרח בעל הבית זה - לא טרח אלא בשביל אשתו ובניו.

Ben Zoma would say: A good guest, what does he say? How much effort did the host expend on my behalf, how much meat did the host bring before me. How much wine did he bring before me. How many loaves [*geluskaot*]<sup>1</sup> did he bring before me. All the effort that he expended, he expended only for me. However, a bad guest, what does he say? What effort did the host expend? I ate only one piece of bread, I ate only one piece of meat and I drank only one cup of wine. All the effort that the home owner expended he only expended on behalf of his wife and children.

### 3. "All was Created by God's Word": Mindfulness and Appreciation

Please read the below story about Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar Movement, in English or Hebrew (they are slightly different). How might we ourselves cultivate an insight of appreciation and an attitude of gratitude? Would it help if there would be within the food industry greater transparency and more explicit recognition of process chains, contributors and ingredients?

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once noticed that a fancy restaurant was charging a huge price for a cup of coffee. He approached the owner and asked why the coffee was so expensive. After all, some hot water, a few coffee beans and a spoonful of sugar could not amount to more than a few cents.

The owner replied: "It is correct that for a few cents you could have coffee in your own home. But here in the restaurant, we provide exquisite decor, soft background music, professional waiters, and the finest china to serve your cup of coffee."

Rabbi Salanter's face lit up. "Oh, thank you very much! I now understand the blessing of *Shehakol* -- 'All was created by His word' -- which we recite before drinking water. You see, until now, when I recited this blessing, I had in mind only that I am thanking the Creator for the water that He created. Now I understand the blessing much better. 'All' includes not merely the water, but also the fresh air that we breathe while drinking the water, the beautiful world around us, the music of the birds that entertain us and exalt our spirits, each with its different voice, the charming flowers with their splendid colors and marvelous hues, the fresh breeze -- for all this we have to thank God when drinking our water!"

ונשאלה שאלה בבית-מדרשם של בעלי המוסר: מהו קנה-המדה להכרת-טובה? האם היא מצטמצמת במסגרת הטובה המוחשית כרגע הנתון ובשטח הנתון, או שהיא עוברת מחוץ לתחומה?  
בחוגי הישיבות מוסרים את הצוודה דלהלן: בעת שהותו של הגאון ר' ישראל מסלנט וצוק"ל בסריו הכירה, נכנס פעם לבית-קפה נהדר ומשובח והזמין כוס קפה. המשקה, נדמה, עלה לו במרנק. דן ר' ישראל לעצמו: בידוע שכוס קפה עלה רק בכמה סנטיים, ומה ראה בעל בית הקפה לדרוש בעדה פרנק שלם? אף על פי כן הדין עמו. הבית ורהיטיו היפים, הגן שמסביב לבית, כלי החרסינה והזכוכית היקרים ושרות המלצרים האדיב — כל זה עלה בכסף רב. והבא לבית הקפה לשתות דבר-מה נהנה לא רק מהמשקה אלא מכל השרותים והנוחיות המקושרים להנאת השתיה. אף גם זאת: ההנאות הנזכרות הבאות בעקפיין מנעימות ונותנות טעם לשבח במשקה גופא. שכן אינה דומה הנאת השתיה בכלים פשוטים ובסביבה קודרת להנאת אותו המשקה בכלים יפים ובסביבה נהדרה. והדין נותן שהנכנס לבית-קפה זה ישלם ביוקר, ביחס לנוחיות. ומכאן, גמר ר' ישראל את דיונו, אנו למדים: כמה צריך האדם להכיר טובה בשעה שהוא נהנה בבית הקפה של רבון העולם. האיש, בשתותו מעט מים לצמאונו הריהו נהנה באותו הרגע גם מהאדמה המוצקה, הבסיס שמתחת לרגליו; מנשימת האויר הנזקק הזורם בלי הרף לעורקי ראותיו ומחין; מהשמים התכולים המקומרים עליו; מריחות הפרחים הנעימים ומצפצופן העליו של צפרי החן ומכל הצלילים והטונים המשתפכים ביחד לסימפוניה נהדרה, לשירת העולם האדירה לאדון העולם; ואחרון אחרון הביב — מחברת בחיר היצורים. בן האדם הנברא בצלם. ובשעה שהוא מודה לשם על הנאתו צריך הוא להביע את הכרת טובתו על כל ההנאות הנגרמות לו באותו הרגע במישרים ובעקיפים. כך העמיק ר' ישראל את הכרת הטובה והרחיבה בשטח. במקום.

הרב ישראל שלמה גורדין, "הכרת טובה", תבונה: עניני תורה ומוסר סיון תש"ז, ט:ע"ט

## 4. The Spirituality of Appreciation and Mindfulness

*Read the below Jewish meditation upon eating a cookie. Consider the other snacks and drinks at our Kiddush table. Entertain a thought experiment and try to estimate the number of hands that helped generate and deliver our kiddush bounty. Would it be meaningful and important to cultivate a spiritual practice of such mindfulness meditations, in addition to the berakhot we recite before and after meals?*

### **Guided Imagery by Rabbi Moshe Miller**

<http://www.jewishpathways.com/mussar-program/gratitude>

When you have a quiet moment of introspection, hold a cookie in your hand and read:

Envision a farmer plowing his field from morning till night. He rises the next day at sunrise and plants seeds of wheat in neat rows. He returns each day to remove the weeds and to irrigate the field. After a few months, tall, green stalks sway back and forth in the soft breeze. The farmer then harvests his field and binds the stalks into sheaves. The sheaves are delivered to a mill where they are pounded to remove the wheat kernels, and separate the chaff. Next, the wheat kernels are ground into flour. The flour is poured into sacks, loaded into a truck, and delivered to a bakery. The baker then measures the flour into a big mixing bowl and adds eggs, sugar, cocoa, and water. He forms the dough into balls and places them on baking trays. Next he slides the baking trays into a pre-heated oven. After 15 minutes he removes the trays of fresh baked cookies and places them on cooling racks.

Soon another worker arranges the cookies in boxes and loads them onto a truck. The driver delivers the cookies to the market, in which you purchased the cookie that you are now holding in your hand.

Contemplate the process of photosynthesis, providing the precise amount of rays from the sun, which is 93 million miles away. Consider how water evaporates from the salty seas and turns into sweet rain to water the earth. Then reflect how a tiny seed that is planted in the brown earth begins to grow and develop into a living plant. How amazing is the growth of food from seeds! A single grain can produce more than a thousand new grains. One grain of wheat can produce over 300 grains.

Look at the cookie in your hand. Who has worked so many wonders to provide this cookie for you? Now eat the cookie -- and savor every bite!

## 5. From Spiritual Mindfulness to Environmental & Social Activism

*Is spiritual mindfulness ultimately selfish? Do we need to go beyond an attitude of gratitude to more active thanksgiving, and environmental and social activism? Consider this counter-point.*

**Barbara Ehrenreich, “The Selfish Side of Gratitude,” *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 2015**

This holiday season, there was something in the air that was even more inescapable than the scent of pumpkin spice: gratitude. In November, NPR issued a number of brief exhortations to cultivate gratitude, culminating in an hourlong special on the “science of gratitude,” narrated by Susan Sarandon. Writers in *Time* magazine, *The New York Times* and *Scientific American* recommended it as a surefire ticket to happiness and even better health...

It’s good to express our thanks, of course, to those who deserve recognition. But this holiday gratitude is all about you, and how you can feel better.... Gratitude is at least potentially more prosocial than the alternative self-improvement techniques. You have to be grateful to someone, who could be an invisible God, but might as well be a friend, mentor or family member. The gratitude literature often advises loving, human interactions: writing a “gratitude letter” to a helpful colleague, for example, or taking time to tell a family member how wonderful they are. These are good things to do, in a moral sense, and the new gratitude gurus are here to tell us that they also feel good...

Consider this, from a yoga instructor on CNN.com: “Cultivate your sense of gratitude by incorporating giving thanks into a personal morning ritual such as writing in a gratitude journal, repeating an affirmation or practicing a meditation. It could even be as simple as writing what you give thanks for on a sticky note and posting it on your mirror or computer. To help you establish a daily routine, create a ‘thankfulness’ reminder on your phone or computer to pop up every morning and prompt you.” Who is interacting here? “You” and “you.”

The Harvard Mental Health Letter begins its list of gratitude interventions with the advice that you should send a thank-you letter as often as once a month, but all the other suggested exercises can be undertaken without human contact: “thank someone mentally,” “keep a gratitude journal,” “count your blessings,” “meditate” and, for those who are so inclined, “pray.”

So it’s possible to achieve the recommended levels of gratitude without spending a penny or uttering a word. All you have to do is to generate, within yourself, the good feelings associated with gratitude, and then bask in its warm, comforting glow. If there is any loving involved in this, it is self-love, and the current hoopla around gratitude is a celebration of onanism.

**Yet there is a need for more gratitude, especially from those who have a roof over their heads and food on their table. Only it should be a more vigorous and inclusive sort of gratitude than what is being urged on us now. Who picked the lettuce in the fields, processed the standing rib roast, drove these products to the stores, stacked them on the supermarket shelves and, of course, prepared them and brought them to the table? Saying grace to an abstract God is an evasion; there are crowds, whole communities of actual people, many of them with aching backs and tenuous finances, who made the meal possible.**

**The real challenge of gratitude lies in figuring out how to express our debt to them, whether through generous tips or, say, by supporting their demands for decent pay and better working conditions. But now we’re not talking about gratitude, we’re talking about a far more muscular impulse — and this is, to use the old-fashioned term, “solidarity” — which may involve getting up off the yoga mat.**