

## Hakarat Hatov – Seven Steps to Grateful Joy

[Deuteronomy 28:45-47 HCSB](#) (45) "All these curses will come, pursue, and overtake you until you are destroyed, since you did not obey the LORD your God and keep the commands and statutes He gave you. (46) These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever. (47) Because you didn't serve the LORD your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though *you had* an abundance of everything,

### Introduction

Coming at the end of Moses' long and illustrious career, today's text is from one of his last three great sermons to our ancestors that are preserved in the book of Deuteronomy. The sermons climaxed with the point that a future Prophet, Who would be like himself, would come and that Israel was to receive this person. He then burst into a sublime song of praise to Yahweh and added prophetic blessings for each of the twelve tribes.

Those blessings, wonderful beyond comprehension, were counterbalanced by awful, dreadful curses. The litany of doom from those curses sounded like the Great Day of God's wrath! And Moses told us why they would come.

### **a. Gratitude is commanded.** (Proverbs 3:33-34; 1:7; 2 Kings 4:13)

The Hebrew term for gratitude is *hakarat ha-tov* "recognition of the good [another has done for you]). To paraphrase Moses, every one of life's curses stems from ingratitude and everyone of life's blessings comes from hakarat hatov – grateful joy. As Meister Eckhart once said, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'thank you,' that would suffice."

Adam and Eve brought sin into all our lives because they were not grateful. They were not content with what Yahweh had provided for them. With their sin came suffering in its many and varied forms: war, famine, disease, abuse of every kind. So what Moses was acknowledging was simply a universal truth.

I have repeatedly taught that pride is the root of every sin and humility is the basis of every good. Let me formally make the connection here for you. Pride leads to ingratitude, and humility leads to its opposite. This is WHY all the curses of the Lord come upon the ungrateful for...

- [Proverbs 3:33-34 HCSB](#) The LORD's curse is on the household of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous; (34) He mocks those who mock, but gives grace to the humble.

In an another passage Solomon taught that...

- [Proverbs 1:7 HCSB](#) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

So if...

1. we recognize that God's wrath descends on those who cannot be grateful for both His many provisions and for their fellow man and if...
2. we fear that righteous indignation with a holy and healthy fear,

...then in order to develop the necessary appreciation and love for God, we must sensitize ourselves to all that is good in our lives.

The Bible records the anecdote that a pious and wealthy woman often extended the mitzvah of hospitality toward the prophet Elisha. One day, Elisha directed his servant to ask the woman:

- [2 Kings 4:13 HCSB](#) Then he said to Gehazi, "Say to her, 'Look, you've gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?'" She answered, "I am living among my own people."

Elisha's way of approaching the woman gives us insight into how to express gratitude to others. He first acknowledged all the good she had done for him and his servant before offering help. Had he simply started with "What can we do for you" she might have been too embarrassed or timid to ask for anything. But by first acknowledging his debt, he placed himself beneath her and made it easier for her to receive what he had to give.

**b. Gratitude is a prerequisite for joy.** (Numbers 21:5; Proverbs 15:13-17)

Gratitude is a prerequisite for joy. A grateful person, when acknowledging the good someone has done for them, automatically assigns good intent to that person. "Look at what she did for me; she must care for me. Look at how he helped me; he must like me," they say to themselves.

On the other hand, an ungrateful person assigns negative intent regardless of the good done to them. "Look at what she did for me; she must want something. Look at what he did for me; he wants to put me in his debt for a future favor," they say to themselves.

How could such a person, who obviously must feel unloved and friendless, feel any happiness or joy? Our people have, unfortunately, often been ungrateful wretches. Although Yahweh had liberated them from slavery, forced labor and forced infanticide and fed them daily with manna from heaven that tasted like honey cakes, they murmured.

- **Numbers 21:5 HCSB** The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!"

Their ingratitude led them to unhappiness. This is why Solomon taught:

- **Proverbs 15:13-17 HCSB** A joyful heart makes a face cheerful, but a sad heart *produces* a broken spirit. (14) A discerning mind seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. (15) All the days of the oppressed are miserable, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast. (16) Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure with turmoil. (17) Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

So how does one cultivate the *mussar* (Hebrew for discipline, character or ethic) of gratitude?

**1. Deliberately remember what has been done for you.** (Ecclesiastes 9:14-15; Genesis 40:23; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Revelation 2:4-5)

Gratitude is rooted in remembrance. If we don't make a conscious effort to remember the good things that God or our fellow man has done for us, then we will inevitably slide into the sin of ingratitude.

Solomon gives us a tragic example of this unfortunate human characteristic.

- **Ecclesiastes 9:14-15 HCSB** (14) There was a small city with few men in it. A great king came against it, surrounded it, and built large siege works against it. (15) Now a poor wise man was found in the city, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

In the book of Genesis, we read that our brother, Joseph, having been falsely accused, was languishing in jail when an opportunity arose to serve. Two men had had frightening dreams. These dreams were not the usual random firing of neurons that the brain automatically tries to string into some semblance of order with a story line. These were prophetic visions from God. Joseph had a spiritual gift that allowed him to not only recognize the difference in these visions but also to accurately interpret them. He interpreted the visions for each man and each prophecy came about exactly as he said they would. However, we read:

- [Genesis 40:23 HCSB](#) Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Because the man did not set about to cultivate a remembrance of the favor that Joseph had done for him, the memory of Joseph and Joseph's mitzvah seeped out of his mind. His callousness led him to leave Joseph still languishing in those Egyptian dungeons for two more years! For thousands of years, that man has been identified as a cad simply because he failed to cultivate a memory of the good that had been done to him.

We need to remember what our lives before Christ were like. We need to remember the threat that loomed over us before the Messiah removed it!

- [1 Corinthians 6:11 HCSB \(11\)](#) Some of you were like this; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

We need to remember what the first blush of our passion for the Lord was like. We need to cultivate the memory of walking around with our slates cleaned of our guilt was like.

- [Revelation 2:4-5 HCSB](#) **But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first. (5) Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent.**

**2. Ensure the memory lasts.** (1 Kings 2:7; 2 Samuel 17:28; 2 Samuel 19:29; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 5:17)

Rabbi Telushkin gives us an illustration of our problem through a classic American joke. The joke tells of a congressman who, when he solicits a constituent's vote, learns that the man is planning to vote for his opponent. "But how can you do that? The congressman objects. "Don't you remember that time ten years ago when your business burned down, and I arranged for you to get a low-interest loan from the Small Business Administration? And what about the time when your daughter got in trouble with the police overseas, and I arranged for her to be released and sent back to the United States? And the time when your wife was sick, and I helped get her admitted to the special hospital she needed?"

The voter answers, "That's all true, but what have you done for me lately?"

In contrast, the Bible tells us that King David (a man after God's own heart) had a long memory. On his deathbed, he gave his son Solomon some final words of advice and wisdom.

- [1 Kings 2:7 HCSB](#) "Show loyalty to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite and let them be among those who eat at your table because they supported me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

Nearly ten years before, during a time when David's family and kingdom was being torn in two, Barzillai supplied David with food and lodging when David was on the run. David offered Barzillai a place in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 17:28). When Barzillai refused, preferring his own place, David took Barzillai's son, Chimham, into his court (2 Samuel 19:29). Nearly a decade later, lying on his deathbed, David was still urging his son Solomon to continue with this tradition of gratitude.

In an excellent book called the *Ethics of the Fathers*, there is a line that says "One who learns from his companion a single chapter, a single law, a single verse, a single expression, or even a single letter should accord him respect." (Ethics 6:3). The Lord agrees, stating

- [Hebrews 13:7 HCSB](#) Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith.
- [1 Timothy 5:17 HCSB](#) The elders who are good leaders should be considered worthy of an ample honorarium, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Even the person who first taught you your letters in kindergarten should be worthy of great respect and honor because she opened the possibility of your being able to read Adonai's

holy Scriptures, to understand His holiness, to fear Him and thus be saved. Even if those who have helped you in the past can no longer help you – indeed ESPECIALLY because they can no longer help you – a debt of gratitude should be maintained and honored in your heart.

### **3. Remember and acknowledge the good someone has done even if later they do wrong.** (1 Samuel 11:2; 31:11-13)

By the end of his life, the once modest and lovable King Saul had turned into a paranoid monster, but he had not always been that way. We read in 1 Samuel 11 that when Saul first became king, the Israelite city of Yavesh-Gilead was besieged by Ammon, and King Nachash threatened to gouge out the right eye of every man in the city. Saul quickly gathered an army, attacked Ammon and saved the people of Yavesh-Gilead. According to 1 Samuel 31:11-13, decades later, when the Philistines killed Saul and three of his sons and put their disfigured bodies on display, the men of Yavesh-Gilead risked their lives by taking down the bodies and giving them a dignified burial.

Bad deeds should be condemned, but we must never use them as an excuse to forget or ignore the good that others have done.

### **4. Express gratitude to family and friends.** (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:4)

We need to practice grateful living on those who are closest to us. As I've said many times before "Ch'essed (which is a zealous loving kindness) begins at home!" Many of us take the people closest to us for granted yet show a tremendous amount of gratitude and politeness to complete strangers.

This is, in my opinion, a primary interpretation of

- [Exodus 20:12 HCSB](#) Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
- [Matthew 15:4 HCSB](#) For God said: **Honor your father and your mother; and, The one who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.**

### **5. Show loyal gratitude to those who help those you love.** (Ruth 2:11-12; 1 Kings 2:7; Proverbs 27:10)

- [Ruth 2:11-12 HCSB](#) Boaz answered her, "Everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death has been fully reported to me: *how* you left your father and mother, and the land of your birth, and *how* you came to a people you didn't previously know. (12) May the LORD reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

The Holy Spirit recorded that Boaz was especially caring and generous to Ruth who was a goyish woman from a cursed people. Why? Because Ruth had been very kind to her mother-in-law Naomi, who was Boaz' cousin.

We can also see this principle illustrated by Solomon who, as we saw earlier, demonstrated grateful kindness to Barzillai's son because of the service Barzillai did for Solomon's father David (1 Kings 2:7). Solomon later wrote to his son "Abandon neither your friend nor your father's friend" (Proverbs 27:10).

### **6. Show polite gratitude to anyone who serves you.** (Romans 12:16; 2 Kings 5:13-14)

The Holman translates Romans 12:16 as...

- [Romans 12:16 HCSB](#) Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

The Message puts it, "Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody." Consider as an illustrative example

- **2 Kings 5:13-14 HCSB** But his servants approached and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more *should you do it* when he tells you, 'Wash and be clean'?" (14) So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the command of the man of God. Then his skin was restored *and became* like the skin of a small boy, and he was clean.

It was not until Naaman showed the humble good sense to show some respect for his servants' views that he experienced God's healing. In like manner, we need to express gratitude to those who help us but who are nearly invisible within our society: the waitress, the host checking us in at the hotel, the bellboy or the cook in the kitchen. All these people serve us in many ways and a godly person will show proper respect and gratitude for their service.

**7. Minimize the favors you have done for others.** (Matthew 6:1-4; 5:16; Philippians 2:6)

The Master taught...

- **Matthew 6:1-4 HCSB** "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They've got their reward! (3) But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

He did not mean to say that we need to ensure that no one EVER knows of ANY good we have done for He also taught...

- **Matthew 5:16 HCSB** In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

We should not make it a goal to advertise our good works in such a way that we glorify ourselves. Instead, we should always make sure that anyone who comes across our good works are immediately moved to glorify God.

Otherwise we will walk around with an "Look what I did for so and so and he never mentions it" attitude. Our little community here will work much better if we each tend to remember our debts and forget our credits. In fact, it will work even better if we imitate our Master who...

- **Philippians 2:6 HCSB** who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.