



A Family Education E-Resource May 2007

Hakarat Hatov – Recognizing Goodness

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Hakarat Hatov (recognizing and acknowledging the myriad benefits that are bestowed upon us daily) is a valuable concept in our hectic, busy world. The Mesorah Center for Continuing Jewish Education, an independent educational organization in Huntington, New York, (www.mesorahcenter.com) reminds us that in order to develop the necessary appreciation of, and love for, God, we must sensitize ourselves to all that is good in our lives. Our tradition teaches us that through *berakhot* we express our appreciation for the mundane and the special. We recite *berakhot* upon awakening and throughout the day, giving us a form for expressing appreciation and making us aware of all the good around us. The blessing of our children on Erev Shabbat is a weekly reminder to tell our children how special they are to us and to encourage them to emulate their ancestors.



Pirkei Avot 4:1 reminds us "Who is happy? He who is happy with what he has." The story of the "Strawberry Plant" in Vicky Kelman's *Family Room: Linking Families into a Jewish Learning Environment*, Shirley and Arthur Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Life, 1995, is a good place to start to discuss **Hakarat Hatov** with our children. This is an adaptation of the story.

Once there were two sisters who lived together and were never content. One day they looked across the street and saw a neighbor watering a plant in her window. The neighbor's home was tiny and needed paint but the neighbor had a smile in her eyes. The sisters heard their neighbor humming when she came out of her house. They saw how she smiled to herself as she walked down the street.

'I think she's not as poor as she looks!' one sister said to the other. "Perhaps she has lots of money hidden away! Maybe she has riches in her house. "

They got dressed up in lovely dresses and went across the street. "Come in!" said the neighbor happily. "I have been lonely. I was hoping someone would visit me!"

The two sisters sat down, but looked all over the room. The living room was tiny, poorly furnished, and had no photographs. They stared at the plant in an old pot on the window sill.



"That's my treasure!" the neighbor said. The sisters looked at each other. They wondered about the "treasure." The neighbor wanted to be a good hostess and began to set out some tea cups.

While she was busy, one sister stealthily went to the window and began to poke her finger into the pot. The dirt was soft and loose. Nothing was buried there. The sister was very disappointed. She expected a great treasure. "It's just a strawberry plant!" she said.

The neighbor smiled and nodded. She was very excited. "It's growing! Every day it grows a little bit more!" "You'll get hardly a mouthful of strawberries from just one strawberry plant!" the second sister warned. The neighbor hardly heard her. "Seeing the plant grow reminds me how near God is!"

And for the first time in their lives neither sister could think of a mean thing to say.

Praise to You, Ado nai Our God,
Ruler of the Universe,
Who has given us life.



This story can provide a framework for recognizing the need to appreciate the good we have in our lives. You might want to ask your child:

1. How do the sisters feel about their neighbor at the beginning of the story?
2. What do the sisters think when their neighbor hums?
3. Why is the neighbor happy?
4. What did the sisters think at the end of the story? Why?



How does **Hakarat Hatov** apply to both Mother's Day and Father's Day? Our tradition teaches us to bless our children each Erev Shabbat - letting them know that *they* are a *blessing* to us. But it is a reciprocal relationship! The Ten Commandments teach us to "Honor your father and mother." Perhaps we need a new prayer for the appreciation of parents! Some thoughts:

1. Ask your children to create sentences of appreciation for you.
www.aish.com/shabbathowto/Fridaynight/blessings contains the traditional blessing for our children on Friday night.

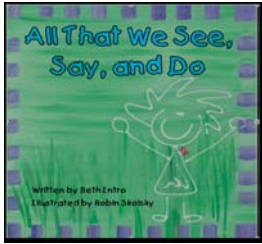
On Friday night or at other times, children can learn to share their love and respect for their parents by completing the sentences below:

I really love when you . . .
It makes me feel good when you are . . .
Mom and Dad are the best . . .
When you tuck me in at night, I feel . . .

2. Make a list with your children of all of the things they can do for those they love.
3. Make an acrostic with the words *Mother*, *Father*, and *Friend*. Have the children fill in next to each letter words that tell how they can show love and respect.



4. Make cards for those you love and send or e-mail them. For online cards, see
<http://cards.jhome.com>
www.123greetings.com/religion/judaism
www.milechai.com - Click on free Jewish cards.
5. Read about our mothers and fathers in the Torah. Some books to try are:
Bible Heroes I Can Be by Ann Eisenberg. Kar-Ben Copies Inc., 1990.
Bible Stories for Little Children by Betty R. Hollender. UAHC, 1986.
People of the Bible by Allison Ziefert. Rooster Books, 1996.
Torah Alive by Lorraine Posner Arcus. URJ Press, 2004.



6. Read to your children! Ask them how they feel - both about the story and the experience. Reading with children has been shown to create life-long warm memories and connections. A new book that exemplifies **Hakarat Hatov** is *All that We See, Say, and Do* by Beth Intro, illustrated by Robin Skolsky, available at www.allthatwesees.com.

7. Tell your children stories from the Jewish tradition about appreciating what one has. [Click here](#) for some good examples.

8. Perform an act of tzedakah with your children:

- ✱ Take them to the [Mitzvah Food Pantry](#).
- ✱ Collect toys for a shelter or hospital.
- ✱ Collect money for the [Alyn Hospital in Israel](#), which serves the orthopedic needs of children.

Connecting children with those less fortunate teaches them to be grateful for what they have.

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