Seder Birkat Hamazon

Appended with a sourcesheet on Jewish Ecology
born from the concepts of Bal Tashhit and Ḥesronan

prepared by Aharon N. Varady from existing sources

Nusah Ashkenaz (with noted variations)

Version 0.2.5 (July 2013)

The Open Siddur Project

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This translation relies hevily on the translation of Rabbi Simeon Singer from his *Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire* (1890).

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The base of the liturgy for the Birkat Hamazon is indebted to the work of the Open Siddur Project and its contributing transcribers: Rabbi Rallis Wiesenthal and Shmueli Gonzales.
Preparing to Bless after Eating

The rabbinic source for the obligation to make the Birkat Hamazon:

Rav Yehudah said: Where do we find that blessing the food afterward is obligated from the Torah? Where it says (in Devarim 8:10): “When you will eat and feel satisfied you will bless [ךָ אֱלֹהֶי יְיָ for the good Earth G!d has given you]” (Talmud Bavli Berakhot 21a).

A short kavanah for the spiritual practice of making blessings after eating:¹

The essential reason for blessing after eating is this: when we feel שָׂבַע (satiation) we experience שׁכֹחַ (forgetfulness) of that which sustains us.

By meditating, imagining, and articulating the Source of all בְָרָכָה (blessing, bountifulness), we can recover an expansive awareness of the interconnected ecology within which the lives of all living creatures on earth are sustained as One through a vast web of mutual חֶסרֹונָן (dependencies), made one as “a Oneness parallel to a Oneness” (Zohar, Terumah §163). This Oneness is revealed in the שֵׁם כְּבֹוד (the Name of his Glorious Kingdom) which struggles to signify the Unnameable, through the סוֹד of פ’י (gematriah of 86) whereby the divine name אֱלֹהִים is writ in הָטֶבַע (the Nature).

May all our fellow creatures be liberated from each of their captivities through awareness of that which suffuses each and every thing in its nature, all behaving with compassion and consideration of each others needs, and living together in צֶדֶק.

Now make your blessing, because:

“Unto you it was shown so that you might know that יי is אהָהֵב מַלְכוּת: (Devarim 4:35). Therefore, שְׁוֵֽיִיתִֽי לְפִיכָֹךּ יְי כִּ֥י לָדַ֔עַת הָרְאֵ֣תָּ אַתָּה מִלְבַדּֽוֹ׃ עֹ֖ד אֵ֥ין ד׃LEARHIM (Talmud Bavli Berakhot 21a).

¹ This kavanah is very important to me. I have tried with difficulty to concisely state the sources supporting my understanding of Torah and of Tefillah. I only came to comprehend the birkat hamazon to this extent after learning the secret of the Afikoman while in chevrutah with Gabriel Botnick at the Conservative Yeshiva in the spring of 5772 (2012).
Borei Nefashot

Bountiful are you, Cosmic Majesty, who creates a diverse multitude of creatures, and deficiencies\(^2\) in all of them through which their beings are animated with the Spirit of Life. Bountiful is the Life of the Worlds.\(^3\)

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2 *Hesronan*, literally, absence or lacking. More on the importance of this concept for a particularly Jewish ecological philosophy appears in the appended sourcesheet.

3 *Siddur Sefes Yisroel*: Among the ראשונים in אשכנז we find the following; the ראובנה and ראובנה both have the text שֶׁבָּרָא. The שֶׁבָּרָא of ראובנה, הנדרת מרצניך שֶׁבָּרָא. In the ראשונים we likewise find texts containing and omitting the word בּוֹרֵא.
**Shir Hama'alot**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>סְבָּעָה בַּרְיָא מֻזָּב:</th>
<th><strong>On Shabbat and Yontov:</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shir haMa'alot:</td>
<td>A Song of Terraces.⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בּשָׁבְתָּ וּיָוְנָּוָּנָּ:</td>
<td>When גּוֹוְוָוָו restores us to Her dwelling place,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כְּחֹלְמִים כְּחֹלְמִים</td>
<td>Tzion, we will be like dreamers: our mouths filled with laughter, our tongues with ululations! All the other peoples of the world will say: “גוֹוְוָו does amazing things for Her people.” גוֹוְו does awesome things for us – we are ecstatic!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רָוְאִים רָוְאִים</td>
<td>Restore our lost tribes, גוֹוְו like (water in) desert wadis. Those who plant with tears shall reap with joy. Though one may go to their field weeping, carrying a pail full of seeds, they shall return home with joy, bearing a mighty harvest. (Tehilim 126)⁵</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Four traditional verses of Torah are sung to satisfy the obligation of learning Torah over a meal:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>הַֽמַּֽ֫עֲלֹ֥ותeration of Torah are sung to satisfy the obligation of learning Torah over a meal:</th>
<th>My mouth shall speak the praise of גוֹוְו and all creatures shall bless His holy name forever (Tehilim 145:21).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>תַּהֲלַ֥ל הָ֞יִֽינוּ צִיֹּ֑ון</strong></td>
<td>We will bless גוֹו now and forever, Halleluyah! (Tehilim 115:18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>עִֽמָּ֑נוּ לַֽעֲשֹׂ֣ות גּוֹוְוָוָוָו</strong></td>
<td>Thank גוֹו for גוֹו is good, and always kind and loving (Tehilim 136:1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>מִי יַשְּמִ֥יעַ גּוֹוְוָוָוָוָו</strong></td>
<td>Who can tell of the mighty acts of גוֹו and make all divine praise be heard? (Tehilim 106:2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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⁴ Normally translated as “ascents,” by translating ma'alot as terraces, we refer to the landscape architecture familiar to Eretz Yisroel, in order to reference the permaculture value of pooling energy through passive design features. This idea was suggested by Julie Berger for sharing this insight which bridges the valence of sacred stairs and ascents with that of the lifegiving waters, and connect the beginning of the Psalm to its ending.

⁵ Siddur Sefat Yisroel: The source for reciting Psalms 126 is in the סְדָדִיר סְפָּר מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם, the author of the prayer מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם. Psalms 126 is said in order to include the פִּי מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם at the table. The מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם is to add two to four פִּסְקָאִים afterward, as listed below. According to the פִּסְקָאִים, these are said for kabbalistic reasons. It is unnecessary to say פִּי מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם at the פִּסְקָאִים. The old מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם did not include it. Perhaps that is also because פִּי מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם was originally not included before the bensching on גוֹוְו. At the פִּי מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם since the whole מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם is said - there is no need to add פִּי מִשְׁרוֹן וְדוֹיֵם.
An Additional verse:

You shall worship אֱלֹהֵיכֶם יְיָ and G!d shall bless your bread and your water, and remove illness from your midst (Shemot 23:25).

Ettiquette for Initiating the Birkat Hamazon with Guests

When three or more people with understanding eat together, initiate the blessing with the following invitation. If there are more than ten present, add the divine name Eloheinu in parentheses.

Friends, let us Bless!

Everyone then says and you repeat after them:

May the name יְיָ be blessed from here to the ends of the world! (Tehilim 113:2)

You then give respect to all of those in attendance:

With the permission of...

my mother, my teacher \ my father, my teacher,
the Kohanim present
our teacher the rabbi
the master (f.) of this house,
the master (m.) of this house,
all of our distinguished guests,

My friends, let us bless (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) from whose bounty we have eaten.

Everyone then says and you repeat after them:

Bountiful is (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) the One whose food we have eaten, and through whose goodness our life depends!

Everyone then says together:

Blessed is G!d and bountiful G!d’s Name.
Blessing for the Sustenance of All Earth’s Creatures

Bountiful are you, אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ יְיָ Protector of the World, who nourishes the whole world with goodness, with grace, with lovingkindness, and with compassion. You feed all creatures because your lovingkindness is everywhere and always (Tehilim 136:25). Through your great goodness we have never been lacking for food: May we never ever be lacking – for the sake of your great name – because you nourish and sustain all beings, you are so good to everything, and you provide food for all your creatures. As it is written, “You open your Yud,⁶ and satisfy the desires of all living creatures” (Tehilim 145:16).⁷ Bountiful are you, הַזָּן יְיָ the nourisher of all.

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⁶ From a meditation of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan on Tehilim 145:16: don’t read yadekha (your hand), read yodekha (your yud) – the yud of the Tetragrammaton corresponding to Keter Elyon, the root of the Tree of Life.

⁷ Siddur Sefas Yisroel: According to the מָחָזָה and the נַפְשָׁה הָסְפָרִים, the verse פֹּותֵ֥חַ רָצֹֽון is said. In the מָחָזָה which primarily follows מָכַס הָסְפָרִים the פֹּותֵ֥חַ נֹתֵ֣ן appears; in the אֵשֶׂנָּז it does not.
Blessing for the Earth and our Freedom

We thank you, אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ יְיָ for the lovely, good and expansive world you gave to our ancestors; and for our liberation, אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ יְיָ from a land of confinement, redeeming us from a house of slavery; and for the promise we made with each other — a promise you made part of our very being; and for your Torah that you teach us, and for your mysteries which you reveal to us, and for the life, grace and lovingkindness that you bestow on us, and for the food with which you constantly nourish and sustain us — every day, in every season, and in every moment...

On Ḥanukah and Purim, or a civic holiday of Thanksgiving and Freedom, one adds the following:

On Ḥanukah:

In the days of the Hashmonean, Mattityahu son of Yoḥanan, the High Priest, and his sons, when the iniquitous power of the Syrian-Greeks rose against your people Yisroel to make them forgetful of your Torah, and to force them to transgress the statutes you commanded them. Then, in your abundant mercy, you rose up for them in their time of trouble; you plead their cause, you judged their complaint, you avenged their wrong; you delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of those who occupied themselves in your Torah. For yourself you made a great and holy name in your world, and for your people Yisroel you didst work a great deliverance and redemption as at this day. And thereupon your children came into the innermost of your house, cleansed your temple, purified your sanctuary, kindled lights in your holy courts, and appointed these eight days of Ḥanukah (house warming8) in order to give thanks and praises unto your great name.

8 The translation of Hanukah as housewarming is from Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi’s Siddur Tehillat Hashem Yideaber Pi available at the Open Siddur Project.
On Purim:

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, in Shushan the capital, when the wicked Haman rose up against them, and sought to destroy, to slay, and to cause all the Jews to perish, both young and old, little children and women, on one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to prey upon their belongings (Esther 3:13). Then in your abundant mercy you brought his counsel to nought, frustrated his design, and returned his evil upon his own head; and they hung him and his sons upon the tree.

On the event of a civic holiday celebrating freedom, independence, or thanksgiving:9 We worried that we would be grasshoppers in the midst of Giants;10 but Yours is the Land, and the fulness thereof,11 and we were born forth from the Earth12 with the responsibility to cultivate and preserve her.13 The Land screams silently from the blood of our brothers it has soaked up,14 while we cry with thanks for the bounty and sanctuary we have found in her. Bountiful is the one who preserves the Earth for those who share in its bounty.

For all this, Elohim, we thank and bless you. May your name be blessed by all life, by each creature in its own way, continually and for all time. As it is written, “and eat and be satisfied and bless Elohim for the good Earth given you” (Devarim 8:10). Bountiful are you Elohim for the Earth and for its sustenance.

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9 This prayer was originally self-published at the Open Siddur Project for Thanksgiving Day 2012. I prefer this prayer over other prayers for Yom Ha’atzmaut.
10 Numbers 13:33
11 Psalms 24:1, cf. Psalm 50:11, and Deuteronomy 10:14
12 Psalms 139:13
13 Genesis 2:15
14 Genesis 4:10
Blessing for a Just, Peaceful, and Open Society

Have compassion, our Protector, feed us, nourish us, sustain, support and relieve us. Speedily, relieve us from all our troubles. We beg you, let our bodies never be indebted to others. Rather, may we only ever rely on your helping hand that is full, open, holy and ample, so that we may never be ashamed nor ever be put to shame.

On Shabbat: Take pleasure, to nurture us through your mitzvot, and especially through the mitzvah of the seventh day, this great and holy Shabbat, since this day is great and holy before you, that we may relax and nap thereon in love in accordance with the command of your will. In your favor, grant us such relief that there be no trouble, grief or lamenting on the day of our rest. Let us, behold the consolation of Tzion your city, and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim your holy city, for you are the Master of rescue and of comfort.

On Yontov: and of our Ancestors! May we rise and come before you and be accepted with the memory of our holy ancestors, with the memory of the Moshiah – the son of David your servant, of the your holy City of Peace, Yerushalayim, and of all your people – the community called Yisrael.

(Please) save us with goodness, with grace and lovingkindness, with compassion, with life, and with peace, on this day of:

the New Moon [Rosh Hodesh].

Rememberance [Rosh Hashanah].

the Festival of Matzah.
the Festival of the Sukkot.
the Festival of the First Harvest.
the Gathering on the Eighth.

Remember us, אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ יְיָ for our well-being, (Amen) and (please) keep us in mind for a blessing. (Amen.) Save our lives as you promised to save us with compassion. (Amen.) Spare us and be gracious to us; have mercy on us and save us; for our eyes look to you, because you are a loving and compassionate protector.15

And rebuild the City of Peace, Yerushalayim, the holy city speedily in our days. Bountiful are you יְיָ who with compassion (and with peace) builds the City of Peace. Amen.

15 cf. Nehemiah 9:31
Blessing for Goodness Sake

Bountiful are you, ☸ Eloheinu Yee, Protector of the World, the god that is our Guide, our Majesty, our Mighty One, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Maker, our Holy One, the Holy One of Yaakov, our Shepherd, the Shepherd of Yisrael. O King who is kind and acts kindly with all creation, day by day you act kindly, are kind, and will be kind with us. You brought, you bring, and you will always bring goodness to us – with grace, lovingkindness, compassion and relief, deliverance and prosperity, blessing and salvation, with comfort and food, compassion, life, and peace – you bring everything that is really really good. For everything good that we need let us never be needy.16

16 From Talmud Bavli Gittin 57a:

Through the axle of a carriage Betar was destroyed. It was the custom when a boy was born to plant a cedar tree and when a girl was born to plant a pine tree, and when they married, the tree was cut down and a wedding canopy made of the branches. One day the daughter of the Emperor was passing when the axle of her carriage broke, so they lopped some branches off a cedar tree and brought it to her [to repair her carriage]. The Jews thereupon fell upon them and beat them. They reported to the Emperor that the Jews were rebelling, and he marched against them.

From Eikha Rabba 4:

They slew the inhabitants until the horses waded in blood up to their nostrils, and the blood rolled along stones of the size of forty se’ah[18] and flowed into the sea, staining it for a distance of four mil. Should you say that Betar is close to the sea; was it not in fact four miles distant from it? Now Hadrian possessed a large vineyard eighteen mil square, as far as from Tiberias to Tzipori, and they surrounded it with a fence consisting of the slain of Betar. Nor was it decreed that they should be buried until a certain king arose and ordered their burial. Rabbi Huna said: On the day when the slain of Betar were allowed burial, the blessing, “hatov v’hameitiv | Who is kind and deals kindly” was instituted – “hatov — Who is kind” because the bodies did not rot, and “v’hameitiv — Who deals kindly” because they were allowed burial.
May the Compassionate One's majesty watch over us for ever and ever.

May the Compassionate One be blessed throughout the cosmos and on this Earth.

May the Compassionate One be praised throughout all generations, glorified among us at all times, and honored among us in every age and in every world.

May the Compassionate One grant us an honorable livelihood.

May the Compassionate One remove the yoke of alienation from our necks, reconnecting us with the Earth we rely upon.

May the Compassionate One send a plentiful blessing upon this dwelling place, and upon this table at which we have eaten.

May the Compassionate One send us Eliyahu the prophet – may he be remembered for good – who will bring us good news, salvation, and comfort.

May the Compassionate One bless each and every one of those here, their families, the seeds they carry, and all that is theirs.

(Also bless) us and all that is ours: just as our ancestors Avraham and Sarah, Yitsḥak and Rivka, Yaakov and Raḥel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah, were each blessed in every way throughout their lives, so may the Compassionate One bless all of us together with a perfect blessing – and let us say, Amen!

May the merit of our blessed ancestors advocate in Heaven on our behalf and bring us a lasting peace on Earth.
we receive a blessing from יְיָ and justice from the אֱלֹהֵי that intervenes at times of danger. May we be considered graceful and thoughtful in the vision of אֱלֹהִים and in the perception of our fellow earthlings.20

On Shabbat:
May the Compassionate One grant us a complete Shabbat, a gift to life everlasting.21

On Yontov:
May the Compassionate One grant to us the day that is completely excellent!22

On Rosh Hodesh:
May the Compassionate One renew upon us this month for goodness and bounty.23

May the Compassionate One make us worthy of the days of the moshiaḥ and of a life in the next Age.

On Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and Yontov:
She is a tower for Her king, bringing lovingkindness to Her chosen servant, to David and to his descendants, throughout the world (II Shmuel 22:41).

On weekdays:
She intervenes for Her king, bringing lovingkindness to Her chosen servant, to David and to his descendants, throughout the world (Tehilim 18:51).

The One who makes peace in lofty places, may He make peace here below for us and for all Yisrael (and for everyone in the world) – and let us say. Amen!

20 cf. Mishlei 3:4
21 Siddur Sefos Yisroel: In general, all of the special הרחמן's are not very ancient, (unlike the standard הרחמן's which date from the time of the גאונים), therefore the הרוקח says, there is no reason to be stringent about their recitation.
22 Ibid: The יושר הרטון cites that the הרחמן תרומת הדשן composed the הרחמן for this month that we say today.
Concluding Verses from the Torah:

Be in awe of יְיָ you holy ones; for those in awe suffer no want. Young lions will suffer the pangs of hunger: but those who seek יְיָ shall not lack anything good (Tehilim 34:10–11).

Give thanks unto יְיָ for goodness is His unconditional ceaseless lovingkindness (Tehilim 136:1).

You open your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Tehilim 145:16).

Blessed is the one that trusts in יְיָ and whose trust יְיָ is (Yirmiyahu 17:7).

I have been young and now I am old; yet have I not seen a righteous person forsaken, nor their children begging for bread (Tehilim 37:25).

יְיָ will give strength to people; יְיָ will bless his people with peace (Tehilim 29:11).

Some Additional Torah I learn for after the Birkat Hamazon:

Binyamin the Shepherd made a sandwich and said, “Blessed is the Compassionate One (Cosmic Majesty) Source of this Food.” Rav says that he had performed his obligation. (Talmud Bavli Berakhot 40b)

Rebbi Yosi ben Rebbi Bun said, “It is forbidden to live in a town in which there is no vegetable garden.” (Talmud Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:12)

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24 In the past only יְיָ and יְרַאָ were said, however in the past 200-300 years were also added. Today it is considered a מנהג เมוב that they are said.
A Sourcesheet on Understanding Jewish Ecology through the Concepts of Ḥesronan and Bal Tashḥit

Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; Let the field exult, and all that is therein; Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy, Before יי for G!d is come to judge the earth.… (ק Divrei Hayamim 16:32-33)

“Are trees of the field human [to withdraw before you into the besieged city]?" This teaches that human life depends solely on fruit-producing trees. Rebbi Yishmael says: On this basis, if the Maqom has shown compassion for the fruit of one tree, all the more so for the tree. And if Scripture cautions you concerning the tree that produces the fruit, all the more so the fruit itself! (Midrash Sifre on Devarim 20:19, trans: Jacob Neusner)

All of life lives by virtue of every creature satisfying one another’s need to live. We rely on each other and we depend on one another. Not one of us was created so self-sufficient that we could live independently of other life. Only the plants (including the trees) and some bacteria can make their own food out of the combination of soil minerals, water, sunlight, and oxygen available on our planet. All of life on Earth (including human beings) depends on plants and bacteria for their life. We were all created lacking, ḥesronan -- and through fulfilling each other’s needs, all the diverse multiplicity of living creatures on Earth becomes interconnected in a living Oneness.

When we feel satisfied (savata) after eating (akhalta) we are obligated to bless (berakhta) G!d for the good Earth provided for us (Devarim 8:10). Additionally we are obligated to observe the mitzvah of Bal Tashḥit -- not to unnecessarily waste or needlessly destroy (Devarim 20:19). What do you think is the relationship between your feeling savata and being created with ḥesronan? And what is the connection between not wasting and being mindful about what we are lacking? In the first blessing of the Birkat haMazon, in Borei Nefashot, and in the blessing on flowering fruit trees, the idea of ḥesronan is explicit. Why do these blessings all speak of our lacking?

Borei Nefashot (after eating all foods except bread and baked goods):

Blessed be you יי Cosmic Majesty, the One who created so many different living beings, all needing each other, to make one Life interwoven through them all, as one soul. Blessed be the Life of all worlds.25

25 (translation adapted from an old translation by David Seidenberg, neohasid.org)
The Blessing on Flowering Fruit Trees (said only in the spring in the northern and southern hemispheres, on two or more flowering fruit trees)

Bless You Cosmic Majesty, for in your cosmos there lacks nothing, and you have fashioned goodly creatures and trees that give people pleasure.

R’ Yeshayahu Horowitz (d. 1630) taught, “While you are eating, think of how you are eating before G!d, and how there is no veil between you and the Holy One.” We remind ourselves that we too are responsible to provide for others, and that we have some will over how to direct our desires when we say, פּוֹתֵחַ רָצוֹן כֹּל, מַשָּׁבִיעַ יָדָךְ, “Open your hand and satisfy all that Life desires!” (Tehillim 145:16). When we open our hand, we are expressing lovingkindness and walking in the ways of G!d, as expressed in this midrash aggadah from Bavli Ta’anit 20b:

כִּי הוּא כָּרָךְ רֵפֵאתוֹ הַזֶּה פִּיתָה לְבַכִּיה וֶאֱמָר כָּל מַאֲךֹתֵינוּ הַלִּי וַיֶּלֶדוּ אַמְר רֵבָּה כֹּלָה
When Rav Huna began to eat bread, he would open the doors of his house and and proclaim, “Whoever is in need of food may come in and eat at my table.” (Talmud Bavli Ta’anit 20b)

Not only through satisfying each other’s needs with tzedakah, but also in satisfying your own needs with consideration and thoughtfulness can you better yourself and the world. Eat food grown without harmful pesticides and fertilizers. Become a farmer. When you buy fruits, grains and vegetables tended with care by farmers who love the Earth, and conscious to minimize the harm and suffering of all living creatures, you are helping to heal this world. By fulfilling each other’s needs with lovingkindness we help to express a more loving Nature. This is an important lesson. Rambam (d. 1204), R’ Avraham Abulafia (d. after 1291), and R’ Yosef Gikatalia (d. 1310) all taught that the hidden underlying meaning of the divine name Elohim is ha-teva – Nature. The nature (ha-teva) of this world can seem cruel and disturbing, but by cultivating the earth with love and with consideration for all of its creatures, we can bring about a more peaceful world.

וַיְרַבְּדוּ עִם־גְּדִי וְנָמֵרָה עִם־כֶּבֶשׂ זְאֵב וְגָר נֹהֵג קָטֹן וְנַעַר יַחְדָּו וּמְרִיא וְעֵגֶל יִרְבָּדוּ יַחְדָּו תִּרְעֶ֖נָה וָדֹב וּפָרָ֤ה בָּֽם׃
And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of G!d, as the waters cover the sea. (Yeshayahu 11:6-9)
You need only ask the beasts and they will teach you; The birds of the sky and they will tell you; Or speak with the Earth and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea, they will tell you. (Iyov 12:7-8)

Even though you may think them superfluous in this world, creatures such as flies, bugs and gnats, have their allotted task in the scheme of creation, as it says ‘And G!d saw everything that G!d had made, and behold, it was very good’. (Bereshit Rabbah 10:7)

Bless you who diversified the creatures. (Blessing upon seeing strange or unusual creatures)

Upon considering all the work of creation, G!d said: These human beings have life, and those other creatures have life. These have breath and those have breath; these have desire for food and drink, and those have desire for food and drink. Human beings ought to be deemed as important as cattle, as beasts, at least as important as the variety of lizards, amphibians, and other creeping things which I created upon the Earth. At once the Holy Blessed One felt some measure of contentment and resolved not to annihilate humanity. And so you see that reptiles, creeping things, and all of life was created in the world dependent on one another, and so too sustains humanity on Earth. (adapted from Tanna d’ebei Eliyahu, end of Chapter 1)

The Maggid of Mezeritch was a great Rabbi and an even greater storyteller. People would come from far and wide to sit and hear his stories. But every morning at dawn, before any of his students were awake, the Maggid would begin his day by going alone to a pond on the edge of town. The Maggid’s students often wondered about the Rabbi’s strange habits, but no one dared to ask him and he never mentioned it. One day a new student asked the Maggid about his daily trips. The Master replied, “I go there daily to learn the song that frogs use to praise the Holy One. Even as a Rabbi and a storyteller, it takes a very long time to learn that song.” (The Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liadi)

Rebbi Yohanan said: If we had not received the Torah, we would have learned modesty from watching a cat, honesty from the ant, and loyalty from the dove. (Bavli Eruvin 100b)

Blessed are you who has such things in the cosmos. (Blessing upon seeing beautiful creatures)
לֹא־תַשְׁחִית
יְיָ’
For יְיָ’’s is the Earth and the fullness thereof (Tehillim 24:1)

בָּהּ׃
וְיֹ֣שְׁבֵי
תֵ֝בֵ֗ל
וּמְלֹואָ֑הּ
הָאָ֣רֶץ
לַֽ֭יְיָ
Rav Simon said: Every single blade of grass has a Mazal [constellation] in the rakia (heavenly firmament) which strikes it and says, ‘Grow!’ This is the meaning of the verse, “Do you know the laws of the heavens, and can you place their control [mishtar] over the earth?” (Job 38:33). Mishtar is an expression of shoteir [an enforcing officer]. (Bereishit Rabbah 10:6, translation by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner)

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placed the Earthling in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and to protect it – l'ovdah ul'shomrah. (Bereishit 2:15)

In the following story, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhok Schneerson (1880-1950) recalls when he was a teenager walking in the fields near Bolivke with his father, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn (1860-1920):

One day in the summer of 1896, I was strolling with my father in the field in the country resort of Bolivke, near Lubavitch. The crops were almost ripe; the grain and the grass rippled in a gentle breeze.

“Behold G'dliness”, my father declared. “Every movement of each single ear of grain and blade of grass was included in the Primeval Thought of Adam Kadmon, He who watches and gazes until the end of all generations. Divine Providence causes this thought to be realized for the sake of a specific G’dly intent.” As we walked on, we found ourselves in a forest. I continued, proceeding deep in contemplation of what I had just been told concerning Divine Providence, overwhelmed by the gentleness and earnestness of my father’s explanation.

As people often do, I plucked the leaf from a tree that I passed by without taking particular notice, and held it for a while in my hand. As I walked on, engrossed in thought, ever so often I tore off small pieces from the leaf and tossed them to the ground.

My father then said: “The ARI z”l teaches that…every leaf is a created being with Divine vitality which G’d created with a specific intent and role in the ultimate purpose of creation…

“We were just discussing the subject of Divine Providence and without any thought at all you plucked the leaf, held it in your hand, played with it…tore it up into little pieces, and scattered it in various places.

“How can a person act so light-mindedly in relation to one of G’d’s creations? This leaf is something created by the Almighty for a particular reason. It has a G’d-given vitality, it has a body and it has a life. In what way is the leaf’s ‘I’ smaller than your ‘I’?”…”

The root reason for this mitzvah (bal tashhit) is known (evident): it is in order to train our spirits to love what is good and beneficial and to cling to it; and as a result, good fortune will cling to us, and we will move well away from every evil thing and from every matter of destructiveness. This is the way of kindly pious people and the conscientiously observant; they love peace and are happy at the good fortune of people, and bring them near the Torah. They will not destroy even a mustard seed in the world and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see; and if they are able to do any rescuing, they will save anything from destruction, with all their power.

Not so, however, are the wicked (Psalms 1:4), the brethren of destructive demons. They rejoice at the destruction of the world and they become destroyed. By the measure with which a man measures, by that he is measured; in other words, to that he is adhered forever – in keeping with the verse, he who is glad at calamity shall not go free of evil (Proverbs 17:5). He who desires good, though, and rejoices at it, his spirit shall abide in good fortune (Psalms 25:13) forever. This is well and widely known. (Sefer HaHinnuch: D’varim 20:19 number 529, translation based on Charles Wengrov)

When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees, for from them will you eat, do not cut them down; for is the tree of the field an earthling that can run away from you? (Devarim 20:19)
“Are trees of the field human [to withdraw before you into the besieged city?” (Deuteronomy 20:19). The Torah says:

You shall not chop down a tree which bears fruit, for you can eat from it. Particularly when you come to do battle with a city, and there are trees in front of the city, those you shall most certainly not chop down, so that you can eat from them. You may not cut off even a twig.

Why does the verse liken a tree to a person? Just as the person has within him the power to grow, so the tree has the power to grow. Just as the person has children, so the tree bears fruits.

The Sages say that when one chops down a fruit-bearing tree, the tree cries out and its voice is heard from one end of the world to the other.

Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav was once traveling with his ḥasidim by carriage, and as it grew dark they came to an inn, where they spent the night. During the night Rebbe Nahman began to cry out loudly in his sleep, waking everyone up in the inn. Everyone came running to see what happened. When he awoke, the first thing Rebbe Nahman did was to take out a book he had brought with him. Then he closed his eyes and opened the book and pointed to a passage. And there it was written “Cutting down a tree before its time is like killing a soul.”

Then Rebbe Nahman asked the innkeeper if the walls of that inn had been built out of saplings cut down before their time. The innkeeper admitted that this was true, but how did the rabbi know?

Rebbe Nahman said: “All night I dreamed I was surrounded by the bodies of those who had been murdered. I was very frightened. Now I know that it was the souls of the trees that cried out to me.” (Rebbe Nahman, retold by Howard Schwartz in Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B’Shvat Anthology (1998).)

Awareness:

Bountiful are You Cosmic Majesty, who gives sight to the blind.26

All Foods:

Bountiful are You Cosmic Majesty, through whose word all things came into being.27

26 cf. Tehillim 146:8
27 Siddur Sefas Yisroel: The Rodolavim Siddur’s text is נהייה, however acc. to theスーパーハンマー, the correct term is נהייה.
Rainbows:
Bountiful are You Cosmic Majesty, Who remembers the covenant and keeps its promise faithfully with all creation.

Rain & Good News:
Bountiful are You Cosmic Majesty, who is good and does good.