

# Shemoneh Esrei: A Journey Through the Siddur

## Installment 1 - Introduction and Da'at

### **Shemoneh Esrei - 4th Bracha**

<p>You grant knowledge to humankind, and teach people understanding. Grant us, from You, knowledge, understanding and insight. Blessed are You, God, the One who Grants Knowledge.</p>	<p>אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת. וּמְלַמֵּד לְאָנוּשׁ בִּינָה: חֲנֹנֵנוּ מֵאֵתְךָ דַּעַת בִּינָה וְהַשְׂכֵּל. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', חוֹנֵן הַדַּעַת:</p>
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### **Creation of Adam and Eve, and the Blessing of Knowledge**

#### **Genesis 1:26-28**

<p>26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."</p>	<p>כּו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: כח וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וַרְדּוּ בְּדִגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּי הָרֹמְשֵׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:</p>
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- Human beings are created in the Divine Image (verse 26)
  - Two main components to this:
    - Dominion over all the other animals (verse 26)
    - Blessing to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (verse 28)
  - How do people dominate other animals?
    - Technological strength i.e. through the use of the intellect
  - How do people multiply and fill the earth?
    - Procreation - also referred to as an outgrowth of *da'at* (see Genesis 4:1, "And Adam knew his wife Eve")

- The Divine Image seems to be expressed through the use of human knowledge → *da'at*, understanding and creative ingenuity
- The blessing opens with the words: אֶתְּהָ חוּן לְאָדָם דַּעַת
  - חוּן means to bestow a gift, it's a loving form of giving
  - In Genesis 2:17, God commands Adam:

And from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat, for on the day you eat from it you shall surely die	וּמַעַץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרַע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַּיּוֹם אֲכַלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת
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- One of the most puzzling questions about Genesis: Why does God want to withhold knowledge of good and evil from humankind? Isn't moral knowledge something God wants us to have?
- This bracha presents knowledge as something that God lovingly bestows, a gift from God to humankind → to Adam (אֶתְּהָ חוּן לְאָדָם דַּעַת). The opposite of something that was *taken* in violation of God's command (Genesis 3:6 - "וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִי וְתֹאכַל", and she **took** of its fruit and ate")
  - Could this bracha be offering an alternative picture? Is it offering a commentary on Genesis?
    - Maybe God *does* want to bestow knowledge to humanity, just not in the way that Adam and Eve took it.
    - Maybe it was meant to be *given* by God at some point, rather than taken illicitly
    - Was there a time that God granted the gift of knowledge ever? When would that have taken place?

Further Research:

- We will continue this exploration of the first bakasha in the next segment and the ones that follow. In the meantime, look at the remainder of this bracha. Do you see any other words or ideas that seem to link it to the early stories in Genesis, and might help add to the theory we're beginning to develop? Do these themes seem to play out in the brachot that follow?