

Appreciating God's World A Prerequisite for *Mitzvot*

By Abraham J. Twerski

"I think I am doing everything right: Shabbat, *kashrut*, *tefillah*, Daf Yomi, but I don't get a spiritual high. What am I doing wrong?" This is not an uncommon question.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* says that on Judgment Day everyone will be asked, "Did you enjoy and appreciate My world?"

Proper enjoyment of the world is a mitzvah, as we acknowledge the grandeur of God's creation. Indeed, Rambam says that the way to achieve love of God is to study His magnificent creations (*Yesodei HaTorah* 2:1-2). The incomparable wonders of the world—whether the macrocosm of super galaxies, the microcosm of molecular structure or the intricate design of a leaf—declare the awesome wisdom and majesty of God. A physician specializing in infertility once said, "I peered through a microscope at a tiny fertilized ovum. I realized that from this point on, all this single cell will receive is a variety of chemicals, from which it will fashion a full human being, with a liver

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that puts all chemical plants to shame and a brain of 100 billion interconnecting cells. It was then that I appreciated the infinite wisdom and omnipotence of God."

The *Shulchan Aruch* lists a number of *berachot* to be recited in appreciation of the marvels of creation, and I have been fortunate to say them, as I have seen the glaciers of Alaska, the snowcapped mountains of the Alps, a display of the aurora borealis, the oasis of Ein Gedi, the breathtaking Grand Canyon, the tropical forests of the Amazon, the mighty Niagra Falls, the giant redwood trees in California, the sunrise and sunset at the western and eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee and the birds and beasts of the jungles of South Africa.

Chazal made it abundantly clear that both prayer and Torah study require an appreciation of the majesty of God, which, as Rambam says, can be achieved by reflecting and meditating on the miracle of nature. This idea is evident in Psalms (19:8-9), where King David prefaces his praises of the Torah with "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse of the sky tells of His handiwork" (19:2). Furthermore, in 104:1, he says, "Bless Hashem, O my soul. Hashem, my God, You are very great," and then follows with a description of nature so enrapturing that some say it is worthwhile to learn Hebrew if

only to read chapter 104 in the original. Similarly, the daily prayer of Shema, in which we accept the sovereignty of God, is preceded by several paragraphs lauding the grandeur of the heavenly bodies.

Some people who pray regularly admit that their prayers lack fervor and their performance of *mitzvot* lacks enthusiasm. Think what it would be like if all the necessary nutrients were provided for us in tasteless food. We could survive, but there would be no pleasure in eating. Prayer, *mitzvot* and Torah study are indeed the nutrients of the soul, but they are sometimes performed without "flavor." King David was right. Appreciating the majesty of God through His wondrous works is a necessary prerequisite for prayer and Torah study.

One does not have to be a world traveler, astronomer or microscopist to appreciate God's magnificent creations. When one recites the *berachah* for fruit, "*Borei peri haetz*," and reflects that a tiny seed disintegrates in the ground and produces a tree that will bear abundant fruit for many years, one can appreciate the Divine grandeur.

The unwillingness to stop and reflect on the wonder of God's world reminds me of the story of a museum visitor who was looking at artistic masterpieces but complained that he saw "only colors." The museum guide removed the visitor's glasses, which were dirty, and wiped them clean. Looking through clear lenses, the visitor could see the beauty of the paintings.

If we take the time and make the effort to meditate adequately on the majesty of God, our prayers, Torah study and performance of *mitzvot* will be spiritually uplifting. **JA**