

Shir Hama-a-lot, b'shuv Adonai et shivat Tzion Hayinu k'cholmim.  
Az y'malci s'chok pinu ul-shoncinu rina, az yomru vagoyim:  
"Higdil Adonai la-a-sot im cilch." Higdil Adonai la-asot imanu, hayinu s'meichim.  
Shuva Adonai et sh'yvitcinu ka-afikim banegev.  
Hazor! m' dima b'rina yik-tzoru.  
Haloch yelicheh uvach, nosci meshech hazara. Bo yavo v'rina nosci alumatav.

T'hilat Adonai y'dabcir pi vivareich kol basar Sheim kod'sho l'olam va-ed.  
Va-anachnu n'veareich va-mei-ata y'ad olam hal'luya.  
Hodu Ladonai ki tov, ki l'olam chasdo.  
Mi y'maleil g'vurot Adonai, yashmi-a kol t'hilato.

LEADER: Chaveirai n'varcich.  
 GROUP (LEADER REPEATS): Y'hi sheim Adonai m'vorach mci-atah v'ad olam.  
 LEADER: Birshut chaveirai n'varcich Eloheinu she-achalnu mishelo.  
 GROUP (LEADER REPEATS): Baruch Eloheinu she-achalnu mishelo uv-tuvo chayinu.  
 ALL: LEADER hu u-varuch sh'mo.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, hazan et ha-olam kulo b'tuvo b'chein  
b'chesed uv-rachamim, hu notein lechem l'chol-basar, ki l'olam chasdo,  
uv-tuvo hagadol tamid lo chasar lanu v'al yechsar lanu mazon l'olam va-ed.  
Ba-avur sh'mo hagadol, ki hu Eil zan um-fameis lakol, u-meitiv lakol u-meichin  
mazon l'chol-b'rivotav asher bara. Baruch atah Adonai, hazan et hakol.

V'al hakol Adonai Eloheinu anachnu modim lach um-varchim  
otach yitbarach shimcha b'fi chol chai tamid l'olam va-ed,  
kakatuv: "V'achalta v'savata uveirachta et-Adonai Elohecha  
al ha-aretz hatova asher natan lach."  
Baruch Atah Adonai, al ha-aretz v'al hamazon.

Racheim Adonai Eloheinu al Yisrael amecha,  
v'al Y'rushalayim irecha, v'al Tzion mishkan k'vodccha,  
v'al malchut beit David m'shichecha, v'al habayit hagadol v'hakadosh shenikra  
shimcha alav. Eloheinu avinu, r'einu zuncinu, parn'seinu v'chalk'lenu  
v'harvicheinu,  
v'harvach-lanu, Adonai Eloheinu, m'heira mikol-tzaroteinu.  
V'na al tatz-richeinu, Adonai Eloheinu,  
lo lidei matnat basar vadam v'lo lidei hal-va-atam,  
ki im l'yad'cha ham'lei-a hap'tucha hak-dosha v'har'chava,  
shelo nejovsh v'lo nikaleim l'olam va-ed.

**ON SHABBAT:**  
R'tzei v'hachalitzeinu Adonai Eloheinu b'mitzvatecha,  
uv-mitzvat yom hash'vi'i haShabbat hagadol  
v'hakadosh hazeh. Ki yom zeh gadol v'kadosh hu l'fanecha,  
lishbot-bo v'lanuach bo b'ahavah k'mitzvat r'tzonecha. U-virtzon'cha hanach  
lanu Adonai Eloheinu shelo t'hei tzara v'yagon va-anacha b'yom m'nuchateinu.  
V'har-cinu Adonai Eloheinu b'n'chemat Tzion ir'cha,uv'vinyan  
Y'rushalayim ir kodshecha. Ki atah hu ba-al al-'v'shuot u-va-al hanechamat.

**FOR FESTIVALS AND THE NEW MOON:**  
 Elohaiinu Veilchoi Avoteynu va'alch v'yavo, v'yagiya, v'yerahch, v'yecirathch v'yishma,  
 v'yipakheyd, v'yizachor, zichroneynyu v'fikdoneinu, v'zichron avoteynu, v'zichron  
 mahshiyach ben Dahved ahvdacha, v'zichron yerushalayim ir kadshchchah, v'zichron kol  
 amcha beyt yisrael l'fahecha, l'faytah, l'tovah, l'cheyn, ul'chesed, ulerachammim,  
 lechayyim, uleshalom b'yom [for new month *Rosh Chodesh*, for Passover *Chag Hamatzot*  
 for Succot *Chag Hasuccot*, for Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah *Shemini Hachag*  
*Ha'atzerei*, for Shemini, *Chag Hashemini*, for Rosh Hashanah *Hazikaron*] hazeh,  
 zahchreynu Adonai Eloheinu bo l'tovah, ufahkdeynu bo l'v'racha, v'hoshiyeynu bo  
 l'chayyim. U'cidach v'shuah v'rachamin choon v'chaneynu v'rachemyn aleynu,  
 v'hoshiyeynu, ki ailacha cynecnu, ki El meloch chasus v'rachum ahata.

9

ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש בבהרה בימינו.  
ברוך אתה יי, בונה ברחמי ירושלים. אמן.  
Uv-nei Y'rushalayim ir hakodesh bimheira v'yameinu.  
Baruch atah Adonai, boneh v'rachamav Y'rushalayim. Amein.  
May God rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily in our lifetime. Blessed is God, who restores Jerusalem with mercy. Amen.

10

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם. האל אבינו  
מלכנו אדינו בוראנו גואלנו יוצרנו קדושו  
קדוש יעקב. ראונו רועה ישראל. המלך הטוב  
והמטיב לכל. שכל יום ויום הוא המטיב.  
הוא מטיב. הוא יטיב לנו. הוא גמלנו הוא  
גומלנו הוא יגמלנו לעד לחן ולחסד ולרחמים  
ולרחו. הצלה והצלה ברכה וישועה גמלה.  
פרנסה וכלכלה ורחמים וחסד ושלום וכל טוב.  
ומכל טוב לעולם אל יחסרנו.

Blessed is The Lord our God, Sovereign of the universe, who is our God, our Parent, our Sovereign, our Mighty One, our Redeemer, our Maker, the Holy One of Jacob, the Shepherd of Israel, the good Sovereign who does good to all. May God who continually shows us kindness continue offering goodness to us. As God has ever bestowed favors upon us, may God continue to bless us with grace, loving kindness, compassion, deliverance, redemption, consolation, sustenance, and mercy; a life of peace and all goodness. May God never withhold goodness from us.

הרחמן, הוא ימלוך עלינו לעולם ועד.

May the Merciful One reign over us forever and ever.

הרחמן, הוא יתברך בשמים ובארץ.

May the Merciful One be extolled in heaven and on earth.

11

הרחמן, הוא ישפח לדור דורים. ויתפאר בנו לעד  
וילבש גצמים. ויתנצח בנו לעד ולעולמי עולמים.

May the Merciful One be praised in all generations, be glorified through us to all eternity, and be honored among us forever.

הרחמן, הוא יפרנסנו בכבוד.

May the Merciful One grant us an honorable livelihood.

הרחמן, הוא ישבור עלנו מעל צארכנו  
והוא יוליכנו קוממיות לארצנו.

May the Merciful One break the yoke of our oppression and lead us in dignity to our ancient homeland.

12

הרחמן, הוא ישלח ברכה מרבה בבית הזה ועל  
שולחן זה שאכלנו עליו.

May the Merciful One send abundant blessing upon this dwelling and the table at which we have eaten.

הרחמן, הוא ישלח לנו את אליהו הנביא. זכור  
לנו. ויבשר לנו בשורות טובות. ישועות ונחמות.

May the Merciful One send Elijah the Prophet to us, and may he bear good tidings of salvation and comfort.

הרחמן הוא יברך את כל המסבים כאן.  
אוהנו ואת כל אשר לנו.

Harachaman hu y'vareich et-kol-ham'subim kan,  
otanu-v'et-kol asher lanu.

May the Merciful One bless all who are gathered here and all their families, as well as all dear to us.

13

כמו שנתברכו אבותינו: אברהם, יצחק,  
ויעקב. ואמותינו: שרה, רבקה, לאה, ורחל.  
בכל מקל כל, בן יברך אותנו כלנו יחד.  
בברכה שלמה, ונאמר: אמן. בפרום ולמדו  
עליהם ועליו זכות. ששהא למשמרת שלום וגשם ברכה מאת יי.  
וידקוה מאלהי ישענו. ונמצא חן ושלום טוב בעיני אלהים ואדם:

Even as our forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and our foremothers: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, were blessed in every way;  
so may God bless all of us together with a perfect blessing, and let us say: Amen. May our merit and the merit of our ancestors secure enduring peace for all of us. May we receive a blessing  
from God, and justice from the God of our salvation. May we find grace and favor in the sight of God and humankind.

14

הרחמן, הוא יברך את כל אחינו בני ישראל  
הנחונים בצרה. ויציאם מאפלה לאורה.

May the Merciful One bless all of the children of Israel who are now oppressed and bring them from darkness into light.

15

הרחמן, הוא יתנו לנו יום שבת ומנוחה לתי העולמים.

May the Merciful One grant us a world that shall be entirely Shabbat and eternal rest.

16

הרחמן הוא יחדש עלינו את החודש הזה לטובה ולברכה.

May the Merciful One grant us this new month for good and blessing.

17

הרחמן, הוא יזכנו לימות המשיח. ויהי העולם הבא.

May the Merciful One enable us to live in the Messianic age and in the world to come.

מגדל (בשבת ובראש חשו: מגדול) ישועות מלכו  
ועושה חסד למשיחו. לידו ולזרעו עד עולם.

God grants deliverance (on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh: God is a tower of deliverance) to God's chosen sovereign, and shows kindness to God's anointed one, to David, and his descendants forever.

18

עושה שלום ברחמי הוא יעשה שלום  
עלינו ועל כל ישראל. אמן.

May the One who makes peace in the heavens let peace descend on all us and all of Israel, and let us say: Amen.

19

יכא את יהוה קדושי כי אין מחסור ליכאיו.  
כפירים רשו ורעבו ודורשי יהוה לא יחסרו כל טוב.  
הודו ליי כי טוב. כי לעולם חסדו.

פוחת את ידו. ומשביע לכל חי רצון.

ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח ביהוה. ויהי יהוה מבטחו.

Be aware of God, you who are consoled: those who are aware of God will be sustained. Those who deny God are lacking and hungry. Those who seek God shall not lack anything that is good. Give thanks to God, for God is good; God's mercy endures forever. God opens God's hand and satisfies every living thing with favor. Blessed is the one who trusts in God, for God will be their protection.

I have been young, and I have been old, but I have not seen a righteous person abandoned, nor that person's seed destitute.

20

יהוה עז לעמו יתן יהוה יכרו את עמו בשלום.

May God give strength to our people; may God bless our people with peace.

SOURCE

"FOOD FOR THOUGHT"

HEON SOURCEBOOK

*"The miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread. Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence in this warm world within the cold and empty stellar distances will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine—which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes."*

– Wendell Berry

## Chapter 2

# Gratitude, Mindfulness & Blessing our Food



How has Jewish tradition understood gratitude? Why is it important to develop a sense of gratitude and how might we do so today?

In this section, we explore how habits can obscure our awareness of daily miracles, and how blessings can re-awaken our sense of mindfulness, and we investigate traditional and non-traditional tools that inculcate gratefulness and open our eyes to the world.



*"A teacher from Berkeley told me about a time when her students washed and trimmed and cut up ingredients and made a big salad. 'Now wait,' she said, 'before we start eating, let's stop and think about the people who tilled the ground, planted the seeds, and harvested the vegetables.'*

*The kids stood up at their desks and gave the salad a standing ovation."*

– Frances Moore Lappé

2.1 Stealing from God

The rabbis understood the world's produce to be a sacred, divine gift. As such it was "kadosh," meaning both "sanctified" and "separate"—and, in consequence, forbidden from our enjoyment unless we made a blessing. The blessing acknowledges the divine creation and, in a sense, de-sacralizes the food, therefore enabling us to eat it. The texts in this section explore this rather fascinating idea.

Everything belongs to God

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.

– Psalm 24:1

לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהָ.

The word "me'ilah" refers to the sin of using something holy for personal benefit. Standing in the shade of the Temple on a hot day was a me'ilah, as was eating food that had already been offered on the altar.

What do you think of this idea?  
For more on Temple rituals, see 3.5

Without blessing, sacrilege

Our Rabbis have taught: It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a blessing, he commits sacrilege. What is his remedy? He should consult a wise man. But what will the wise man do for him? He has already committed the offence! Raba said: What this means is that he should consult a wise man beforehand, so that he would teach him blessings, so that he should not commit sacrilege (me'ilah).

– Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Brachot 35a

תִּנּוּ רַבָּנֵן: אִסּוּר לֹא לְאָדָם שִׂיחֵנָה מִן הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא בִּרְכָה, וְכָל הַנֶּחֱנָה מִן הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא בִּרְכָה – מַעַל. מֵאִי תִקְנִיתִיה – יִלֵּךְ אֶצֶל חָכָם. יִלֵּךְ אֶצֶל חָכָם – מֵאִי עֲבִיד לַיהוָה? הֵא עֲבִיד לַיהוָה אִסּוּרָא! אֵלֶּיָּא אָמַר רַבָּא: יִלֵּךְ אֶצֶל חָכָם מַעֲיָקְרָא וְיִלְמְדֵנוּ בִּרְכוֹת, בְּדִי שְׁלֵא יִבֵּא לִידֵי מַעֲיָלָה.

Putting good energy back into the universe

What does it mean, "Whoever enjoys produce in this world without pronouncing a blessing is called a robber"?  
...By means of the blessing, one draws down shefa. The angel who is assigned to that fruit [which one is eating] is filled by the shefa so that a second fruit can replace the first. One who enjoys the first without blessing it...eliminates the spiritual element it contained. ... As a result, the angel's power is annulled, since it no longer possesses the shefa [that it needs in order to replace the fruit].  
– Peri Eytz Hadar; translated by Miles Krassen

This text comes from the kabbalistic/mystical tradition. We don't need to believe literally in angels in order to try to understand something about this kabbalistic relationship to the sanctity of food.  
What does this passage suggest about the relationship between people and God?  
"Shefa" means abundance. In this case, the text refers to the flow of Divine abundance.

Another way to think about stealing from God is to consider the effect of our actions on future generations.  
See 8.5

## Did you steal that apple?

I was teaching about Tu B'Shevat to a number of people at the Orangetown Jewish Center. We were talking about this idea of food being stolen from God. What does that mean, exactly? "Sir," I said to a man at the front of the room, "what was the last thing you ate before you came here?"

"An apple," he replied.

"Great," I said. "An apple. Did you steal that apple?"

"No," he replied, "I bought it at ShopRite."

People smiled. But he was quite right. When most of us want an apple, we go to a store and we buy one. With stores and markets as the intermediating mechanism by which we obtain our food, which necessarily involve *not* stealing – what could this text possibly imply, and how can a *bracha* make a difference?

I said, "Sir, if someone had given you a million dollars, would you have been able to make that apple?" And people smiled again, this time with a different sense of awareness.

The point of "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24) is to remind us that we enjoy the natural fruits of creation. We ourselves did not create and could never create them. A *bracha* is different than saying "Thanks for dinner, Mom," (though we should say that, too). When the rabbis of the Talmud suggested not merely that we say a *bracha* before eating, but that failing to do so represented a case of theft, this is a central idea they teach us: we might buy an apple or we might grow it, but we can never create it, and its creation is an everyday miracle.

– Nigel Savage

### Apples: the fruit of diversity

A hundred years ago, there were over 14,000 different apple varieties cultivated in the US. Today, there are about 2,500. Only 100 of these are grown commercially, and of that, just fifteen varieties accounted for 90% of all sales in 1999.

Before you read the list of those apples below, how many different kinds of apples can you name? Which are your favorite?

1. Red Delicious
2. Golden Delicious
3. Granny Smith
4. Fuji
5. McIntosh
6. Gala
7. Rome
8. Jonathan
9. Idared
10. Empire
11. York
12. Cortland
13. Northern Spy
14. Rhode Island Greening
15. Stayman

(Up-and-coming varieties include: Cameo, Ginger Gold, Honey Crisp and Pink Lady.)

Source: US Apple Growers Association

## Food for Thought:

- What do you think the impact of saying a *bracha* before you eat has been (or could be) on your life?
- Which sets of wise people might you consult in order to learn how to eat healthily and responsibly?

Being alive and being human means not only that we experience but also that we can reflect on our experience. And the more we do so, the more we notice the world, the details, the hundred different species of tulips, the countless florets in a head of cauliflower, the more we are returned to our best selves. Simply by requiring that we pause a minute to reflect on our food and our lives before we eat, brachot can help us become more mindful of the food we eat. There is great value in this—for the Jewish people and for the whole world.

## Seeing again for the first time

*Jewish tradition also has a bracha for seeing a beautiful sunrise. Do you think it serves the same purpose as food brachot?*

## Seeing again for the first time

Because we eat two, three or four times every day, it's easy to forget how wondrous that is. It's like the sunrise or the sunset. The sun rises and sets every day. If it's an especially beautiful sunrise, we may notice it. But if it's not "special" we may not even see it.

*How is noticing a sunrise different or similar to noticing the source of your food?*

But if we can see it as if for the first time, each sunrise becomes very special and very beautiful. And so with each meal we create.

- Bernard Glassman, Instructions to the Cook

## Radical amazement

These words of Heschel's have become famous. What does he mean exactly?

### Radical amazement

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

*How would your life be different if you carried this consciousness with you on a daily basis?*

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man

## Stop and bless

*What is the central point you think that Rabbi Ba is making? What might this mean in your life?*

Rabbi Ba the son of Rav Hiyya bar Abba teaches: If he ate while walking, he must stand and bless. If he ate standing, he must sit and bless. If he ate sitting, he must recline [formally] and bless. If he ate reclining, he must enwrap himself and bless. And if he did this, he is like the angels who serve God.

– Talmud Yerushalmi, Brachot 7:5

רָבִי בָּא בְּרִיחַ דְּרַב חִיָּיא בַּר אֲבָא: אָכַל  
מִהֶלֶל, עוֹמֵד וּמִבְּרֵךְ. אָכַל עוֹמֵד, וְיֹשֵׁב  
וּמִבְּרֵךְ. אָכַל יֹשֵׁב, מִיֹּשֵׁב וּמִבְּרֵךְ. אָכַל  
מִיֹּשֵׁב, מִתְּעַשָּׂף וּמִבְּרֵךְ. אִם עָשָׂה כֵּן הָרִי  
הוּא בְּמַלְאכֵי הַשָּׁרָת.

## Eating a tangerine

I remember a number of years ago, when Jim and I were first traveling together in the United States, we sat under a tree and shared a tangerine. He began to talk about what we would be doing in the future. Whenever we thought about a project that seemed attractive or inspiring, Jim became so immersed in it that he literally forgot about what he was doing in the present. He popped a section of tangerine in his mouth and, before he had begun chewing it, had another slice ready to pop into his mouth again. He was hardly aware he was eating a tangerine. All I had to say was, "You ought to eat the tangerine section you've already taken." Jim was startled into realizing what he was doing.

It was as if he hadn't been eating the tangerine at all. If he had been eating anything, he was "eating" his future plans.

A tangerine has sections. If you can eat just one section, you can probably eat the entire tangerine. But if you can't eat a single section, you cannot eat the tangerine. Jim understood. He slowly put his hand down and focused on the presence of the slice already in his mouth. He chewed it thoughtfully before reaching down and taking another section.

– *Thich Nhat Hanh, Miracle of Mindfulness*

## Gratitude means noticing / eating a piece of parsley

Why is eating a vegetable one of the steps to freedom? Because gratitude is liberating. And how do we get there? We focus on the details.

Close your eyes: You are holding a piece of parsley, which you are about to dip into salt water. But before that – what things needed to happen to get this parsley into our hands? Who placed the parsley seeds into the ground? What sort of conditions did it grow in? Was it a hot summer? What did the soil feel like? How was the parsley harvested? What did it look like at that perfect moment when it was mature and ready to be picked? Who picked it? Where did the parsley travel next? Was it packed into cardboard boxes? How did it travel to the store or farmer's market? Who unloaded and unpacked it? Who placed it on a scale and weighed it so it could be purchased? Think for a moment about the number of hands that played a part in getting the parsley to this table and into our hands.

Now open your eyes: Look a little more closely at the parsley in your hand – what does it look like? How many leaves does it have? What does that specific color green remind you of? What does the stem feel like? Imagine what it tastes like...

Take a piece of parsley and dip it in salt water. Then we say the blessing together, and then we eat. *Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of fruit from the earth.*

– *Leah Koenig (Pesach 2006)*

## Food for Thought:

- What are the similarities and differences between the contemporary Buddhist perspectives of Glassman and Thich Nhat Hanh and the traditional Jewish understanding of mindfulness and gratitude?
- How does Jewish tradition encourage or discourage emphasis on the human role of food production?

This text doesn't have a question, it has a suggestion:

*Eat a tangerine ☺*

*(And try to eat it slowly, with full awareness...)*

### Special fruit

"Tangerines" are so called because the first of these sweet, easily-peeled oranges to be shipped to the US were from Tangier, Morocco, in 1710. Today, most Tangerines in the world are from China, which produced eleven thousand tons of them (and other winter oranges such as Mandarins and Clementines) in 2005, followed by Spain, which produced two thousand tons in the same year.

– UN Food & Agriculture Organization

*How does your experience of eating change when you know what has gone into the preparation of the food?*

### Grow your own karpas!

Count back about 7-8 weeks from Passover. You'll need a warm, sunny place to set your parsley plants. Soak the seeds overnight, then plant in 3" pots. Germination can take anywhere from 3-6 weeks, so be patient. Once your shoots are about 6" high, you can harvest them for your seder (or garnish).

Jews have been saying food brachot for over 2000 years. The French Revolution and the rise of modernity challenged the theology of traditional religion, and undermined prayer in many ways. The postmodern era enables old traditions to be reaccessed in new ways. We understand the saying of brachot as a key exemplar of this move. Rather than asking, "Do you believe in God?", we want to open a conversation about the broader nature of gratitude in relation to food. Can traditional brachot engender post-traditional mindfulness? And wouldn't it be ironic if post-traditional mindfulness in fact re-connected us to the world of the ancients?

## Food Blessings

*Why do you think these particular categories for food brachot arose? If you could establish different sorts of food brachot, what would they be?*

*Over bread:*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, the One who brings bread forth from the earth.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

*Over (non-bread) foods made from wheat, oats, rye, barley, and spelt:*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, Creator of types of nourishment.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
בורא מיני מזונות.

*Over wine:*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
בורא פרי הגפן.

*Over tree fruit:*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, Creator of fruit of the tree.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
בורא פרי העץ.

*Eitz or Adamah? Notice that when you think about which prayer to say, you're thinking about how the food you ate grew. Was it planted this season? Is it a perennial that produces new fruit every year? Can you imagine the tree or the field, where your food grew?*

*Over fruit from the earth:*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, Creator of fruit of the earth.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
בורא פרי האדמה.

*Over meat, fish, milk, eggs, and cheese, as well as beverages (other than wine):*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, by Whose word all things came to be.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
שהכל נהיה בדברו.

*What is the difference between saying a bracha over a natural phenomenon, such as a rainbow, and saying a bracha over food?*

*One last thought on brachot: If you don't usually say food brachot, trying saying them for a week, or even a day, and see how they influence your experience of eating.*



## Wait - what was that bracha?

If they brought before him types of desserts, he recites over them the blessing, 'Creator of types of sweets;' over edible seeds he recites, 'Creator of types of seeds;' and over other herbs he recites, 'Creator of types of herbs;' and over greens he recites, 'Creator of the fruit of the ground.' Rabbi Judah says: [He recites,] 'Blessed are You at Whose word the earth sprouts'.

Rabbi Meir says: Even if one saw a loaf [of bread] and said, 'Blessed are You Who created this loaf, how nice it is,' that serves as its blessing. If one saw figs and said, 'Blessed are You Who created these figs, how nice they are,' that serves as their blessing.

Rabbi Yose says: Anyone who departs from the formula which the sages established for blessings has not fulfilled his obligation.

– Tosefta Brachot 4:4–5

הביאו לפני מיני תרומה מברך עליהן  
'בורא מיני פסני', על הירעים הוא אומר  
'בורא מיני ירעים', ועל הדשאים הוא אומר  
'בורא מיני דשאים', ועל הירקות הוא  
אומר 'בורא פרי האדמה'. רבי יהודה אומר  
'ברוך מצמיח האדמה בדברו'.

What is the significance of the word "even" (afilu) in what Rabbi Meir is arguing? What can we infer about the previous formulations by contrast?

What does this discussion in the Tosefta show about the development of food brachot?

רבי מאיר אומר: אפילו ראה את הפת  
ואמר 'ברוך אשר ברא את הפת זו, כמה  
היא נאה', זו ברכתה. ראה את התאנים  
ואמר 'ברוך שברא את התאנים הללו,  
כמה נאין הן', זו ברכתן.

Do you agree with Rabbi Meir or Rabbi Yose?

רבי יוסי אומר: כל המשנה ממטבע שטבעו  
חכמים בברכה – לא יצא.

## God Language

Some people have amended the traditional God-language of brachot to reflect their theological outlooks and ethical concerns. While reciting the blessings shown here and those in the liturgy, the following elements can be combined to create alternative formulas.

<i>barukh 'atah adonai</i>	ברוך אתה יהוה	Blessed are you Adonai
<i>berukha 'at yah</i>	ברוכה את יי	Blessed are you Yah
<i>nevarekh 'et</i>	נברך את	Let us Bless
<i>eloheynu</i>	אלוהינו	our God
<i>he-shekhina</i>	השכינה	the Shekhina
<i>'ein ha-chayim</i>	עין החיים	Source of Life
<i>melekh ha-'olam</i>	מלך העולם	Sovereign of the universe
<i>chey ha-'olamim</i>	חי העולמים	Life of all the universe
<i>ruach ha-'olam</i>	רוח העולם	Spirit of the universe

How do these phrases differ in meaning and outlook?

– Kol Haneslama (Reconstructionist Prayerbook)

## Food for Thought:

- If you regularly say brachot, how does this practice help you feel gratitude? If you don't normally say brachot, how do you feel when you do?
- What are the arguments for using the traditional formulations? Or less traditional ones? Which do you choose to say, and why? And if you don't traditionally say a bracha, which of these most makes sense to you?

Deuteronomy 8 includes the phrase, “you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless.” These three Hebrew words led to the entire Jewish tradition of bensching (saying blessings after we have eaten.) Whether you said *Birkat Hamazon* as a kid at summer camp with lots of banging on the table, or you say it after every meal, or never at all, this remarkable prayer is a fascinatingly rich reflection of the evolution of the Jewish relationship to food and to the world.

## Food for all

*Given that we know there is so much hunger in the world, what does it mean to praise God for being “hazan et ha-kol”, the one who “provides food for all”?*

Because of God’s great goodness, we have never lacked food, nor will we ever lack it—on account of God’s great name—since God feeds and provides for all and is good to all, and who supplies food for all God’s creatures which God brought into being. Blessed are You, God, who nourishes / provides food for all.

ובטובו הגדול תמיד לא חסר לנו  
ואל יחסר לנו מזון לעולם ועד.  
בעבור שמו הגדול כי הוא אל זן  
ומפרנס לכל, ומטיב לכל ומכין מזון  
לכל ברייתיו אשר ברא. ברוך אתה  
יהוה, הזן את הכל.

## Land, food & covenant

*What are the components of the Jewish people’s relationship with God as listed here? How do they compare with other lists (such as in the Amidah, or in Dayenu in the Pesach Hagadah)? Why do you think these elements are included in the grace after meals?*

We thank You, Lord our God, for having given the heritage of a lovely, fine and spacious land to our fathers, and for having brought us out, Lord our God, from Egypt, and for rescuing us from slavery, and also for Your covenant which You sealed in our flesh, as well as for Your Torah which You taught us, and Your laws of which You told us, and for the life, grace and kindness You have granted us, and for the food which You supply and provide for us constantly, every day, all the time, and at every hour.

נודה לך יהוה אלהינו, על  
שהנחת לאבותינו ארץ חמדה  
טובה ורחבה, ועל שהוצאתנו  
יהוה אלהינו מארץ מצרים,  
ופדיתנו מבית עבדים, ועל  
בריתך שחתמת בבשרנו, ועל  
תורתך שלמדתנו, ועל חקיך  
שהודעתנו, ועל חיים חן וחסד  
שחוננתנו, ועל אכילת מזון  
שאתה זן ומפרנס אותנו תמיד,  
בכל יום ובכל עת ובכל שעה.

See Deuteronomy 8 in  
section 1.3 and 7.2

And so for everything, Adonai our God, we thank You and bless You—may Your name be blessed in the speech of all living beings, constantly, for all time. For it is written: “And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God for the good land God gave you.” Blessed are You, God, for the land and for the food.

ועל הכל יהוה אלהינו אנחנו  
מודים לך ומברכים אותך, יתברך  
שמך בפי כל חי תמיד לעולם  
ועד, כפתיב: ואכלת ושבעת  
וברכת את יהוה אלהיך על הארץ  
הטובה אשר נתן לך. ברוך אתה  
יהוה, על הארץ ועל המזון.

## Rebuild Jerusalem

*How would the nature of being Jewish be different if this paragraph was not included in the bensching? Discuss this, then read the text from Rabbi Joy Levitt on the opposite page, and then read this text again. How, if at all, does your understanding differ?*

And may You build up Jerusalem, the holy city, rapidly in our lifetimes. Blessed are You, God, who in your mercy builds up Jerusalem. Amen.

– *Birkat Hamazon*

ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה  
בימינו. ברוך אתה יהוה, בונה  
ברחמי ירושלים, אמן.

### Brich Rachamana

Blessed is the Merciful One,

Ruler of the world,

Who created this bread.

You are the source of Life for all that is,  
and your blessing flows through me.

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא  
מִלְכָּא דְעָלְמָא  
מְרִיבָה דְהָאֵי פִּיטָא

This bracha is based on the shortest bracha that will still fulfill your obligation (to say grace after meals) should you find yourself being invaded by an army or pursued by a lion.

– Aramaic from Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Brachot 40b. We think that the English words (which can be sung to the same melody but which are not a direct translation) are by Shefa Gold. If we're wrong, and you're the author, or you know who is, please let us know!

In 1990 Roger Kamenetz was a participant in a group of rabbis and Jewish leaders who traveled to Tibet for an interfaith conversation with the Dalai Lama. He subsequently wrote a book about the experience called *The Jew in the Lotus*. Rabbi Joy Levitt was a participant on the trip. This excerpt is from a review of the book, which she wrote the following year.

### Praying for our holy city

The Tibetans became very moved upon learning that Jews pray for the rebuilding of Jerusalem after meals in their homes. They immediately made plans to see if they might write a Tibetan prayer articulating their yearning for Lhasa.

I was stunned by the new light suddenly cast on this very familiar prayer. I have recited grace after meals on Shabbat my entire life, and yet had never really grasped its role in preserving the Zionist dream in the hearts and minds of Jews throughout the generations. Since my return from India, I have never recited those words without thinking both of the Tibetans and of my deep longing for Zion at peace.

– Rabbi Joy Levitt, *"The Dialogue with the Dalai Lama"*

What role, if any, does the Birkat Hamazon play in your personal relationship to the Land of Israel? If you don't regularly say the Birkat, what do you think the effect might be if you did?

### Food for Thought:

- Do you normally say a grace after meals? Which one? Why? If you don't normally say one, how do you think it might feel to do so?
- How are the blessings said after the meal different or similar to those we say before eating? (See 2.3) Why do you think the blessings are so different?

## 2.5 Eating our words

Jewish tradition includes the idea of the *d'var torah*—the obligation to speak words of Torah whenever a group of people has gathered to eat. We trace here the elements of this idea and ask the question: how do the words we speak during a meal influence not only the meal itself but also the nature of what it means to be Jewish?

### If three have eaten...

*The joke in yeshiva was, of course, that we'd be eating together and someone would say "iiiiiffff three people..." And we would say, "Yofi! We've just fulfilled our obligation to learn words of Torah, by learning that we are obligated to learn words of Torah when we eat together!"*

– Rabbi Avi Finegold

*Why do you think this applies to three people but not two or four?*

Rabbi Shimon said: If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken over it words of Torah, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, for it is written (Isaiah 28:8) "All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean." But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, for it is written (Ezekiel 41:22) "He said to me, 'This is the table that stands before God.'"

– *Pirkei Avot 3:4*

רבי שמעון אומר: שלשה שאכלו על  
שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה,  
באלו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר:  
"כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי  
מקום" (ישעיה כח:ח). אבל שלשה  
שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו  
דברי תורה, באלו אכלו משלחנו של  
מקום, שנאמר: "וידבר אלי זה השלחן  
אשר לפני יהוה" (יחזקאל מא:כב).

### The *D'var Torah*

*Why do you think it was not deemed  
sacrilegious to discuss words of  
Torah at the table?*

I love that Jews have the tradition of giving a *d'var torah* at a Shabbat meal. At a dinner party, conversation might flit about, from engaging debate to lighthearted banter, and this is enjoyable. Someone may have important news or an exciting new idea to share. But it's different than the choreographed set piece of a *d'var torah*. This is the scene:

You've eaten, you're full. You're schmoozing. Then someone taps a glass and says, "In this week's *parsha*, we learn that..." And we give the person our attention, and for two or five or more minutes we follow an exegetical journey in Torah, contemporary ideas, values, challenges. It could be cute, it could be profound. We hear them say, "and this makes me think of..." and we also are provoked to think, without the complication of conversation to obscure our thinking before we articulate it. And we hear, "In conclusion, I bless us all that..." and the learning ends with the gift of an idea or questions to ponder.

We not only eat, but share pieces of ourselves with others at the table, bringing Torah once again out of history and into the dining room, and creating time and space to enjoy the wisdom of our tradition.

– Anna Stevenson

## A person's table

"And he spoke to me, this is the table that stands before God." (Ezekiel 41:22)

This verse in Ezekiel refers to the Temple—and the Temple is here called a 'table.' It appears that there is a table that is similar to the Temple. What table is this? This refers to a table upon which many people share words of Torah.

—Magen Avot of Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemaeh Duran

"וַיִּדְבֹר אֵלַי: זֶה הַשֻּׁלְחָן, אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה" (יחזקאל מא:כב).

What connection is made between Torah and table here?

וְזֶה הַפֶּסוּק בִּיחֻקָּאֵל עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וְלִפִּי שֶׁנִּקְרָא הַמִּזְבֵּחַ שׁוּלְחָן, נִרְאֶה שֶׁיֵּשׁ שׁוּלְחָן דּוֹמֶה לַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וְאֵי זֶה הוּא? זֶה שֻׁלְחָן שֶׁאָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבַרֵּי תוֹרָה.

Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish both explain: At the time when the Temple stood, the altar used to make atonement for a person; now a person's table makes atonement for him.

—Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Chagigah 27a

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְרִישׁ לָקִישׁ דְּאָמְרֵי תְרוּוִיהוּ: בְּזֶמֶן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָים מִזְבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַל אָדָם. עַכְשָׁיו, שֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מְכַפֵּר עָלָיו.

What do you think this means? (If you want to see Rashi's explanation, which points this conversation in a different direction, see 5.3)

## Food for Thought:

- How is conversation over food different from conversation not over food?
- If you don't already have the practice of sharing words of Torah when you eat, what do you think of the idea? If you do this, how is a *d'var Torah* offered at a meal different than one offered, say, in shul or somewhere without food?

## TOPICS ADDRESSED BY BIRKAT HAMAZON

- a) **Gratitude for satisfaction of our needs:** Birkat Ha-Mazon offers gratitude not only for food, but for a range of needs (Goldberger lists ten such benefits described by Birkat Ha-Mazon, 23), including life, freedom, and laws by which to structure our lives. In the Talmud, the rabbis determine that one must say Birkat Ha-Mazon even if one has eaten only an amount of bread equal to the size of an olive (Ber. 58b). But is such a small amount of food really satisfying?
- b) **Gratitude and Humility in time of prosperity:** The purpose of blessing after eating (as expressed in Deut. 8:12-18), is that in times of prosperity (when you have "eaten your fill"), one might forget God and think that all of one's successes are one's own doing (Deut. 8:12-18). Birkat Ha-Mazon teaches us not to take our prosperity for granted.
- c) **Ethical responsibility arising from awareness of our prosperity as gift from God:** We have an obligation to both to respect and to help provide for those who are less fortunate than ourselves, and to make the effective and righteous use of our resources.
- d) **Awareness of one's membership in a community:** Birkat Ha-Mazon, and in particular the saying of the Mezuza, is a reminder of the social and communal nature of Judaism, in which every individual is a part of a larger collective. Furthermore, each of us depends upon the actions of others (generally, non-Jews) in providing food for ourselves – we are therefore part of a larger community that goes beyond the Jewish people.
- e) **Ethical responsibility arising from awareness of community:** "All Jews are responsible for one another." Jews have specific obligations towards other Jews. This raises questions of Jewish pluralism and unity. Similarly, we have a responsibility to all people, everywhere, because of our interdependent membership in the "international community" of the human race.
- f) **Universalism vs. Particularism:** The move in the text of Birkat Ha-Mazon from a universal to particularist message, particularly regarding the Jewish relationship with the land of Israel, begs the question of how can one participate in "secular" contemporary society while maintaining an authentic Jewish identity? Are we required to be a "light to the nations," and what does that mean?
- g) **Tradition/Jewish Continuity:** For some individuals, saying Birkat Ha-Mazon has less to do with the meaning of its text than with connecting with an ethnic or cultural heritage or personal family history. Along with keeping kosher and eating certain "Jewish" foods, it is a form of cultural identification.
- h) **Moral character is developed through habitual behavior:** By making routines out of certain activities, even if performed by rote, one develops self-discipline.
- i) **Gratitude for God's role in our past:** Birkat Ha-Mazon offers thanks for specific events when miracles occurred for the Jewish people, including the liberation from slavery in Egypt.
- j) **God as active force in our lives, today:** Just as God performed miracles for our ancestors, so too is God involved in our daily lives right now. Much of Birkat Ha-Mazon, as with all blessings, is set in the present tense to emphasize this point.

l) **Connection to the land of Israel:** According to tradition, the second paragraph of Birkat Ha-Mazon was instituted by Joshua at the time when the Hebrews entered the land of Israel, as an expression of gratitude (Ber. 48b). Much of the language reminds us of the connection between Jews and this land, even when they do not live in Israel.

m) **The Land of Israel as Jewish inheritance:** Use of such words as "nachalah" (inheritance) in this prayer raises questions of Jewish nationalism.

n) **Milah as reminder of Covenant with God:** Birkat Ha-Mazon explicitly mentions Milah (circumcision), which serves as a reminder that Jewish possession of the land of Israel is the result of a covenant between God and the Jewish people.

o) **Responsibilities arising from covenant with God for Land of Israel:** Jewish possession of the Land of Israel is conditional upon Jewish behavior, in terms of how the land is treated and how Israelites treat one another and their neighbor.

p) **Consolation from current state of Alienation and Exile:** Although the Temple has been destroyed, Birkat Ha-Mazon offers words of comfort, reminding Jews that God has not abandoned them.

q) **Expression of Messianic longings:** Birkat Ha-Mazon directly asks for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of a messianic age.

r) **Food is meaningless without Peace:** Birkat Ha-Mazon concludes with a prayer for peace, and includes the prayer "Oseh Shalom," "Make Peace." Prosperity and bounty are useless when there is no peace.

s) **Hachnasat Orchim, the honoring of guests and hosts:** The "most distinguished guest is generally asked to lead" Birkat Ha-Mazon (Tal. Ber. 46a, 47a), even if that person was not present for the entire meal. On the other hand, Birkat Ha-Mazon also includes a blessing that guests should make for their host(s).

t) **The Aesthetic Dimension:** Judah Halevi writes, in the Kuzari, "by blessing God we double our enjoyment of the food." (3:17, quoted in Plaut 1392). This blessing is a way of concluding a meal with everyone still at the table. Also, the choice of melody used to sing Birkat Ha-Mazon will affect the mood and emotional orientation of the prayer.

These terse descriptions cannot do justice to the variety of material, textual and theoretical, that each of these topics addresses as related to Birkat Ha-Mazon. Nevertheless, this list is comprehensive, and should serve to indicate the diversity of generative topics addressed by Birkat Ha-Mazon. It should be noted that each of these areas can serve as a "jumping-off point" to a more

60

13

comprehensive study of the subject. For example, one might examine the theology expressed in Birkat Ha-Mazon, and then compare it with the theology expressed by other prayers or contemporary theologians.

In the final third of this section, I will (again, only briefly) address the topic areas that are

# Birchot HaNehenin

## Blessings upon enjoying God's world

The Earth belongs to Adonai; and all that fills it, the world and all who dwell there.

— Psalms 24:1

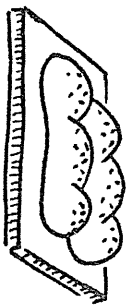
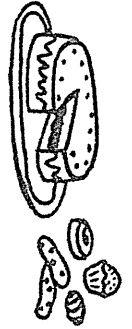
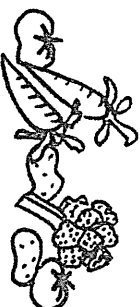


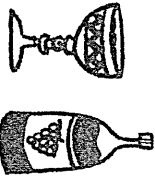
The Rabbis taught that without reciting a blessing the world or its utility is, bless God who made before taking food from

Food drawings by Tanya Zion

### Kind of Food

### Examples

### Blessing Before

Bread made from 5 grains: wheat, barley, oats, spelt, rye		Bread	<b>HaMotzi</b> הַמּוֹצִי	<b>Ba-rukh ata</b> בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה	Blessed are You
5 grains or rice when cooked or baked with so many added ingredients as to become a cake, kugel or cracker rather than a bread		Grain-based dishes: crackers, cookies, pasta, kugel	<b>M'zonot</b> מִצְנוֹת	<b>Ba-rukt</b> בָּרוּכְךָ	Blessed are You
Roots, leaves, fruit of trees that live for only one year or of trees close to the ground		Most vegetables, bananas, watermelon (unless their form changes from the natural state like pumpkin pie or tomato soup)	<b>Ha-Adama</b> הָאֲדָמָה	<b>Ba-rukh</b> בָּרוּךְ	Blessed are You
Fruit of trees that bear fruit for many years		Most fruits/ Fruits of Seven Species of Land of Israel (olive, date, fig, pomegranate)	<b>Ha-Etz</b> הָעֵץ	<b>Ba-rukh</b> בָּרוּךְ	Blessed are You
Miscellaneous		Most drinks, animal products, vegetables and fruits transformed by cooking	<b>Sheh-ha-Kol</b> שֶׁהַחַיָּה כֹּל	<b>Ba-rukh at</b> בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה	Blessed are You
Fruit of the vine		Wine and grape juice	<b>Ha-Gafen</b> הַגָּפֶן	<b>Ba-rukh</b> בָּרוּךְ	Blessed are You

**Blessing AFTER fruits, vegetables, rice, and miscellaneous foods not from grains**  
(and not from the 7 species of the Land of Israel):

**ברוך אתה יהי העולם.**  
Borei n'fashot ha-yekhes-ronan, al kol

**Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, borei n'fashot ha-yekhes-ronan, al kol**  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates many creatures and their needs. For a



# ברכות הנהנין

The Rabbis taught that "no one is allowed to enjoy something from this world without reciting a blessing/bracha" (Talmud Berachot 35a). When we behold the beauty of the world or its utility for humans, then we bless the Creator: "How lovely this bread is, bless God who made it." (Talmud Berachot 40b). That is our way of asking permission before taking food from our host's — our Divine benefactor's — table.

re'll there.

— Psalms 24:1

## Blessing Before

Motzi

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, ha-motzi lekhem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

zonot

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי מְזֻזוֹת.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, borei mi-nei m'zonot.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates species of nourishment.

-Adama

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאָדָמָה.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-adama.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

-Etz

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-eitz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

sh-ha-Kol

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, sheh-ha-kol ni-h'yah bi-d'varo.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, through whose word everything came to be.

-Gafen

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Ba-rukh ata Adonai, Elo-hei-nu me-lekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא נִפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחַיִּים, עַל כָּל מַה שֶּׁבָּרָא לַחַיִּים בְּחַיִּים רַבּוֹת. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא נִפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחַיִּים, עַל כָּל מַה שֶּׁבָּרָא לַחַיִּים בְּחַיִּים רַבּוֹת.

borei n'fashot rabot khes-ronan, al kol mah sheh-bara l'ha-khayot ba-hem nefesh kol khai. Ba-rukh khei ha-olamim.

creates many creatures and their needs. For all that You have created to sustain every living creature, we praise You, the One whose life is eternal.

## Blessing After

Birkat HaMazon  
(covers all foods when eaten with bread)

Bracha Mei-ein Shalosh  
(not in this book — see any prayerbook)

Borei N'fashot Rabot  
(see bottom of this page)

Borei N'fashot Rabot/  
Bracha Mei-ein Shalosh

Borei N'fashot Rabot

Bracha Mei-ein Shalosh

# Tales of gratitude and ingratitude

For every breath of life one takes, one should offer praise to the Holy One.

— MIDRASH, GENESIS RABBAH 14:9

## Guilty of Stealing a Meal

A nineteenth-century story tells of two Eastern European rabbis who were traveling together. They both ate a meal at an inn owned by a pious widow. While eating, one rabbi engaged in a long, detailed conversation with the rather talkative woman; the other sat quietly and, when not eating, turned his attention to a holy text he was studying.

When they rose to leave, the widow refused to let the rabbis pay for the meal. Outside, the more convivial of the two turned to his friend, commenting, "It seems to me that you are guilty of stealing a meal from that woman."

His friend looked up in astonishment. "She herself told us that we didn't have to pay."

"She didn't want us to pay money," the first rabbi answered. "But the payment she wanted was that we listen and talk to her. This you didn't do."

Guests, not just hosts, have ethical obligations. For example, Jewish tradition teaches that during the *Birkat Hamazon* (the blessings after the meal), guests are to invoke a special blessing for the family that has to be considerate and polite, and to bring pleasure to the person who is hosting them. Guests should express gratitude for

what they are served and make efforts to be sociable (and not sit at the table quiet and withdrawn). As every parent knows, guests can bring great joy to their hosts by finding things in their children to complement, too. Most of all, engage your hosts. If they need to speak, lend them your ear.

Jewish law demands additional, perhaps surprising sensitivity, on the part of guests. If they have been treated with truly generous hospitality, they should not praise their hosts lavishly to many other people; such praise might cause others to come to the host family to exploit their generosity.

— JOSEPH TELUSHKIN, *THE BOOK OF JEWISH VALUES*

## An Appreciative Guest and a Muffin

A man who spent much time with Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, used to speak of his ability to compliment and express gratitude . . . even for a muffin.

On one occasion he sat with Reb Shlomo in a dingy restaurant, presided over by a sour-looking proprietress and waitress. The woman was unusually homely, and unpleasant as well. He was happy when she put down their breakfast order and returned to the counter. But after taking one bite of the muffin she had brought

him, Reb Shlomo summoned her back. "My most beautiful friend," he said to her gently, "are you by any chance the person who baked this muffin?"

"Yeah, I am, what about it?"

"I just want you to know that this is the most delicious muffin I have ever tasted in my life."

The woman gave a hint of a smile, thanked him, and started to walk away.

"And I also want you to know," Reb Shlomo continued, "that I have eaten muffins all over the world, but none came close to this one."

Again, the woman thanked him, but Reb Shlomo still was not finished. "And *mamesh* (truly), I have to thank you because I was so hungry, and you did me the greatest favor in the world by so expertly baking this muffin, which is surely a taste of the World-to-Come."

By now the woman was smiling broadly. "Well, gee, thanks a lot. It's very nice of you to say so. Most people never comment when the food is good; you only hear from them when they have a complaint."

Reb Shlomo went on to ask the woman about the special ingredients she used in preparing the muffin, and listened attentively. He was specific with his compliments as well, commenting on the muffin's airy texture, its buttery and fragrant quality. Carlebach's friend recalls that he was watching Reb Shlomo's paean to a muffin with a mixture of amazement and amusement, until he gazed at the woman. "I was taken aback. The homely woman was no more. A few minutes with Shlomo had done the trick. She was transformed. She had become beautiful."

— JOSEPH TELUSHKIN, *THE BOOK OF JEWISH VALUES*

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It is gratef-  
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great.

HESCHEL, M.

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— ANONYMOUS

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OF JEWISH VALUES

You should eat, and  
be satisfied. Then  
you should bless  
Adonai, your God.

— DEUTERONOMY 8:10

It is gratefulness which  
makes the soul  
great.

— ABRAHAM JOSHUA  
HESCHEL, MAN'S QUEST FOR GOD

If a Jew breaks his leg,  
he thanks God that  
he did not break  
both legs.

If he breaks both legs,  
he thanks God he  
did not break his  
neck.

— ANONYMOUS JEWISH COMEDIAN

Cholent — Shabbat stew — was prepared in  
Poland in a communal oven to and from which  
Jews carried the crockpot (1930-1939).  
USHMM, Washington, D.C.



## MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

Choose a mindfulness activity to practice for the week and remember to practice awareness of your body sensations, thoughts and feelings while performing the activity. You may select from the list below or choose an activity of your own.

- 1) Washing hands. Consider where the water comes from, and how valuable it is in our arid environment. Be aware of the posture of your body, feeling of the water, the soap, the movement of your hands. Breathe!
- 2) Stopping at red light. Allow this to be a moment to pause, breathe, look at the sky, people. Become aware of the posture of sitting, notice the sense of your hands on the wheel. How tightly are you holding the wheel? Be aware of your shoulders, back. Notice the pressure of your buttocks on the seat, your thighs. The contact your feet make with the floor, the brake. What sort of thoughts and feelings arise? What is your mood?
- 3) Looking at a clock or your watch, remember to pause and breathe. Try putting your watch on the other arm as another way to pause. Notice how it feels when things are slightly different.
- 4) When the telephone rings, instead of rushing to answer it, allow yourself to pause with the first three rings, relax your face with a half-smile and breathe. Feel your arm reaching for the phone, the contact your hand makes with the plastic, how the receiver feels against the ear.
- 5) Washing dishes. Notice your posture, how your body moves, the look and feel of the dishes: the feel of the water, how it looks and sounds. Are you doing them slowly or rushing to get them done. Be aware of your mood. Breathe.
- 6) Brushing your teeth. How your hands hold the toothbrush, the movement of your arm, the sound of the brush on your teeth. Taste of toothbrush.
- 7) Taking a shower. Awareness of water. Its temperature, where it hits your body. Posture. Movements. Mood.

- 8) Eating one meal a day, breakfast or lunch. Notice how you are sitting (or standing?). See the food, the shapes and colors. Smell it. Pause to consider from where it came and how it ultimately reached your table. Notice any feelings of anticipation. Be aware of reaching for the food, bringing it to your mouth. Be with the taste and texture of the food as your chew. How do you swallow? Notice any impulse to rush through this bite in order to go on with the next. Thoughts and feelings that arise. What is your mood? How is your breathing?
- 9) Reaching, touching, turning a doorknob, opening the door and passing through the doorway. Breathe. A transition.
- 10) Driving: Turn the radio off and be with driving. Awareness of your posture, the pressure of your hands on the steering wheel, your buttocks on the seat and your foot on the gas pedal/brake. Notice what parts of your body are tense or relaxed. What is your breathing like? Be with sights and sounds as they arise and pass away. Use beginner's mind to see your old route with fresh eyes. (Or you might try a new route.)
- 11) Drive slowly. Stay in the right lane and go 55 miles per hour. Breathe.
- 12) When you go to work, look into the eyes of a co-worker and say, "Good morning." Breathe.
- 13) When dressing and undressing, notice your posture and how you reach for the clothes. How they feel on your skin as you slip them on or off. Breathe.
- 14) Use those moments of walking (in the office, at home, to or from the car, shopping, etc. as a meditation. Be with your posture, the feel of your body moving, how your legs and arms move. The feel of your feet contacting the ground. Your breathing. Sights and sounds. Thoughts and moods.
- 15) Shopping meditation. Be aware of your intention, what you plan to buy. Notice how your attention is pulled by different objects, notice the desire to have or own something. See if you can pause and ask yourself if you need this or if it is enough to look at this beautiful object in the store. (Stores as art museums.) When food shopping be aware of what foods are calling you. Is it your body that is hungry for them, or your mind?

