

- 9 *A land where you will eat bread without scarceness, and you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper.* ט אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמִסְכָּנֹת תֵּאָכְלֶה-
בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא-תִחְסַר כֹּל כִּי אֶרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אֲבָנֶיהָ בְּרִזָּל וּמִהַרְרֵיהָ
תִּחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת:
- 10 *When you eat and are satisfied, then bless God, your God, for the good land that He has given you.* י וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל-הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר
נָתַן-לְךָ: שְׁנֵי

showed me the first printed sheets of his book, and I found in them what appears to me to be a most important note on this verse. He points out that in the ancient world, and not just in Jewish circles, fruits such as barleycorns, olives, etc. were used as units of weight and measure. Naturally, in international commerce it was necessary to establish the fruits of one specific country as the standards. Since the fruit of Eretz Yisrael was recognized as the very best, units of measure and weight were set according to its fruit. Standards were not set according to just any barleycorns or olives, but according to barleycorns of Eretz Yisrael, olives of Eretz Yisrael, and so forth. Thus, שבה ארץ ישראל was demonstrated by the fact that its fruits were generally accepted as units of measure. To my regret, I do not recall the name of the author, and I also do not know whether his completed work was published

- 9 *מסכנות. ארץ וגו' — from the root סכן: to pay careful attention to something. Thus סוכן: the keeper of the king's treasury. Thus also מסכן: a miser, and one who must be stingy out of necessity. במסכנות: in parsimony. (See Commentary, Bereshis 19:4.)*
לא תחסר כל בה: It provides you also with delicacies which serve only to heighten the pleasantness of life.
אשר אבניה ברזל וגו'. From *Divrei Ha-Yamim* I, 22:3 it is clear that iron and copper were mined from quarries in Eretz Yisrael. חצב is the term for mining ores from rock. Accordingly, it is a land whose soil is suitable for agriculture and for industry.
- 10 *ואכלת ושבעת וגו' אכל: to consume something in order to renew oneself [see Commentary, Bereshis 1:29-30].*

שבוע is related to צבה, שבע, שפע, ספה, all of which denote abundance.

ברך את ה' "to bless God," means: to further and realize God's aims, which were entrusted to man who acts in moral freedom; or, to resolve to realize these aims in practice (see *Shemos* 18:10 [and Commentary there, 18:11; cf. Commentary, *Bereshis* 9:27]). Whenever you have partaken of God's bounty, to strengthen yourself and to satisfy the requirements of your bodily existence, you must remember that it is to God alone, *your* God, that you owe the restoration of your strength and the satisfaction for the requirements of your survival. You are therefore obligated to dedicate all of your being, strengthened and uplifted by Him, to His service, to the furtherance of His aims, and to the realization of His Will on earth. This vow of dedication on your part must be pronounced through words of ברכה.

This is the mitzvah of ברכת המזון, which applies after one partakes of bread. The purpose of the mitzvah is to remind us of God's direct, personal care, of which we became aware through the revealed miracle of the manna. The ברכה is meant to cultivate and reinforce this awareness even under ordinary conditions, when you obtain nourishment by the usual means. Every piece of bread shall be regarded as a direct gift from God, like the manna dropped from heaven to the generation that wandered in the wilderness.

The accepted halachah in *Berachos* 44a refers the mitzvah of ואכלה וגוי to the לחם mentioned in the preceding verse, for verse 9 starts afresh with ארץ and serves to characterize the land: Its inhabitants do not eat bread in scarcity; rather, they eat their bread in comfort, and their houses are full of all good things. But the main object of the verse is לחם, and to it ואכלה וגוי refers. Accordingly, מן ברכת המזון applies only after eating bread, and this is the admonition that is issued here: We should not think that God provides us only with luxuries. Rather, even the bread that sustains us is not within our power alone to supply; even the barest necessities, the simplest means of existence, are a direct gift of God's providence (see Commentary, vv. 14-18). It is all מוצא פי ה', and every breath we take depends on His pronouncement.

Only bread made of the five kinds of grain — חיטה ושעורה וכוסמין שבולת — שועל ושיפון — is called "לחם." These five kinds of grain are all included in the term "חטה ושעורה."

There is, however, an opinion that also after eating any of the seven

species of fruit mentioned in verse 8, the obligation to recite a ברכה is דאורייתא (see בית יוסף and טור אורח חיים סי' רט there).

The context in which the mitzvah of ברכת המזון is set in the Torah as well as the very concept of ברכה teach us that the Jewish “Grace after Meals,” as it is popularly known, is something more than a formal rendering of thanks for what we have received. It is intended not only to remind us that it is to God and God alone that we owe our existence, but also to make us aware of the logical implications of this fact for the accomplishment of our life’s mission. For this reason ברכת המזון consists of four ברכות which together encompass all the factors that constitute the concept of “the Jew.” God’s guidance of the world in general and of Jewish history in particular has assigned the Jew to his post and should make every generation of Jews aware of its mission.

This is the verity that the manna demonstrated to every Jewish soul as an inalienable truth: Just as God’s very Name implies that He grants a future to every human soul (see Commentary, *Shemos* 6:2), so He watches over every soul with His providence, making its needs for continued survival the object of His special concern. Therefore, every piece of bread that is eaten and every moment of continued existence enabled thereby are gifts of His goodness [טובו], which is manifested as favor [חן], lovingkindness [חסד], or mercy [רחמים] — depending on the merits of the recipient. This is what is expressed in ברכת הון, the *first* ברכה of ברכת המזון. In reciting this ברכה, we vow to devote our lives to the One Who gives sustenance to all.

While God is near to the fate and destiny of every man, the fate and destiny of Jewish man are in special relationship to God and His providence. As everlasting testimony to this relationship, God promised and gave the Land of Israel to the family of Jewish man. The Land of Israel, in its prosperity and in its temporary חורבן, is the pledge for Israel’s unique historical position on earth, and it is to the Land of Israel that ברכת הארץ, the *second* ברכה of ברכת המזון, is dedicated.

However, Israel must pay heed to the conditions and purpose of the gift of the Land. The whole historical position of Israel in its land rests on ברית אברהם (*Bereshis* 17:7-8), which places all the physical aspects of life in the service of God, and the *purpose* of this position is the faithful fulfillment of the *mitzvos* of the Torah: וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶרְצוֹת גּוֹיִם וְגוֹ' בְּעִבּוֹר יִשְׁמְרוּ (Tehillim 105:44-45). Therefore, the Land should be mentioned only in connection with ברית and תורה. Only by continuing to up-

hold the *בריה בבשרנו* and by remaining constantly devoted to the tasks set by the Torah will we receive the special care of Divine providence which sustains us “every day, at every hour, and through all time.”

The Jewish national calling is to realize God’s Torah. The permanent expression of this calling is the Sanctuary of the Torah on Har Tziyon, and the permanent bearer of this calling is the dynasty of David, the man who fought his people’s battle for political independence and, in addition, bequeathed to his people the strains of his harp, to raise his people to the spiritual heights of its calling. To them [the Sanctuary and the Davidic dynasty] the *third ברכה* is dedicated.

Yerushalayim, at the foot of Har Tziyon, whose summit is the site of the Sanctuary of the Torah, represents God’s people camped around God’s Torah. God’s Torah is the people’s soul, which dominates it and instructs it. And the people’s noblest family is the dynasty of David, which is forever linked with the attainment of Israel’s loftiest goal. Yerushalayim-Tziyon impresses on all of Eretz Yisrael the stamp of its spiritual calling, which, according to our Sages (*Berachos* 48b), is indicated in our verse by “הארץ הטובה.” Similarly, the Land’s spiritual purpose, centered on Har Tziyon, is expressed above (3:25) by הארץ הטובה וגוי ההר (3:25) by הארץ הטובה וגוי הטוב וגוי (see Commentary there).

The third *ברכה* concerns itself with the continued existence and independence of the *individual*, in the context of a petition for the material and spiritual welfare of the *community*. When the Temple was standing and the Davidic kingdom was in existence, the petition for the community’s welfare was expressed in the form of a prayer for the preservation of the Temple and the Davidic kingdom, since these are the bearers of our national future. When the Temple was destroyed and we were exiled from our land, this prayer became a prayer for the restoration of Yerushalayim, *ברכת בונה ירושלים*.

These three blessings cover all the factors to be included *מדאורייתא* in *ברכת המזון*. However, one addition was made by the Sages. When, during the reign of Hadrian, the rebellion led by Bar Kochba proved to be a disastrous error, it became necessary to warn Jews of all generations not to repeat this attempt. For not by their own power and by the might of their own hand should they attempt to restore Israel’s crown to its former glory; rather, they should entrust their national future solely to Divine providence. Hence, after the crushed nation had begun to recover, even welcoming, as a portent of better days to come, the permission finally

granted them to bury the hundreds of thousands who had fallen at Betar, the Sages, meeting in Yavneh, instituted ברכת הטוב והמטיב, the *fourth* ברכה of ברכת המזון. This blessing perpetuates the memory of the unprecedented defeat at Betar in the form of a prayer of thanksgiving: Even the fact that the bodies of the fallen had remained intact until they could be buried was seen as a mark of God's favor — הטוב שלא הסריחו והמטיב שניתנו לקבורה (Berachos 48b). For all future time our eyes are directed away from all human assistance and turned toward God alone: הוא הטיב וכו' הוא יטיב לנו: וכו' הוא יגמלנו וכו' הוא ימלך וכו' הוא ישבור וכו'.

There appears to be profound ethical significance in the halachah that deals with three who partake of a meal together. This halachah stresses that the *communal* element during a meal is worthy of special attention. When three or more mature adults, בני מצוה, break bread together, they are obligated to also recite the ברכה [i.e., ברכת המזון] together, to give expression to the fact that they ate communally. One of them invites his companions to recite the ברכה together, and thus he as well as they recall that *one* God has, with His goodness, given food to them all: נברך שאכלנו וכו' משלו, ברוך שאכלנו וכו'. Then one recites the ברכה on behalf of all the others, who by responding אמן make his ברכה their own. In seeking food — more than in anything else — a person tends to think only of himself, and every man competes with his fellow man. The communal element in the meal and in the recitation of the ברכה reminds us of God's goodness, which is directed simultaneously and in equal measure to all, and thus we are liberated from selfish thoughts. For this reason ברכת הזימון refers essentially to ברכת הזון (ibid. 46a and תוספות there).

The mitzvah וגוי אלקיך וגוי, וברכת את ה' אלקיך, stated in the Torah, has become the model and prototype of the great institution of ברכות which the Sages, seeking to mold the spirit of the Jewish people, have woven into the whole fabric of our lives. Here, the Torah itself ordains how we are to act in partaking of the fruit of the land: We are to direct our thoughts from the fruit to the One Who gave us both the land and the fruit, and on this basis we are to determine our conduct and decide on our actions in the spirit of the concept of ברכה. Similarly, the Sages have turned all the phenomena we experience in our lives into tutors, as it were, to instruct us about God and about our obligations toward Him. They have taught us to raise our eyes to God ever afresh and to renew our pledge, as expressed by the words ברוך אתה וכו', to serve Him with all our lives. Every pleasure we enjoy, every stirring phenomenon of nature, every significant event

in our lives, any occasion to perform a mitzvah — ברכות הראיה, ברכות הנהנין — all these afford us an opportunity to recite the pledge ברוך אתה ה' וכו' and thus to attain the correct perspective toward God, “our” God [אלקינו].

What is more, the kernel and flower of our whole service of God, all the עבודה שבלב (see Commentary below, 11:13), all the work we are duty-bound to perform on our inner selves, is “ברכה,” which expresses the dedication of our lives to the fulfillment of God’s Will in practice. In this regard, the ברכה recited in the service of prayer resembles the עולה offered in the service of the offerings. For the עולה signifies that the continual ascent to the height of our life’s mission is the essence of our every heart-beat, and the service of prayer translates this essence into words via the ברכה.

Indeed, the idea expressed by the words ברוך אתה ה' includes the sum of all the truths that form the basis of the moral content of our lives: that God has a special relationship to every individual; that every individual is in the service of God; and that God has endowed man with moral freedom. For by granting man his freedom, God entrusted His world to man, thus making the fulfillment of His Will, the attainment of His purposes on earth, the “prospering of His work,” dependent on the free will of man. Hence, the man who dedicates himself to God’s service can express this dedication by addressing to God the word ברוך [cf. Commentary, *Bereshis* 9:27].

Already from our verse it is clear that one who recites a ברכה must mention שם ה', for it says here וברכת את ה' אלקיך; thus in the ברכה formula: ה' אלקינו. To this our Sages add that one who recites a ברכה must also mention מלכות ה', and in the ברכה formula: מלך העולם. As the Halachah says: כל ברכה שאין בה הזכרת השם אינה ברכה, כל ברכה שאין בה מלכות אינה ברכה (*Berachos* 40b). For the purpose of the ברכות is to lead us from matters we encounter in the temporal world to the eternal Ruler of all time, so that we may realize that He Who is attested to by every moment of our transitory existence is ה' אלקינו, and that we must therefore render Him homage by devoting to Him our whole existence and all our aspirations.

The second half of each ברכה mentions God in the third person, whereas the first half addresses Him in the second person. The reason for this is that, as a rule, the second half states the occasion for the blessing: it points to the work of the One to Whom we address our

homage in the first half. The pleasure we have enjoyed, the natural phenomenon we have beheld, the mitzvah we have performed, refer us to the One אשר קדשנו במצותיו וכו', שכוהו וגבורתו מלא עולם, הזן את העולם כולו [In the first half] we turn *directly to Him* with the declaration of our commitment: ברוך אתה. We pledge to do His Will — with the energy we expect to obtain, or have already obtained, in the world filled with His power and might, in the act to be performed in accordance with His commandments, etc.

The ברכה that our Sages instituted for recitation *after* the enjoyment of food and the like are modelled on ברכת המזון, which applies מדאורייתא. So, too, many authorities hold that the ברכה to be recited *before* לימוד התורה is דאורייתא (ibid. 21a). (See ספר המצוות in his postscript to רמב"ן טו, מצווה 47; see Commentary below, 32:3.) Accordingly, these two ברכות are the prototypes for the ברכות instituted by the Sages for recitation before and after specified acts and occasions. Only if we resolve, as it is expressed by the ברכה recited before eating anything, that the additional energy we will gain from the eating will be used in the service of God, will we be worthy of that enjoyment. As the Sages put it: כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה מעל, "If one enjoys anything of this world without reciting a ברכה, he commits a sacrilege." Until the ברכה is recited, everything belongs to God; only by reciting the ברכה does the individual become entitled to share in the good things of this world (*Berachos* 35a).

Similarly, the purpose of reciting a ברכה before performing a mitzvah is to instill in us the consciousness with which that mitzvah should be carried out. Thus we will perform the act as a mitzvah, as God's commandment, which is intended "to make us holy": אשר קדשנו במצותיו. For this reason a ברכה is recited only before those *mitzvos* designed to rectify and enrich our thoughts and aspirations and to exercise a sanctifying influence on us — e.g., שופר, מגילה, שופר, ציצית, מגילה, שופר. A ברכה is not recited before those *mitzvos* designed primarily to yield a concrete result — e.g., השבת, צדקה, גולה, השבת עבוט, גולה; for the purpose of these *mitzvos* is attained by their very performance, independent of the intention with which they are carried out.

We believe that we have thus found a key to the system of ברכת המצוות. The only ברכה that does not conform to this interpretation is the one to be recited before placing a מעקה (below, 22:8; see אבודרהם, chap. 3). See *Chorev*, §678.