

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashat Ekev  
August 4, 2018

פרשת עקב  
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Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 7:12-11:25

In this *parasha*, Moshe continues his speech to the Bnei Yisrael, reminding them to keep Hashem's commandments when they enter the land of Israel.

The mandate to say *Birkat Hamazon*, Grace After Meals, comes from this *parasha*. Chapter 8 verse 10 says: “ וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, עַל-הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה – You will eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem your God on the good land which Hashem has given to you.”

The Rabbis in the Talmud comment on this verse in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Berachot* 48b:

תנו רבנן מנין לברכת המזון מן התורה שנאמר (דברים ח) ואכלת ושבעת וברכת זו ברכת הזן את ה' א-להיך זו ברכת הזמון על הארץ זו ברכת הארץ הטובה זו בונה ירושלים... אין לי אלא לאחריו לפניו מנין אמרת קל וחומר כשהוא שבע מברך כשהוא רעב

The Rabbis taught: From where do we derive *Birkat Hamazon* from the Torah? As it is written (*Devarim* 8) 'You will eat and be satisfied and bless...' This is the blessing of 'the One who gives food' [the first paragraph in *Birkat Hamazon*.] '...Hashem your God...' this is the blessing of the *zimmun* [the invitation to say *Birkat Hamazon* when three or more have eaten together.] 'On the land' this is the blessing of the land [the third paragraph in *Birkat Hamazon*.] 'Good' this is the blessing of the building of Yerushalayim [the fifth paragraph of *Birkat Hamazon* and the last actual blessing in the prayer.] This verse speaks only about the blessing after meals, how do we know that we say a blessing before

meals? It can be derived from a comparison; if we bless God when we are satisfied, how much more so when we are hungry!

We can learn another lesson from the words “וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ – you will eat and be satisfied.” These same words appear three chapters later in the section we refer to as the second paragraph of *Shema*. The text there says (11:15): “וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ, לְבִהֶמְתֶּךָ; וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ – I will give grass in your fields for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied.”

The Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Berachot* 40a, and even more clearly in Tractate *Gittin* 62a, says that we may not eat or even taste anything at all until we have first given food to our animals. This is because, in the verse cited above, it first says, “grass for your cattle,” and only after that does it say, “you will eat and be satisfied.”

Taking a moment before and after eating to acknowledge that we are ingesting the products that the earth has given us raises our consciousness and makes us more grateful and spiritual people. Feeding our animals consistently before ourselves makes us more compassionate and caring individuals. These are both good practices to follow to improve ourselves as human beings.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Is there anything we eat that does not have its origins in the land?
- The Talmud passages quoted above give us the source from the Torah for feeding animals before ourselves. What do you think is the moral or philosophical reason for this practice?
- Since the verse says, “You will eat and be satisfied,” should one say *Birkat Hamazon* if one is not completely satisfied? Why or why not?