

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Vayishlach
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פרשת וישלח
י"ז בכסלו תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* [Genesis] 32:4-36:43

In this *parasha*, Yaakov confronts Esav, wrestles with a “man” who blesses him by changing his name to Yisrael, loses his wife Rachel in childbirth, and experiences the trauma of the incident with his daughter Deena.

Towards the end of *בְּרַכַּת הַמְזוּזוֹן* – *Birkat Hamazon*, Grace After Meals – we say, “כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְבְּרַכּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבִרְהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב [וְאַמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה] בְּכֹל, מִכֹּל, כָּל כֶּן וְיִבְרַךְ אֹתָנוּ כְּלָנוּ יַחַד בְּבְרָכָה שְׁלֵמָה וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן. – As our ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov [Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah] were blessed in everything, from everything, with everything, so may Hashem bless all of us as one.”

Like so much else in our liturgy, this phrase has its origins in the Torah.

The word *בְּכֹל* – *Bakol*, “in everything” – refers to Avraham, about whom the Torah says [*Bereshit* 24:1:], “וַה' בְּרַךְ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם, בְּכֹל – And Hashem had blessed Avraham in everything.”

מִכֹּל – *Mikol*, “from everything” – refers to Yitzchak, who says in the scene of him giving Yaakov rather than Esav the initial blessing [*Bereshit* 27:33:], “וְאָכַל מִכֹּל בְּטָרָם – and I ate from everything before you came.”

Finally, *כֹּל* – *Kol*, “everything” – refers to Yaakov, who says [*Bereshit* 33:11:], “כִּי-חֲנִנִי – אֶ-לֵהִים וְכִי יֵשׁ-לִי-כֹל – For Hashem graced me and I therefore have everything.”

The Babylonian Talmud in *Masechet* [Tractate] *Berachot* 48b, and states that reciting the first four blessings of the *Birkat Hamazon* is a Biblical imperative: “Where is the saying of grace intimated in the Torah? In the verse [*Devarim* 8:10], ‘וְשָׂבַעְתָּ, וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ--’ – And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem your God.”

The text then lays out the first four blessings of the *Birkat*: “Our Rabbis taught: The order of grace after meals is as follows. The first benediction is that of ‘הזן – Who feeds.’ The second is the benediction of the land, ‘על הארץ ועל המזון.’ The third is ‘בונה ירושלים – Who builds Jerusalem.’ The fourth is ‘הטוב והמיטיב – Who is good and bestows good.’”

The Talmud also gives attribution to the authors of the first four blessings: “R. Nahman said: Moshe instituted for Israel the benediction ‘Who feeds’ at the time when manna descended for them. Yehoshua instituted for them the benediction of the land when they entered the Land. David and Shlomo instituted the benediction which closes ‘Who builds Jerusalem’... The benediction ‘Who is good and bestows good’ was instituted in Yavneh with reference to those who were slain in Beitar.”

The remainder of *Birkat Hamazon*, in which the “*kol*” quotes above appear, is from a later era. Whoever the authors were, whose names are now lost, they knew to write requests of Hashem using the language of the Torah which they attributed to the Divine Word of God. What better way to ask someone for something than using their own words in the request?

These words also allude to what we are asking Hashem for: we are asking Hashem for physical sustenance, for food, and for spiritual sustenance, reflecting the original use of these words in the Book of *Bereshit*.

That’s a lot of information packed into just three little words in the *Birkat Hamazon* that we rarely if ever, even pay attention to.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If you said that Hashem had blessed you “with everything,” what would you include?
- Why might it be important to say a blessing after we eat?
- What does the following question mean: “What better way to ask someone for something than using their own words in the request?”