



## TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

### TEFILLA

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



# Birkat Hamazon

*Chaim was quite skeptical. He was 37 years old and had been born in the Midbar. He had spent his childhood and adolescence and even his early adult years travelling through the desert, eating from the מן that fell from the sky each day, and preparing to enter into Eretz Yisrael. After finally arriving at their long-awaited destination, the people were informed that the מן was going to come to an end and soon they would need to learn to eat food from the ground. The whole idea sounded so preposterous! How could food possibly grow from the ground? The people were instructed to plant seeds and to water them every day and that eventually they would see wheat grow. Despite his skepticism, Chaim watered the magic seeds every day and to his shock, it worked! Wheat grew and the people learned how to make it into bread. You can imagine the day that Chaim took his first bite of bread! He must have been blown over with gratitude to Hashem for this unbelievable miracle.*

ברכת המזון is the only bracha explicitly mentioned in the Torah. Before he dies, Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael (Devarim 8:10-18) that Hashem will bring them to a Land filled with delicious fruits and crops, where they will not lack for anything. He then commands them

“ואכלת ושבעת וברכת” – when you eat and are satisfied, you must say ברכת המזון. He goes on to explain that this is because one needs to be very careful – when one has everything he needs, when he eats and is satiated, when he has a nice house, and plenty of cattle and sheep, and gold and silver, he can easily forget Hashem **and the מן** **He provided in the desert**. A person needs to remind himself through his daily Birkat HaMazon that it is not our own ability that causes us to succeed (כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה), but rather it is Hashem who provides us with that ability to succeed (הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל).

This, then, is the goal of ברכת המזון. We *bencht* every time we eat in order to be reminded of the מן (and of the first time we ate bread from the ground), which reminds us that it is Hashem who is truly providing sustenance for us, even if we are actively involved in the process. **Rav Hirsch** writes that we should feel that each piece of bread that we eat is “כאילו קבלנו אותו מישירין מיד הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו בדרך” „נס מן השמים, כמו הורדת המן directly from Hashem Himself miraculously from the heavens, just like the descent of the מן. We should be like Chaim and recognize that the food we eat from the ground is not less miraculous than the food we received from the sky. The same way we knew 100% that Hashem had directly provided the מן for us in the desert, we should recognize clearly that the same is true today with the food we get in seemingly more natural ways.

Why are we specifically commanded מְדַאֲרִינָנוּ to make a bracha after bread, and not after other foods? Rav Eliyahu Munk explains in his book עולם התפילות that this is to send home the message that we need to thank Hashem for even the most basic things. We might have thought that we should thank Hashem when He provides something extra for us, when we receive luxuries that are not necessary. The Torah is telling us here that it is no less important to thank Hashem on a daily basis for the basic things He provides us with in order to survive. Often, when we receive something on a constant basis, we tend to take it for granted. But it is these basic things that we receive constantly and directly from Hashem every single day that we need to be most grateful for.

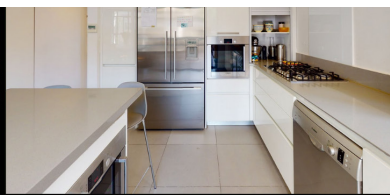
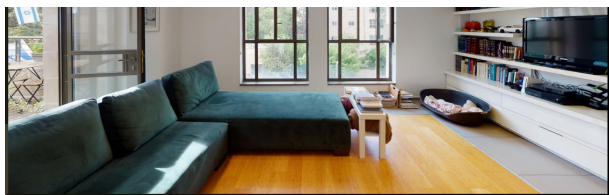
In the next article, we will take a look at the structure of ברכת המזון. ■



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