



The Blessings of Blessing (2)

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E30)

Notes about Birkas HaMazon (Part 2)

The fourth Brocha – הטוב והמטיב

The fourth Brocha of ברכת המזון is called הטוב והמטיב – *the One who is good and Who does good for all*. The theme of Hashem's goodness repeats throughout. We are clearly being called to stop and reflect on Hashem's boundless goodness. The context for this Brocha makes the theme even more poignant.

The backstory

The Gemara¹ describes the events which serve as the backdrop for the institution of this Brocha by the חכמי יבנה.

After the חורבן many Jews still could be found in ארץ ישראל, living under Roman rule. That situation continued for 52 years after the חורבן. Then, a leader known to us as בר כוכבא (Shimon bar Coseva), led a revolt against the Romans in the city of Beitar, located about seven miles southwest of Yerushalayim.

Bar Kokhba amassed a very significant following of thousands of Jews who were willing to go to war to regain independence. His revolt was initially successful, and the Romans were forced into defensive positions. But, after bringing a vast army from Rome to back them up, the Romans, furious at having been defeated by the revolt, conquered Beitar and slaughtered

the thousands of Jews who were involved in the revolt.

In their anger, the Romans forbade anyone from going into Beitar to bury the dead and the thousands of people were unburied and exposed to the elements for years. The grieving for the חורבן was thus greatly intensified.

Eventually, Rabban Gamliel, through תפילות and bribes, received permission to bury the הרוגי ביתר. Upon arriving, the Jews discovered that the

bodies all survived completely intact. They did not decompose, nor did they emit even the terrible smell of death which quickly overtakes the body after the Neshama has left.

The miracles associated with bringing קבורת ישראל to הרוגי ביתר is what moved the חכמי יבנה to institute the fourth Brocha of ברכת המזון. The name of the Brocha carries the message: הטוב – that the bodies did not decompose; והמטיב – that they were freed to be brought to קבורת ישראל.

Bitachon does not preclude sadness; it precludes anxiety.

Find the Good in the Everywhere

We might wonder why this event, miraculous as it was, became an integral part of ברכת המזון. After all, we have a day to recall the חורבן, but we are instructed to recall the miracle of bringing the הרוגי ביתר to קבורה every time we eat

¹ ברכות מח:



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a meal! Surely the message of this ברכה is central to our lives.

That message is that the requirement to see and perceive Hashem's kindness is never restricted to the 'good times' leaving the impression that Hashem's kindness is absent during the 'bad times.' Nothing could be further from the truth. Hashem showers us with kindness even during the darkest moments of our lives.

And because this message is tricky, we review the message all the time, every time we eat.

The message is made trickier given that we are inundated with the gloom and doom of the media. We get endless reports of every horror and tragic mishap. The salvations and silver linings are not trumpeted in the headlines. Hashem's kindness is intentionally hidden by a world that seeks to deny His lovingkindness. The job, therefore, was assigned to us, individually and regularly, to declare that no matter how dark it may seem, Hashem is the טוב and the מטיב. Always. Without fail. The message is so important that חז"ל attached it to one of the most frequently recited ברכות in our lives. We have a declaration to make, an affirmation of absolute confidence in Hashem's boundless goodness.

Goodness always

A central theme of our affirmation is that Hashem's goodness transcends the limitations of time. הוא הטוב, הוא מטיב, הוא יטיב לנו – He extended His kindness in the past, it is found in the present moment, and it will always be present into the eternal future.

The eternal nature of Hashem's goodness comes up in the first and second Brochos of ברכת המזון, as well. In the first Brocha we say הוא נותן לחם – present, ובטובו הגדול תמיד לא חסר לנו, – past, and אל ואל – future. In נודה we also speak about His goodness being eternal – בכל עת. (The Brocha of רחם is a בקשה, not a הודאה, and all requests refer to the future.) Whenever we praise Hashem for His goodness (for example, in מודים) we refer to its eternity.

Hashem's goodness is rooted in the מדות of הקב"ה. He made the world only to shower us with His goodness, and there is nothing that can alter His הטוב והמטיב.

And if that message is hard for you to swallow, you are invited to have a meal... and to Bentsh.

Bentshing the הבית בעל

Per the Gemara, a guest must give a Brocha to the host at the conclusion of ברכת המזון. This Brocha includes a blessing that the host be successful with his possessions and that his possessions be close to the city.

It is not hard to assume that the possessions being spoken of are the goods of one's business enterprises. The blessing would seem to revolve around business success without the need to travel distances to close the deals. It was with that in mind that a guest at the home of R' Chaim Kanievsky שליט"א asked the Rav if this Brocha is relevant to the Rav who surely is not involved in any business matters.

R' Chaim שליט"א responded that is certainly applies to him. His 'possessions' are his ספרים and his 'success' is his learning. And 'close to



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the city' means, in his case, a blessing that the Sefer that he needs should be close at hand and not require climbing to learn from it.

We must see ourselves as teachers

In the הרחמן for one who is eating at his parents' table, as well as whenever one refers to one's parents, one refers to father as אבי מורי and one's mother as אמי מרתי. Was my parent my classroom teacher?

Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky שליט"א commented that this reference is meant to remind each of us that our children and grandchildren are watching carefully and are learning lessons all the time. Nobody is exempt. Everyone is a teacher and a משפיע. Our influence is built into our roles, and we must take our roles seriously.

The abandoned Tzadik whose children seek bread

ברכת המזון concludes with two פסוקים. The first of the two has raised many questions in the minds and hearts of those who say them:

נער הייתי גם זקנתי ולא ראיתי צדיק נעזב וזרעו מבקש להם²

I was young and I have grown old [but] I have never seen a Tzaddik abandoned and his children ask for bread.

Those who think about the פסוק tend to ask if it never happened that the children of a poor,

righteous person had to beg for bread? Surely the evidence before us speaks otherwise.

Rav Shimon Schwab זצ"ל suggested an explanation.³ He says that the פסוק is describing the faith of the Tzadik. A Tzadik never feels abandoned, even if his children must beg for their bread. That is the measure of the righteous. They also feel the loving hand of הקב"ה on their shoulder even when there are challenging times.

Rav Schwab related that, as a little boy in Germany, bread was rationed. A certain sized loaf would have to suffice for each soul in the family for a week. Every mother had to take pains to portion out the bread to allow each member of the family to survive the week.

One night he was very hungry and asked for a second piece of bread. His mother declined his request explaining that this is what Hashem has given us and the rest must wait for the other days of the week.

As she turned away the young Shimon Schwab glimpsed the tear in his mother's eye. Her sadness at not having more bread to offer her hungry child mixed perfectly with her certainty that הקב"ה allocates exactly that which is meant for every one of us. Bitachon does not preclude sadness; it precludes anxiety.

The blessing of שלום

The closing words of ברכת המזון are ה' יברך את עמו בשלום. The Midrash⁴ extols the wonderful

² תהלים לו: כה

³ Rav Schwab on Prayer p. 519. The same explanation is found in the ArtScroll siddur in the name of the ענף יוסף.

⁴ ויקרא רבה ט: ט



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qualities of שלום. We know that many ברכות conclude with שלום: Kadish, the Amidah, Birkas Kokhanim, and Birkas HaMazon. שלום is the way that we bless one another. And שלום, concludes the Midrash, is going to be the first announcement of the מלך המשיח as the פסוק says⁵

מה נאוו על הַקָּרִים רַגְלֵי מְבַשֵּׁר מְשֻׁמֵּעַ שְׁלוֹם מְבַשֵּׁר טוֹב
מְשֻׁמֵּעַ יְשׁוּעָה אָמַר לְצִיּוֹן מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

The טוב מבשר will be משמיע שלום – he will announce the long-awaited שלום.

The Gemara⁶ refers to the פסוק of ה' יברך את עמו לא מצא הקב"ה כלל מחזיק ברכה בשלום and teaches that בְּהַנִּים, לִישְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶּיךָ הַשְּׁלוֹם. The כלי – vessel refers to כלל ישראל. When the various parts of ישראל are united we can reveal the secret vessel that is called שלום.

Takeaway: I will try to relate to ברכת המזון as the treasure-trove of Bitachon that it is.

⁵ ישעיה נב: ד

⁶ סוף עוקצין