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Birchat Hamazon

Rabbi Yehuda Oppenheimer

Past Rabbi, Young Israel of Forest Hills, NY

Parshat Eikev contains many important mitzvot, some that we encounter daily. One of the most prevalent is the commandment to bless HaShem after we eat, as it says in ברכת המזון (Grace after meals): ככתוב ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלוקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך

Although one usually thinks of that verse as a commandment to bless and thank HaShem for the food we have been given, that is not what the verse literally says. Rather, it says "And you shall eat and be sated, and bless HaShem for the good Land that He has given to you" – A blessing on the Land of Israel.

We need to look only at the context of the verse to note that the entire passage is not about food, but about Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, it may be said that Parshat Eikev – perhaps more than any other parsha in the Torah – is the parsha of Eretz Yisrael. The beginning of the parsha, after promising that HaShem will grant us extraordinary kindness if we follow His direction,

describes how Eretz Yisrael will be won from its previous occupants. This is followed by our section (Chapter 8) which describes the wonders of Eretz Yisrael – how fortunate we will be to live there while enjoying its special fruit and minerals, and that we will then bless HaShem for our good fortune in the Land. Clearly, Eretz Yisrael is the focus of that blessing! The message in this passage about Eretz Yisrael is not a simple one, however. It is intertwined several times with the commandment to remember the manna. Quoting just a few verses in Chapter 8:

*(2) And you shall remember the entire way on which the Lord, your G-d, led you these 40 years in the desert, in order to afflict you, to test you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (3) And He afflicted you and let you go hungry, and then fed you with **manna**. . . so that He would make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but rather by whatever comes from the mouth of the Lord does man live.*

(7) For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land, a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths, that emerge in valleys and mountains, (8) a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil-producing olives and honey

(10) And you shall eat and be sated, and bless HaShem for the good Land that He has given to you. (11) Beware that you do not forget the Lord, your G-d, by not keeping His commandments, His ordinances, and His statutes, which I command you this day

*(16) Who fed you with **manna** in the desert, which your forefathers did not know, in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to benefit you in your end, (17) and you will say to yourself, "My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." (18) But you must remember the Lord your G-d, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth . . .*

It becomes clear that the blessing over our food is linked inextricably not only to Eretz Yisrael, but to the manna as well. The manna is described as the tool HaShem used for testing us in the desert, so that we remember eternally that it is not כחי ועוצם ידי "the strength of my hand that brings my success," but rather, it is the Almighty who gives us that very energy which we then use for success.

It remains to wonder: why is it that the manna, of all things, is what HaShem calls us to remember so that we use Eretz Yisrael properly? The Gemara in Brachos 48b says the following regarding the ברכת המזון:

R. Nahman said: Moshe established for Israel the [first] bracha הזן 'at the time when manna descended for them. Yehoshua established for them the [second] bracha על הארץ when they entered the land. David and Solomon established the [third] bracha בונה ירושלים . . .

Interesting! The first blessing is on the Manna, the second is on the land and the third is on the sanctuary. (It seems to be not much about the food we just ate.) Again, the first blessing, on Manna, functions as an introduction to the main blessing indicated in our verses – the second blessing, the one focusing on the Land – that explicitly quotes the commandment verse. Why is the Manna so important to us so many years after it has ceased to fall? And why is the פרשת

המך (the story of the giving of the Manna which appears in Shmot Chapter 16) considered to be especially vital for a person asking G-d to help with their parnasah?

Let us consider the Manna. It was a miraculous food. It tasted like anything a person desired. It was fat and cholesterol free, completely absorbed inside the body. Wonderful! So, why were there complaints about it time and again? How was the manna "an affliction and a test?"

One answer I heard from a Gadol in Eretz Yisrael is that the Manna (wonderful as it was) was given one day at a time, דבר יום ביומו. Each person received their daily allotment – no more and no less. It was not able to be accumulated. If any of it was left over for the next day, it would become wormy and rot. (I hope it was OK for a midnight snack.) The lesson HaShem wanted to teach us as we left Egypt, spent those years in the Desert, and prepared to enter Eretz Yisrael, is that we need to train ourselves to know that everything we have comes from HaShem... that we live in His Grace, not only during the great moments of life, but in every small way... that all we have and all we can accomplish is only because He is supplying our needs on a daily, and even minute-by-minute, basis... that if need be, we can go to sleep with our cupboards completely bare, and know that He will provide for us and sustain us. And that is a difficult lesson for us to get. That we are not independent... that although we have free will, and we are called upon to engage with the world and put in our effort to feed our families, ultimately we are completely in His hands, and will be successful only to the degree that He wills it.

It is only with this attitude that HaShem allows us to enjoy this world fully, and certainly the best place on earth, Eretz Yisrael. And that we need to avoid the attitude of כחי ועוצם ידי if we want HaShem to look with favor upon our lives.

Thus, when we consider our daily sustenance, we first recite an introductory blessing, affirming that just as He did with the manna, the Almighty is העולם כלו בטובו the one who provides for the entire world with His Goodness, Grace, Kindness, and Mercy. Just as in the long bygone days of the Manna, first of all, we are called upon to affirm His constant presence in our lives. Once we have this straight, we can then go on to thank Him נודה לך first of all for ארץ the land, and for . . . and for ... and for ... and for ... and for מזון, as it says in our verse ככתוב ואכלת

That is the structure of our daily Blessing after meals. It is much more than about the food, which is almost an afterthought. It is about our relationship with HaShem, who constantly gives to us and supports us and is kind to us, and so much wants us to have the blessing of Eretz Yisrael, if we appreciate it in the right way.

Those of us who unfortunately are not yet privileged to live in Eretz Yisrael, surely need this message all the more so. In Eretz Yisrael, if you are even slightly spiritually sensitive, you can readily feel HaShem's presence. Here in the Diaspora, it is so much easier to attribute our successes to our own genius and effort, and to leave HaShem out of the equation.

May this week's Torah reading inspire us to remember that He –הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל

is the one who brings our success, and one of our central goals in life should be to live in Eretz Yisrael, the tremendous gift that HaShem has given us.

Shabbat Shalom