



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Parashat Eikev / פרשת עֵקֶב

More Than Food: Bread, Jerusalem, and the Essence of a Yehudi

As *Klal Yisrael* prepare for entry into *Eretz Yisrael*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* introduces a crucial, unique *mitzvah*: *Birkat HaMazon*. “And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless *Hashem*, your God, on the good land He has given you.” After consuming bread, we fulfill this *mitzvah* by blessing *Hashem* in thanks for our satiation.

At first glance, this is a simple instruction: after eating, thank *Hashem* for the food. Yet, the *Gemara Berachos* (48b) derives a far more expansive list of themes that must be mentioned. “עַל הָאָרֶץ – on the land” obligates us to thank *Hashem* for the gift of *Eretz Yisrael*. And “הַטּוֹבָה – the good” obligates us to ask for *Yerushalayim*’s restoration. The *Gemara* goes even further, mentioning an additional obligation to mention the gifts of Torah, *Brit Milah*, and *Malchus Beit David*. According to some authorities, all of these themes are obligatory on a biblical level (see *Tosafos* to *Berachos* 20b and *Beur Halacha* 187:3), to the point where one must repeat *Birkat HaMazon* if they possibly missed a single one.

These are all profound gifts that we should certainly be thankful for. But this list seems like a potpourri of random, unrelated topics. Why are we mentioning Torah, *Brit Milah*, and *Yerushalayim* in a *beracha* related to food?

On the surface, these themes seem unrelated to a full stomach. But Rav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch reveals the deeper essence that binds them. He explains that we recite these *berachot* over bread specifically because bread is the basic staple of sustenance – it represents the gift of life itself. A Jew recognizes that his very life flows directly from the guiding Hand of Divine Providence. Just as we were sustained by heavenly *Mann*, openly and intimately granted by *Hashem*, our livelihood continues to “fall” from the heavens, albeit in a more hidden fashion.

And what *Hashem* grants, *Hashem* owns. Despite our God-given free will, a true *eved Hashem* eats his meal knowing that nothing truly belongs to him. Even the most basic necessities of life are granted from above. Our very vitality remains in the domain of our Creator. This basic truth demands that we dedicate our existence to *Hashem*’s mission. Every time we sustain that existence and strengthen our bodies, we are obligated to reinforce the foundational themes that define the life and purpose of a Jew.

Torah and *Brit Milah* both represent all-encompassing dedication to *Hashem*. Torah is the ultimate expression of Divine wisdom and Divine will in this world, shaping thought, emotion, speech, and action in every realm of life. *Brit Milah* is the physical seal of this covenant, etched into the flesh as a constant reminder of our undying loyalty to our Creator. Its placement is deliberate, testifying that even the act of martial intimacy, so easily debased into bestial desire, is elevated and devoted to the Almighty.



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The pinnacle of this all-encompassing commitment to the Divine will is *Yerushalayim*. Rav Hirsch explains that our ultimate national task is to physically express *Hashem's* will in this world. The holy city is the Sanctuary of the Torah, where the Torah's ideals find their fullest expression in the national destiny of *Klal Yisrael*. *Dovid HaMelech*, the king that first conquered and sanctified *Yerushalayim*, intertwined his political leadership with the fiery spiritual passion of *Tehillim*.

When we recite *Birkat HaMazon*, we recognize that the most basic necessities of life – granted with grace and kindness from above – must be entirely dedicated to a cosmic mission that transcends the physical. This is what it means to be a *Yehudi*. This identity relies on the restoration of *Yerushalayim*. The full expression of our covenant with *Hashem* and His holy Torah can only be achieved in this sanctified abode. Without *Yerushalayim*, our very identity hangs in the balance.

