

## Preparing for the Birkat Hamazon

*The rabbinic source for the obligation to make the Birkat Hamazon:*

אמר רב יהודה: מנין לברכת המזון  
לאחריה מן התורה?  
שנאמו: **וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ:**  
Rav Yehudah said: Where do we find that the Birkat  
HaMazon is obligated from the Torah? Where it says (in  
Devarim 8:10): “**When you will eat and  
feel satisfied**, you will bless אֱלֹהֵיךָ for the  
good Earth G!d has given you” (*Talmud Bavli Berakhot*  
21a).

*A short kavvanah for the spiritual practice of Birkat Hamazon:<sup>1</sup>*

In feeling **שָׂבַע** (satiation) we experience **שִׁכְחָה** (forgetfulness) of that which sustains us.

By meditating, imagining, and articulating the Source of all **בְּרָכָה** (blessing, bountifulness), we can recover an expansive awareness of the interconnected ecology within which the lives of all living creatures on earth are sustained as One through a vast web of mutual **הִסְרוּן** (dependencies), made one as “a Oneness parallel to a Oneness” (Zohar, Terumah §163). This Oneness is revealed in the **שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלְכוּתוֹ** (the Name of his Glorious Kingdom) which struggles to signify the Unnameable, through the **סוּד פָּ”ו** (gematriah of 86) whereby the divine name **אֱלֹהִים** is writ in **הַטֵּבַע** (Nature).

May all our fellow creatures be liberated from each of their captivities through awareness of that which suffuses each and every thing in its nature, all behaving with compassion and consideration of each others needs, and living together in **צְדָקָה**.

Now bless with the *Birkat Hamazon*, because:

**אֲתָהּ הָרַאָתָ לָדַעַת כִּי יי הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים** “Unto you it was shown so that you might know that יי is  
**אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבַדּוֹ: (דְּבָרִים ז:לז)** **הָאֱלֹהִים; there is nothing else besides**” (Devarim 4:35).  
**לְפִיכֵן** Therefore,  
**שׁוֹיֵתִי יי לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד וְכוּ' (תְּהִלִּים טז:ח)** “I will set יי before me always...” (Tehilim 16:8).

<sup>1</sup> This kavvanah is very important to me. I have tried with difficulty to concisely state the sources supporting my understanding of Torah and of Tefillah. I only came to comprehend the *birkat hamazon* to this extent after learning the secret of the Afikoman while in chevrotah with Gabriel Botnick at the Conservative Yeshiva in the spring of 5772 (2012).



בשבת וביום טוב::

שיר המעלות:

בְּשׁוּבַ יי אֶת-שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ  
כְּחֹלְמִים: אִזּוּ יִמְלֵא שִׂחֻק פִּינוּ  
וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה אִזּוּ יֵאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם  
הַגְּדִיל יי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם-אֱלֹהֵי:  
הַגְּדִיל יי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הָיִינוּ  
שְׂמֵחִים:

שׁוּבָה יי אֶת-שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כְּאֶפְיָקִים  
בְּנִגְבִ: הַזֶּרְעִים בְּדַמְעָה בְּרִנָּה  
יִקְצְרוּ: הֶלֶוֶף יִלָּךְ | וּבִכְהֵ נִשָּׂא  
מִשָּׂדֶה-הַזֶּרַע בְּאֵיבָא בְּרִנָּה  
נִשָּׂא אֶלְמִתָּיו: (תהלים קכו)

*On Shabbat and Yontov:*

A Song of Terraces.<sup>2</sup>

When יי restores us to Her dwelling place, Tzion, we will be like dreamers: our mouths filled with laughter, our tongues with ululations! All the other peoples of the world will say: “Hashem does amazing things for Her people.” יי does awesome things for us – we are ecstatic!

Restore our lost tribes, יי like (water in) desert wadis. Those who plant with tears shall reap with joy. Though one may go to their field weeping, carrying a pail full of seeds, they shall return home with joy, bearing a mighty harvest. (Tehilim 126)

*Four traditional verses of Torah are sung to satisfy the obligation of learning Torah over a meal:*

תְּהַלֵּל יי יְדָבָר פִּי, וּיְבָרֵךְ כָּל בֶּשֶׂר שֵׁם  
קְדֹשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: (תהלים קמה:כא)

וְאֲנַחְנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם,  
הַלְלוּיָהּ: (תהלים קטו:יח)

הוֹדוּ לַיי כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסֵדוֹ:  
(תהלים קלו:א)

מִי יִמְלֵל גְּבוּרֹת יי יִשְׁמִיעַ כָּל תְּהַלָּתוֹ:  
(תהלים קו:ב)

My mouth shall speak the praise of יי and all creatures shall bless His holy name forever (Tehilim 145:21).

We will bless יהוה now and forever, Halleluyah! (Tehilim 115:18)

Thank יי for יי is good, and always kind and loving (Tehilim 136:1).

Who can tell of the mighty acts of יי and make all divine praise be heard? (Tehilim 106:2)

*An Additional verse:*

וְעַבְדְּתֶם יי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּיְבָרֵךְ  
אֶת-לֶחְמֵךְ וְאֶת-מִימֵיךָ וַיְהַסְרֵתִי מִזִּמְתִּי  
מִקְרָבֶךָ: (שמות כג:כה)

You shall worship יי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם and G!d shall bless your bread and your water, and remove illness from your midst (Shemot 23:25).

<sup>2</sup> By *terraces*, we refer to the landscape architecture familiar to Eretz Yisroel, in order to reference the permaculture value of pooling energy through passive design features. This idea was suggested by Julie Berger for sharing this insight which bridges the valence of sacred stairs and ascents with that of the lifegiving waters, and connect the beginning of the Psalm to its ending.



## Etiquette for Initiating the Birkat Hamazon with Guests

When three or more people with understanding eat together, initiate the blessing with the following invitation. If there are more than ten present, add the divine name Eloheinu in parentheses.

**חֲבֵרֵי נְבָרְךָ! Friends, let us Bless!**

**יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם :**  
(תהלים קיג:ב)

*Everyone then says and you repeat after them:*

May the name "י" be blessed from here to the ends of the world! (Tehilim 113:2)

*You then give respect to all of those in attendance:*

With the permission of...

בְּרִשׁוֹת...  
אָבִי מוֹרֵי \ אִמִּי מוֹרְתִי

- my mother and father, my teachers,
- the Kohanim present,
- our teacher the rabbi,
- the master of this house,
- all of our distinguished guests,

כְּהֹנָנִים

מוֹרְגֵנוּ הַרַב

בְּעֵלֵת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה

בְּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה

מְרַנֵּן וְרַבָּנָן וְרַבּוֹתֵי

חֲבֵרֵי נְבָרְךָ (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שְׂאֲכַלְנוּ מִשְּׁלֹךְ:

My friends,

let us bless (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) from whose bounty we have eaten.

*Everyone then says and you repeat after them:*

בְּרוּךְ (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שְׂאֲכַלְנוּ מִשְּׁלֹךְ וּבְטוֹבוֹ  
תֵּינֵנוּ:

Bountiful is (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) the One whose food we have eaten, and through whose goodness our life depends!

*Everyone then says together:*

בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּבְרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ:

Blessed is G!d and bountiful G!d's Name.



## Blessing for All Earth's Creatures

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה  
 אֵת הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּחֵן בְּחֶסֶד  
 וּבְרַחֲמִים הוּא נֹתֵן לָהֶם לְכֹל-בֶּשֶׂר כִּי  
 לְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם (תהלים קלו:כה): וּבְטוֹבוֹ  
 הַגָּדוֹל תָּמִיד לֹא חָסַר לָנוּ וְאֵל יַחְסֹר  
 לָנוּ מִזּוֹן לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד בְּעֵבוֹר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל:  
 כִּי הוּא זֶן וּמְפַרֵּס לְכֹל וּמְטִיב לְכֹל  
 וּמְכִין מִזּוֹן לְכֹל בְּרִיּוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא.  
 כְּאָמֹר: פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת-יָדָךְ וּמְשַׁבֵּעַ לְכָל-חַי  
 רִצּוֹן (תהלים קמה:טז): בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 הַזֶּה אֵת הַכֹּל:

Bountiful are you, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ Protector of the World, who nourishes the whole world with goodness, with grace, with lovingkindness, and with compassion. You feed all creatures because **your lovingkindness is everywhere and always** (Tehilim 136:25). Through your great goodness we have never been lacking for food: May we never ever be lacking – for the sake of your great name – because you nourish and sustain all beings, you are so good to everything, and you provide food for all your creatures. As it is written, “**You open your Yud,<sup>3</sup> and satisfy the desires of all living creatures**” (Tehilim 145:16). Bountiful are you יי the nourisher of all.

3 From a meditation of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan on Tehilim 145:16: don't read *yadekha* (your hand), read *yodekha* (your yud) – the *yud* of the Tetragrammaton corresponding to *Keter Elyon*, the root of the Tree of Life.



## Blessing for the Earth

נוֹדָה לָךְ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל שֶׁהִנְחַלְתָּ  
 לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ חֲמֻדָּה טוֹבָה וּרְחֹבָה וְעַל  
 שֶׁהוֹצַאתָנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
 וּפְדִיתָנוּ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים וְעַל בְּרִיתְךָ  
 שֶׁחֲתַמְתָּ בְּבִשְׁרָנוּ וְעַל תּוֹרַתְךָ שֶׁלִּמְדָתָנוּ  
 וְעַל חֻקֶּיךָ שֶׁהוֹדַעְתָּנוּ וְעַל חַיִּים חֵן וְחֹסֶד  
 שֶׁחֹנְנָתָנוּ וְעַל אֲכִילַת מְזֹן שְׂאֵתָה זֶן  
 וּמְפָרֵס אוֹתָנוּ תָּמִיד בְּכָל יוֹם וּבְכָל עֵת  
 וּבְכָל שָׁעָה.

We thank you, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ for the lovely, good and expansive world you gave to our ancestors; and for our liberation, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ from a land of confinement, redeeming us from a house of slavery; and for the promise we made with each other — a promise you made part of our very being; and for your Torah that you teach us, and for your mysteries which you reveal to us, and for the life, grace and lovingkindness that you bestow on us, and for the food with which you constantly nourish and sustain us — every day, in every season, and in every moment...

וְעַל הַנְּסִים וְעַל הַפְּרָקָן וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת  
 וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ  
 לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה:

*On Hanukkah and Purim, or a civic holiday of Thanksgiving and Freedom, one adds the following:*

We thank you also for the miracles, for the redemption, for your mighty deeds, rescuing acts, and wonders, you made for our ancestors in days of old, in this season.

בַּיָּמִים מִתְתַּיְהוּ בֶּן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל,  
 חֲשֵׁמוֹנָאִי וּבָנָיו, כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יוֹן  
 הַרְשָׁעָה, עַל עַמּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְהַשְׁכִּיחַם  
 תּוֹרַתְךָ וּלְהַעֲבִירָם מִחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ, וְאֵתָה  
 בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּיבִים, עָמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת  
 צָרָתָם. רַבֵּת אֵת רִיבָם, דָּנַת אֵת דִּינָם,  
 נִקְמַת אֵת נִקְמָתָם, מְסַרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בְּיַד  
 חֲלָשִׁים, וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעֻטִּים, וְטַמְאִים בְּיַד  
 טְהוֹרִים, וְרָשָׁעִים בְּיַד צַדִּיקִים, וְזוֹדִים  
 בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תּוֹרַתְךָ, וְלָךְ עָשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל  
 וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ, וּלְעַמּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשִׂיתָ  
 תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וּפְרָקָן כְּתִיוֹם הַזֶּה: וְאַחֲרַי  
 כִּי בָאוּ בְנֵיךָ לְדַבֵּר בֵּיתְךָ, וּפָנּוּ אֵת  
 הַיְכָלְךָ, וְטִהַרוּ אֵת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ, וְהִדְלִיקוּ  
 גְרוֹת בְּחִצְרוֹת קִדְשֶׁךָ, וּקְבַעוּ שְׁמוֹנֵת יָמִי

*On Hanukkah:*

In the days of the Hashmonean, Mattityahu son of Yohanan, the High Priest, and his sons, when the iniquitous power of the Syrian-Greeks rose against your people Yisroel to make them forgetful of your Torah, and to force them to transgress the statutes you commanded them. Then, in your abundant mercy, you rose up for them in their time of trouble; you plead their cause, you judged their complaint, you avenged their wrong; you delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of those who occupied themselves in your Torah. For yourself you made a great and holy name in your world, and for your people Yisroel you didst work a great deliverance and redemption as at this day. And thereupon your children came into the innermost of your house, cleansed your temple, purified your sanctuary, kindled lights in your holy courts, and appointed these eight days of Hanukkah (house warming<sup>4</sup>) in order to give

4 The translation of Hanukkah as housewarming is from Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's *Siddur Tehillat Hashem Yideaber Pi* available at the Open Siddur Project.



חַנּוּכָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ  
הַגָּדוֹל:

thanks and praises unto your great name.

*On Purim:*

בִּימֵי מֶרְדֵּכַי וְאֶסְתֵּר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבְּיֵרָה,  
כְּשֶׁעָמַד עֲלֵיהֶם הָמָן הָרָשָׁע, בִּקְשָׁה  
לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת כָּל  
הַיְהוּדִים, מִנַּעַר וְעַד זָקֵן, טַף וְנָשִׁים, בְּיוֹם  
אֶחָד, בְּשָׁלְשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר,  
הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְשָׁלָלָם לְבוֹז (אסתר ג:יג).  
וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים הַפְּרַתְּ אֶת עֲצָתוֹ,  
וְקַלְקַלְתָּ אֶת מַחְשַׁבְתּוֹ, וְהִשְׁבֹּתָ לוֹ גְּמוּלוֹ  
בְּרֹאשׁוֹ, וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת בָּנָיו עַל הָעֵץ.

In the days of Mordehai and Esther, in Shushan the capital, when the wicked Haman rose up against them, and sought to destroy, to slay, and to cause all the Jews to perish, both young and old, little children and women, on one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to prey upon their belongings (Esther 3:13). Then in your abundant mercy you brought his counsel to nought, frustrated his design, and returned his evil upon his own head; and they hung him and his sons upon the tree.

*On the event of a civic holiday celebrating freedom, independence, or thanksgiving:<sup>5</sup>*

We worried that we would be grasshoppers in the midst of Giants;<sup>6</sup> But Yours is the Land, and the fulness thereof,<sup>7</sup> and we were born forth from the Earth<sup>8</sup> with the responsibility to cultivate and preserve it.<sup>9</sup> The land screams silently from the blood of our brothers it has soaked up,<sup>10</sup> while we cry with thanks for the bounty and sanctuary we have found in it. Bountiful is the one who preserves the Earth for those who share in its bounty.

וְעַל הַכֹּל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לְךָ For all this, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ we thank and bless you. May your

5 This prayer was originally self-published at the [Open Siddur Project](#) for Thanksgiving Day 2012. I prefer this prayer over other prayers for Yom Ha'atzmaut.

6 Numbers 13:33

7 Psalms 24:1, cf. Psalm 50:11, and Deuteronomy 10:14

8 Psalms 139:13

9 Genesis 2:15

10 Genesis 4:10



וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתָךְ יִתְבָּרֵךְ שְׁמֶךָ בְּפִי [נ"א]:

בְּפֶה] כָּל חַי תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: כְּכַתוּב:

וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וַיְבָרְכֶךָ

אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ

הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתְּ לָךְ (דברים ח:

א): בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל תְּמִינָתָהּ:

name be blessed by all life, by each creature in its own way, continually and for all time. As it is written, “and

eat and be satisfied and bless יְיָ:

אֱלֹהֶיךָ for the good Earth

given you” (Devarim 8:10). Bountiful are you יְיָ

for the Earth and for its sustenance.





## Blessing for Society

רחם יי אלהינו עלינו ועל ישראל עמך ועל ירושלים עירך ועל ציון משכן כבודך ועל מלכות בית דוד משיחך ועל הבית הגדול והקדוש שנקרא שמך עליו:

אלהינו אבינו רענו [בשבת: רוענו] זוננו פרוסנו וכלכלנו והרויחנו והרנח לנו יי אלהינו מהרה מכל צרותינו ונא אל תצריכנו יי אלהינו לא לידי מתנת בשר נדם ולא לידי הלואתם אלא [נ"א: פי אם] לידך המלאה הפתוחה הקדושה והרחבה שלא נבוש ולא נכלם לעולם ועד:

Have compassion, יי אלהינו on us and upon Yisrael your people, on the City of Peace (Yerushalayim) and upon Tzion the place upon which your Kavod – your Glory – dwells, on the kingdom of the house of David your chosen servant and upon the great and holy house wherein your Ineffable Name was pronounced.

אלהינו – our Protector, feed us, nourish us, sustain, support and relieve us. Speedily, יי אלהינו relieve us from all our troubles. We beg you, יי אלהינו let our bodies never be indebted to others. Rather, may we only ever rely on your helping hand that is full, open, holy and ample, so that we may never be ashamed nor ever be put to shame.

בשבת: רצה והתליצנו יי אלהינו במצותיך ובמצות יום השביעי השבת הגדול והקדוש הזה. כי יום זה גדול וקדוש הוא לפניך לשבת בו ולנוח בו באהבה כמצות רצונך. ברצונך הגיח לנו יי אלהינו שלא תהא צרה ויגון ואנחה ביום מגוחתנו והראנו יי אלהינו בנחמות ציון עירך ובבנין ירושלים עיר קדשך כי אתה הוא בעל הישועות ובעל הנחמות:

*On Shabbat:* Take pleasure, יי אלהינו to nurture us through your mitzvot, and especially through the mitzvah of the seventh day, this great and holy Shabbat, since this day is great and holy before you, that we may relax and nap thereon in love in accordance with the command of your will. In your favor, יי אלהינו grant us such relief that there be no trouble, grief or lamenting on the day of our rest. Let us, יי אלהינו behold the consolation of Tzion your city, and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim your holy city, for you are the Master of rescue and of comfort.

ביום טוב: אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו. יעלה ויבא ויגיע ויראה וירצה וישמע ויפקד ויזכר זכרוננו ופקדוננו וזכרון אבותינו. וזכרון משיח בן דוד עבדך. וזכרון ירושלים עיר קדשך. וזכרון כל עמך בית ישראל לפניך.

*On Yontov:* אלהי and אלהינו of our Ancestors! May we rise and come before you and be accepted with the memory of our holy ancestors, with the memory of the Moshiah – the son of David your servant, of the your holy City of Peace, Yerushalayim, and of all your people – the community called Yisrael.

לפליטה ולטובה ולחן ולחסד ולרחמים ולחיים ולשלום...

(Please) save us with goodness, with grace and lovingkindness, with compassion, with life, and with peace,





on this day of:

בְּיוֹם רֵאשׁ הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה:

בְּיוֹם הַזְכָּרוֹן הַזֶּה:

בְּיוֹם חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה:

בְּיוֹם חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת הַזֶּה:

בְּיוֹם חַג הַשְּׁבָעוֹת הַזֶּה:

בְּיוֹם שְׁמִינֵי עֶצְרַת הַחַג הַזֶּה:

זְכַרְנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בּוֹ לְטוֹבָה (אָמֵן)  
וּפְקַדְנוּ בּוֹ לְבִרְכָה (אָמֵן) וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנו בּוֹ  
לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים (אָמֵן) וּבְדַבַּר יְשׁוּעָה  
וְרַחֲמִים חוֹס וְחַנּוּן וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנו,  
כִּי אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֵינֵינוּ, כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם  
אַתָּה:

- the New Moon [*Rosh Hodesh*].
- Remembrance [*Rosh Hashanah*].
- Festival of *Matzah*.
- Festival of the *Sukkot*.
- Festival of the First Harvest.
- Coming Together on the 8th [to pray for rain!].

Remember us, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ for our well-being, (Amen) and (please) keep us in mind for a blessing. (Amen.) Save our lives as you promised to save us with compassion. (Amen.) Spare us and be gracious to us; have mercy on us and save us; for our eyes look to you, because you are a loving and compassionate protector.<sup>11</sup>

וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַם עִיר הַקִּדְשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה  
בְּיָמֵינוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ בְּנֵה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ  
[וּבְשָׁלוֹם] יְרוּשָׁלַם. אָמֵן:

And rebuild the City of Peace, Yerushalayim, the holy city speedily in our days. Bountiful are you יְיָ who with compassion (and with peace) builds the City of Peace. Amen.

11 cf. Nehemiah 9:31



## Blessing for Goodness Sake

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הָאֵל  
 אֲבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ אֲדִירֵנוּ בּוֹרְאֵנוּ גֹאֲלֵנוּ  
 יוֹצֵרֵנוּ קְדוֹשֵׁנוּ קְדוֹשׁ יַעֲקֹב רוֹעֵנוּ רוֹעֵה  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמֶּלֶךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב לְכָל  
 שֶׁבְּכֹל יוֹם וְיוֹם הוּא הַטֵּיב הוּא מְטִיב  
 הוּא יֵטִיב לָנוּ: הוּא גִמְלָנוּ הוּא גּוֹמְלָנוּ  
 הוּא יְגַמְלָנוּ [נִיֵּא יְגַמּוֹל בְּעַדֵינוּ] לְעַד לְחַן  
 לְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים וּלְרַחֲוֹת הַצֶּלֶה וְהַצִּלָּה  
 בְּרַכָּה וַיְשׁוּעָה נַחֲמָה פְּרִיָסָה וְכִלְפָּה  
 וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשָׁלוֹם וְכָל טוֹב וּמְכָל  
 טוֹב אֵל יַחֲסֵרְנוּ:

Bountiful are you אֱלֹהֵינוּ Protector of the World, the god that is our Guide, our King, our Mighty One, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Maker, our Holy One, the Holy One of Yaakov, our Shepherd, the Shepherd of Yisrael. O King who is kind and acts kindly with all creation, day by day you act kindly, are kind, and will be kind with us. You brought, you bring, and you will always bring goodness to us – with grace, lovingkindness, compassion and relief, deliverance and prosperity, blessing and salvation, with comfort and food, compassion, life, and peace – you bring everything that is really really good. For everything good that we need let us never be needy.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> cf. Eikha Rabba 4 and Bavli Gittin 57a. From Talmud Bavli Gittin 57a:

אשקא קא דריספק חריב ביתר דהווי נהיגי כי הוה מתיליד ינוקא שתלי ארזא ינוקתא שתלי תורניתא וכי הווי מינסבי קייצי להו ועברו גננא יומא חד הוה קא חלפא ברתיה דקיסר אתבר שקא דריספק קצו ארזא ועיילו לה אתו נפול עלייהו מחונהו אתו אמרו ליה לקיסר מרדו בכ יהודאי אתא עלייהו:

Through the axle of a carriage Betar was destroyed. It was the custom when a boy was born to plant a cedar tree and when a girl was born to plant a pine tree, and when they married, the tree was cut down and a wedding canopy made of the branches. One day the daughter of the Emperor was passing when the axle of her carriage broke, so they lopped some branches off a cedar tree and brought it to her [to repair her carriage]. The Jews thereupon fell upon them and beat them. They reported to the Emperor that the Jews were rebelling, and he marched against them.

From *Eikha Rabba* 4:

הורגים בהם עד ששקע הסוס בדם עד חוטמו והיה הדם מגלגל אבנים של ארבעים סאה והולך בים ארבעה מילין ואם תאמר שקרובה לים והלא רחוקה מן הים ארבעה מילין וכרם גדול היה לו לאדריאנוס שמונה עשר מיל על שמונה עשר מיל כמן טבריא לציפורי והקיפו גדר מהרוגי ביתר ולא נזר עליהם שיקברו עד שעמד מלך אחד וגזר עליהם וקברום ר' הונא אמר יום שניתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה נקבעה הטוב והמטיב הטוב שלא הסריחו והמטיב שנתנו לקבורה

They slew the inhabitants until the horses waded in blood up to their nostrils, and the blood rolled along stones of the size of forty *se'ah*<sup>[18]</sup> and flowed into the sea, staining it for a distance of four *mil*. Should you say that Betar is close to the sea; was it not in fact four miles distant from it? Now Hadrian possessed a large vineyard eighteen *mil* square, as far as from Tiberias to Tzipori, and they surrounded it with a fence consisting of the slain of Betar. Nor was it decreed that they should be buried until a certain king arose and ordered their burial. Rabbi Huna said: On the day when the slain of Betar were allowed burial, the blessing, “*hatov v’hameitiv* | Who is kind and deals kindly” was instituted – “*hatov* — *Who is kind*” because the bodies did not rot, and “*v’hameitiv* — *Who deals kindly*” because they were allowed burial.



## Additional Requests

הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִמְלֵךְ עָלֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.	May the Compassionate One's majesty watch over us for ever and ever.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.	May the Compassionate One be blessed throughout the cosmos and on this Earth.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִשְׁתַּבַּח לְדוֹר וָדוֹר וְיִתְפָּאֵר בְּנוֹ לְעַד לְנֶצַח נְצָחִים וְיִתְהַדָּר בְּנוֹ לְעַד וּלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים.	May the Compassionate One be praised throughout all generations, glorified among us at all times, and honored among us in every age and in every world.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יַפְרִינֵסְנוּ בְּכָבוֹד.	May the Compassionate One grant us an honorable livelihood.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִשְׁבֹּר עַל גְּלוּת מַעַל צְוָאֲרָנוּ וְהוּא יוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְאָרְצֵנוּ.	May the Compassionate One remove the yoke of alienation from our necks, reconnecting us with the Earth we rely upon. <sup>13</sup>
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה מְרֵבָה בְּבֵית הַזֶּה וְעַל שְׁלֶחֶן זֶה שֶׁאֲכָלְנוּ עָלָיו.	May the Compassionate One send a plentiful blessing upon this dwelling place, and upon this table at which we have eaten.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ אֶת אֱלִיָּה הַנָּבִיא זְכוּר לְטוֹב, וַיְבַשֵּׁר לָנוּ [בְּמַתְרָה] בְּשׂוֹרוֹת טוֹבוֹת יְשׁוּעוֹת וְנַחֲמוֹת.	May the Compassionate One send us Eliyahu the prophet – may he be remembered for good – who will bring us good news, salvation, and comfort.
הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת [אָבִי מוֹרִי] בְּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה, וְאֶת [אִמִּי מוֹרִתִי] בְּעַלֵּת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה, אוֹתָם וְאֶת בֵּיתָם וְאֶת זְרָעָם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם...	May the Compassionate One bless each and every one of those here, their families, the seeds they carry, and all that is theirs.
אוֹתָנוּ וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָנוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְבָּרַכְנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה, יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה, יַעֲקֹב וְלֵיאָה רַחֵל בְּלָהָה וְזִלְפָּה, בְּכָל מְכַל כָּל, בֶּן יְבָרֵךְ אוֹתָנוּ כְּלָנוּ יַחַד בְּבָרָכָה שְׁלֵמָה, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.	(Also bless) us and all that is ours: just as our ancestors Avraham and Sarah, Yitzhak and Rivka, Yaakov and Raḥel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah, were each blessed in every way throughout their lives, <sup>14</sup> so may the Compassionate One bless all of us together with a perfect blessing – and let us say, Amen!
מְמָרוֹם [נ"א: בְּמָרוֹם] יִלְמְדוּ עָלֵינוּ וְעָלֵינוּ זְכוּת, שֶׁתֵּהָא לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלוֹם, וְנִשְׂא בְּרָכָה מֵאֵת יי וְצַדִּיקָה מֵאֵלֵהי יִשְׁעָנוּ, וְנִמְצָא חַן וְשִׂכָּל טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם.	May the merit of our blessed ancestors advocate in Heaven on our behalf and bring us a lasting peace on Earth. May we receive a blessing from יי and justice from the אֱלֹהֵי that intervenes at times of danger. May we be considered graceful and thoughtful in the vision of אֱלֹהִים and in the perception of our fellow earthlings. <sup>15</sup>

13 Here, I translate גְּלוּת as a psychological state of “alienation” which will certainly remain for us in every land, including Eretz Yisroel, until take responsibility for the first mitzvah, l'ovdah u'l'shomrah– to cultivate and to preserve the Earth, as the compassionate Earthling gardeners G'd born us from.

14 cf. Bereishit 24:1; 27:33; 33:11



בשבת: הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִנְחֵלְנוּ לְיוֹם שְׁפָלוֹ שַׁבָּת וּמְנוּחָה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים.	<i>On Shabbat:</i> May the Compassionate One grant us a complete Shabbat, a gift to life everlasting.
ביום טוב: הַרְחֵמֵנוּ הוּא יִנְחֵלְנוּ לְיוֹם שְׁפָלוֹ טוֹב:	<i>On Yontov:</i> May the Compassionate One grant to us the day that is completely excellent!

הַרְחֵמֵנוּ. הוּא יִזְכֵּנוּ לַיָּמֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ וּלְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא:	May the Compassionate One make us worthy of the days of the moshiah and of a life in the next Age.
[ביום טוב: <b>מִגְדֹּל</b> (שמואל ב' כב:נא)   <b>מִגְדֵּיל יְשׁוּעוֹת מְלָכָו וְעֵשָׂה זֶסֶד  </b> <b>לְמִשְׁיָחוֹ לְדָוִד וּלְזַרְעוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם:</b> (תהלים יח:נא) <b>עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה</b> <b>שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל (וְעַל כָּל</b> <b>יֹשְׁבֵי תְּבֵל). וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.</b>	She intervenes (on shabbat: is a tower) for Her king, bringing lovingkindness to Her chosen servant, to David and to his descendants, throughout the world (Tehilim 18:51, II Shmuel 22:41). The One who makes peace in lofty places, may He make peace here below for us and for all Yisrael (for all Yishmael and for everyone in the world) – and let us say. Amen!

Kol Hamesubin Kan



*Final verses of Torah to complete the Birkat Hamazon:*

יִרְאוּ אֶת־יְיָ קְדוֹשׁוֹ כִּי אֵין מִחְסוֹר לִירְאָיו: כַּפִּירִים רָשׁוּ וְרַעֲבוּ וְדָרְשׁוּ יְיָ לֹא־יִחְסְרוּ כָל־טוֹב: (תהלים לד:י-יא)	Be in awe of יְיָ you holy ones; for those in awe suffer no want. Young lions will suffer the pangs of hunger: but those who seek יְיָ shall not lack anything good (Tehilim 34:10–11).
הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ: (תהלים קמה:טז)	Give thanks unto יְיָ for goodness is His unconditional ceaseless lovingkindness (Tehilim 136:1).
פִּתַּח אֶת־יָדְךָ וּמְשַׁבֵּעַ לְכָל־חַי רָצוֹן: (תהלים קמה:טז)	You open your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Tehilim 145:16).
בָּרִיךְ הַנִּבְרָךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בּוֹ וְהָיָה יְיָ מִבְטָחוֹ: (ירמיהו יז:ז)	Blessed is the one that trusts in יְיָ and whose trust יְיָ is (Yirmiyahu 17:7).
נָעַר הָיִיתִי גַם־זָקֵנְתִי וְלֹא־רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק נִעְזָב וְזָרְעוֹ מִבְּקִשׁ־לֶחֶם: (תהלים לז:כה)	I have been young and now I am old; yet have I not seen a righteous person forsaken, nor their children begging for bread (Tehilim 37:25).
יְיָ עֲזֵר וְיִבְרַךְ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם: (תהלים כט:יא)	יְיָ will give strength to people; יְיָ will bless his people with peace (Tehilim 29:11).

*Some Additional Torah I learn for after the Birkat Hamazon:*

בנימין רעיא כרך ריפתא, ואמר: בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא (מִלְּפָא דְעָלְמָא) מַרְיָה דְהָאִי פִּיתָא. אַמַר רַב: יֵצֵא. (בבלי ברכות מ:ב)	Binyamin the Shepherd made a sandwich and said, “Blessed is the Compassionate One (Cosmic Majesty) Source of this Food.” Rav says that he had performed his obligation. ( <i>Talmud Bavli Berachot 40b</i> )
אמר רבי יוסי בן רבי בון: אף אסור לדור בעיר שאין בה גיננותא של ירק. (ירושלמי ד:יא)	Rebbi Yosi ben Rebbi Bun said, “It is forbidden to live in a town in which there is no vegetable garden.” ( <i>Talmud Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:12</i> )



יָרַעַם הַיָּם וּמְלוֹאוֹ יַעֲלֶץ הַשָּׂדֶה וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ: אִזּוּ יִרְנְנוּ עֲצֵי הַיַּעַר מִלְּפָנֶי יי כִּי־בָא לְשִׁפּוֹט אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:

Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; Let the field exult, and all that is therein; Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy, Before יי for G!d is come to judge the earth.... (S Divrei Hayamim 16:32-33)

[כי האדם עץ השדה]. שחייו של אדם (אינו אלא) מן האילן. ר' ישמעאל אומר, מכאן חס המקום על פירות האילן. ק"ו מאילן. ומה אילן שעושה פירות. הזוהירך הכתוב עליו; פירות עצמם. על אחת כמה וכמה. [ד"א,] [הא אם מעכבך] לבא מפניך במצור - קצצהו.

If not for the trees, human life could not exist. (Midrash Sifre on Devarim 20:19)

## חֶסְרוֹנָן

All of life lives by virtue of every creature satisfying one another's need to live. We rely on each other and we depend on one another. Not one of us was created so self-sufficient that we could live independently of other life. Only the plants (including the trees) and some bacteria can make their own food out of the combination of soil minerals, water, sunlight, and oxygen available on our planet. All of life on Earth (including human beings) depends on plants and bacteria for their life. We were all created lacking, *hesronan* -- and through fulfilling each other's needs, all the diverse multiplicity of living creatures on Earth becomes interconnected in a living Oneness. • When we feel satisfied (*savata*) after eating (*akhalta*) we are obligated to bless (*berakhta*) G!d for the good Earth provided for us (Devarim 8:10). Additionally we are obligated to observe the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit* -- not to unnecessarily waste or needlessly destroy (Devarim 20:19). What do you think is the relationship between your feeling *savata* and being created with *hesronan*? And what is the connection between not wasting and being mindful about what we are lacking? In the first blessing of the Birkat haMazon, in *Borei Nefashot*, and in the blessing on flowering fruit trees, the idea of *hesronan* is explicit. Why do these blessings all speak of our lacking?

*Borei Nefashot* (after eating all foods except bread and baked goods):

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרָא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחֶסְרוֹנָן, עַל כֵּן כָּל מַה שֶּׁבְּרָאתָ לְחַיּוֹת בָּהֶם נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חַי. בָּרוּךְ חַי הָעוֹלָמִים:

Blessed be you יי Cosmic Majesty, the One who created so many different living beings, all needing each other, to make one Life interwoven through them all, as one soul. Blessed be the Life of all worlds.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> (translation adapted from an old translation by David Seidenberg, [neohasid.org](http://neohasid.org))



*The Blessing on Flowering Fruit Trees* (said only in the spring in the northern and southern hemispheres, on two or more flowering fruit trees)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. שְׁלֹ חֶסֶר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ דְּבָרָה, וּבְרָא בּוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְאֵילָנוֹת  
טוֹבִים, לְהַנּוֹת בָּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם:

Bless You אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי Cosmic Majesty, for in your cosmos there lacks nothing, and you have fashioned goodly creatures and trees that give people pleasure.

R' Yeshayahu Horowitz (d. 1630) taught, “While you are eating, think of how you are eating before G!d, and how there is no veil between you and the Holy One.” We remind ourselves that we too are responsible to provide for others, and that we have some will over how to direct our desires when we say, פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדְךָ וּמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רְצוֹן, “Open your hand and satisfy all that Life desires!” When we open our hand, we are expressing lovingkindness and walking in the ways of G!d, as expressed in this midrash aggadah from Bavli Ta’anit 20b:

כִּי הוּא כַרְךָ רִיפְתָא הוּא פִתַח לְבַבִּיהּ וְאָמַר כֹּל מֵאֵן דְּצָרִיךְ לִיתִי וְלִיכּוֹל אָמַר רַבָּא כּוֹלְהוּ  
מִצִּינָא מְקִימָנָא

When Rav Huna began to eat bread, he would open the doors of his house and and proclaim, “Whoever is in need of food may come in and eat at my table.” (Bavli Ta’anit 20b)

Not only through satisfying each other’s needs with tzedakah, but also in satisfying your own needs with consideration and thoughtfulness can you better yourself and the world. Eat food grown without harmful pesticides and fertilizers. Become a farmer. When you buy fruits, grains and vegetables tended with care by farmers who love the Earth, and conscious to minimize the harm and suffering of all living creatures, you are helping to heal this world. By fulfilling each other’s needs with lovingkindness we help to express a more loving Nature. This is an important lesson. Rambam (d. 1204), R' Avraham Abulafia (d. after 1291), and R' Yosef Gikatalia (d. 1310) all taught that the hidden underlying meaning of the divine name Elohim is ha-teva – Nature. The nature (ha-teva) of this world can seem cruel and disturbing, but by cultivating the earth with love and with consideration for all of its creatures, we can bring about a more peaceful world.

וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם-פֶּבֶשׁ וְנֹמֵר עִם-גְּדֵי יִרְבֵּץ וְעֵגֶל וּכְפִיר וּמְרִיא יַחֲדוּ וְנֶעַר קָטָן נַחֵג בָּם: וּפְרָה וְרֹב  
תִּרְעִינָה יַחֲדוּ יִרְבְּצוּ וְלִדְיָתָן וְאַרְיֵה כַּבְּקָר יֹאכַל-תְּבֹן: וְשַׁעֲשַׁע יוֹנֵק עַל-חֵר פֶּתֶן וְעַל מְאוּרֶת





צָפְעוֹנַי נִמּוּל יָרוּ הָדָה: לֹא־יִרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל־הָר קָדְשִׁי כִּי־מְלֹאָה הָאָרֶץ דְּעַה אֶת־יְיָ כַּמַּיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of יְיָ, as the waters cover the sea. (Yeshayahu 11:6-9)

וְאוֹלָם שְׂאֵל־נָא בְּהַמָּוֹת וְתִרְדָּה וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְגַד־לָךְ: אִזְ שִׁיחַ לְאֶרֶץ וְתִרְדָּה וַיִּסְפְּרוּ לָךְ דִּגְי תִּנְיָם:

You need only ask the beasts and they will teach you; The birds of the sky and they will tell you; Or speak with the Earth and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea, they will tell you. (Iyov 12:7-8)

רַבֵּנן אָמְרִי: אִפִּי' דְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵתָּה רוֹאָה אוֹתָן שֶׁהֵן יִתִּירָה בְּעוֹלָם כִּגּוֹן זְבוּבִין וּפְרַעוּשִׁין וַיִּתּוּשִׁין אָף הֵן בְּכֻלָּל בְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם הֵן, וּבְכֻלָּל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלִיחוֹתוֹ:

Even though you may think them superfluous in this world, creatures such as flies, bugs and gnats, have their allotted task in the scheme of creation, as it says 'And G'd saw everything that G'd had made, and behold, it was very good'. (Bereshit Rabbah 10:7)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. מְשַׁנֵּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת:

Bless you יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ who diversified the creatures. (Blessing upon seeing strange or unusual creatures)

כִּשְׁהוּא חוּזֵר וּמִסְתַּכֵּל בְּכֻלָּ מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו שֶׁבְּרָא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ אָמַר. לֵאֵילוֹ חַיִּים וּלְאֵילוֹ חַיִּים לֵאֵילוֹ נִשְׁמוֹת וּלְאֵילוֹ נִשְׁמוֹת לֵאֵילוֹ אֲכִילָה וּשְׁתִּיָּה וּלְאֵילוֹ אֲכִילָה וּשְׁתִּיָּה. הֲרֵי הֵן חֲשׂוּבִין כְּבַהֲמָה וּבַחֲיָיָה וּכְשֶׂאֵר שְׂקִצִּים וּרְמֻשִׁים שֶׁבְּרָא הַקַּב"ה עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה. מִיָּד נִתְקַרְרָה דַּעְתּוֹ וְאִין מַכְלָה אוֹתָם. הֵא לְמַדַּת שְׁלֵא נִבְרָאוּ שְׂקִצִּים וּרְמֻשִׁים בְּעוֹלָם אֵלָּא רְפוּאָה לְבְנֵי אָדָם עַל הָאָרֶץ:

Upon considering all the work of creation, G'd said: These human beings have life, and those other creatures have life. These have breath and those have breath; these have desire for food and drink, and those have desire for food and drink. Human beings ought to be deemed as important as cattle, as beasts, at least as important as the variety of lizards, amphibians, and other creeping things which I created upon the Earth. At once the Holy Blessed One felt some measure of contentment and resolved not to annihilate humanity. And so you see that reptiles, creeping things, and all of life was created in the world dependent on one another, and so too sustains humanity on Earth. (adapted from Tanna d'ebei Eliyahu, end of Chapter 1)



The Maggid of Mezeritch was a great Rabbi and an even greater storyteller. People would come from far and wide to sit and hear his stories. But every morning at dawn, before any of his students were awake, the Maggid would begin his day by going alone to a pond on the edge of town. The Maggid's students often wondered about the Rabbi's strange habits, but no one dared to ask him and he never mentioned it. One day a new student asked the Maggid about his daily trips. The Master replied, "I go there daily to learn the song that frogs use to praise the Holy One. Even as a Rabbi and a storyteller, it takes a very long time to learn that song." (The Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liadi)

אמר רבי יוחנן: אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה - היינו למידין צניעות מחתול, וגזל מנמלה, ועריות מיונה, דרך ארץ מתרנגול שמפייס ואחר כך בועל.

Rebbi Yoḥanan said: If we had not received the Torah, we would have learned modesty from watching a cat, honesty from the ant, and loyalty from the dove. (Bavli Eruvin 100b)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁפָכָה לּוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ:

Blessed are you יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ who has such things in the cosmos. (Blessing upon seeing beautiful creatures)

# לֹא-תִשְׁחִית

לַיִן הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּכְּלֵל וַיֵּשְׁבִי בָהּ:

For יי's is the Earth and the fullness thereof (Tehillim 24:1)

א"ר סימון אין לך כל עשב ועשב, שאין לו מזל ברקיע שמכה אותו, ואומר לו גדל, הה"ד (איוב לח) הידעת חקות שמים אם תשים משטרו בארץ וגו', לשון שוטר

Rav Simon said: Every single blade of grass has a Mazal [lit. constellation] in the rakia (heavenly firmament) which strikes it and says, 'Grow!' This is the meaning of the verse (Job 38:33), 'Do you know the laws of the heavens, and can you place their control [mishtar] over the earth?' Mishtar is an expression of shoteir [meaning, an enforcing officer.] (Bereishit Rabbah, 10:6 (translation by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner)

וַיִּקַּח יי אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּגִן-עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:



And אֱלֹהִים placed the Earthling in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and to protect it – l'ovdah ul'shomrah. (Bereishit 2:15)

In the following story retold by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhok Schneerson (1880-1950) recalled when he was a teenager walking in the fields near Bolivke with his father, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn (1860-1920):

One day in the summer of 1896, I was strolling with my father in the field in the country resort of Bolivke, near Lubavitch. The crops were almost ripe; the grain and the grass rippled in a gentle breeze.

“Behold G!dliness”, my father declared. “Every movement of each single ear of grain and blade of grass was included in the Primeval Thought of Adam Kadmon, He who watches and gazes until the end of all generations. Divine Providence causes this thought to be realized for the sake of a specific G!dly intent.” As we walked on, we found ourselves in a forest. I continued, proceeding deep in contemplation of what I had just been told concerning Divine Providence, overwhelmed by the gentleness and earnestness of my father’s explanation.

As people often do, I plucked the leaf from a tree that I passed by without taking particular notice, and held it for a while in my hand. As I walked on, engrossed in thought, ever so often I tore off small pieces from the leaf and tossed them to the ground.

My father then said: “The ARI z”l teaches that...every leaf is a created being with Divine vitality which G!d created with a specific intent and role in the ultimate purpose of creation...”

“We were just discussing the subject of Divine Providence and without any thought at all you plucked the leaf, held it in your hand, played with it...tore it up into little pieces, and scattered it in various places.

“How can a person act so light-mindedly in relation to one of G!d’s creations? This leaf is something created by the Almighty for a particular reason. It has a G!d-given vitality, it has a body and it has a life. In what way is the leaf’s ‘I’ smaller than your ‘I?’”...

(Likkutei Dibburim, Vol. I, page 177 in English (1957-1958))

שורש המצוה ידוע, שהוא כדי ללמד נפשנו לאהוב הטוב והתועלת ולהדבק בו, ומתוך כך תדבק בנו הטובה ונרחיק מכל דבר רע ומכל דבר השחתה, וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה אוהבים שלום ושמחים בטוב הבריות ומקרבים אותן לתורה, ולא יאבדו אפילו גרגר של חרדל בעולם, ויצר עליהם בכל אבדון והשחתה שיראו, ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר מהשחית בכל כחם, ולא כן הרשעים אחיהם של מזיקין שמחים בהשחתת עולם והמה משחיתים, במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו, כלומר בה הוא נדבק לעולם, וכענין שכתוב (משלי יז, ה): "שמח לאד לא ינקה רע, והחפץ בטוב ושמח בו נפשו בטוב תלין לעולם", זה ידוע ומפורסם.

The root reason for this mitzvah (bal tashchit) is known (evident): it is in order to train our spirits to love what is good and beneficial and to cling to it; and as a result, good fortune will cling to us, and we will move well away from every evil thing and from every matter of destructiveness. This is the way of kindly pious people and the conscientiously observant; they love peace and are happy at the good fortune of people, and bring them near the Torah. They will not destroy even a mustard seed in the world and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see; and if they are able to do any rescuing, they will



save anything from destruction, with all their power. (Sefer Hachinuch: D'varim 20:19 number 529)

כִּי־תָצוּר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצֶיהָ לְנִדַּח עָלֶיהָ נִרְוֶן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לִבָּא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמָּצוֹר:

When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees, for from them will you eat, do not cut them down; for is the tree of the field an earthling that can run away from you? (Devarim 20:19)

כמו בני־אדם, לעצים יש כוח לגדול. כשם שלבני אנוש נולדים ילדים, כך נושאים העצים פרות. וכשם שכשבן־אדם פגוע, צעקותיו נשמעים ברחבי התבל, כך שכשעץ נגדע, צעקותיו נשמעים ברחבי תבל.

[The Torah compares humans to trees] because, like humans, trees have the power to grow. And as humans have children, so trees bear fruit. And when a human is hurt, cries of pain are heard throughout the world, so when a tree is chopped down, its cries are heard throughout the world." (Rabbi Yaakov ben Yitzhak Ashkenazi, Tsena Ur'ena (258b), translated from Yiddish)

Rebbe Naḥman of Bratzlav was once traveling with his ḥasidim by carriage, and as it grew dark they came to an inn, where they spent the night. During the night Rebbe Naḥman began to cry out loudly in his sleep, waking everyone up in the inn. Everyone came running to see what happened. When he awoke, the first thing Rebbe Naḥman did was to take out a book he had brought with him. Then he closed his eyes and opened the book and pointed to a passage. And there it was written "Cutting down a tree before its time is like killing a soul."

Then Rebbe Naḥman asked the innkeeper if the walls of that inn had been built out of saplings cut down before their time. The innkeeper admitted that this was true, but how did the rabbi know?

Rebbe Naḥman said: "All night I dreamed I was surrounded by the bodies of those who had been murdered. I was very frightened. Now I know that it was the souls of the trees that cried out to me." (Rebbe Naḥman, retold by Howard Schwartz in *Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology* (1998).)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. פּוֹקֵחַ עוֹרִים:

Awareness: Bless You YHVH Eloheinu, Cosmic Majesty, who gives sight to the blind. (cf. Tehillim 146:8)<sup>17</sup>

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ:

All Foods:

יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹרִים יי זָקַף כְּפֹפִיִּים יי אֶתְּב צְדִיקִים: 17



Bless You YHVH Eloheinu, Cosmic Majesty, through whose word all things came into being.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, זוֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וְנֹאמֵן בְּבְרִיתוֹ וְקִיָּם בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ:

Rainbows:

Bless You YHVH Eloheinu, Cosmic Majesty, Who remembers the covenant and keeps its promise faithfully with all creation.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב:

Rain & Good News:

Bless You YHVH Eloheinu, Cosmic Majesty, who is good and does good.

