



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

BIRKAT (more than) HAMAZON

We call it Benching. Its full name is BIRKAT HAMAZON. But it is much more than food that we are blessing HaShem.

Food is the starting point. The Torah says - and we say/sing it in the benching: V'ACHALTA, V'SAVATA, UVEIRACHTA... You will eat, and be satisfied, and you shall bless G-d.

As we know, the mitzva to bench is a d'Oraita, a Torah command - specifically after a full, satisfying meal. Benching after a bread-meal even if it is just half of a falafel that did little to curb your appetite, is a Rabbinic requirement. One way or the other, we are to Bench, but it is important to know the difference between a d'Oraita and a d'Rabbanan command.

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There is an interesting three-way machloket (debate) as to what eating requires the full Birkat HaMazon.

Mishna B'rachot 6:8 states that it was Rabban Gamliel's opinion that (in addition to a bread-meal) one is required to say the full Benching after eating dates, olives, grapes,

figs, pomegranates, as well as after food made with wheat or barley. Rabban Gamliel's opinion is based on the flow of three p'sukim in this week's sedra - D'varim 8:8-10 -

ERETZ CHITA... A land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil producing olives and honey (dates),

ERETZ ASHER... A land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will lack nothing in it...

V'ACHALTA... And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless the Lord, your God, for the good land He has given you.

Rabban Gamliel looks at the three p'sukim and draws his conclusion that Shiv'at HaMinim (the Seven Species) require full benching, as does a bread-meal.

The Chachamim say that on the Seven Species we say the single abridged bracha (which we call B'racha Mei-ein Shalosh, B'racha Acharona, Al HaMichya, Al HaGefen, Al HaPeirot) and only on a bread-meal is the full Benching to be said. This opinion - the one that is the decisive ruling, can be seen to reflect the second and third p'sukim above, which together link eating bread and Birkat HaMazon.

Rabbi Akiva looks just at the pasuk of Eat, be satisfied, Bench and states

that whatever a person eats as a satisfying meal would require the full benching - a hearty salad, meat and potatoes...

Please be clear - the halacha is like the Chachamim and the other opinions should be considered of academic interest.

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The first b'racha of Birkat HaMazon speaks only of food and that HaShem provides for all living creatures. Had our Sages stopped with this b'racha only, then Benching would be thanking G-d for the food. Period.

But our Sages looked at the whole pasuk D'varim 8:10. It says more than eat, be satisfied, and bless G-d. The V'ACHALTA pasuk command us to bless HaShem "for the good land He has given you." The second b'racha of Benching includes our acknowledgment and appreciation for -

having given as a heritage to our ancestors a precious, good and spacious land; for having brought us out, HaShem our G-d, from the land of Egypt, and redeemed us from the house of bondage; for Your covenant which You have sealed in our flesh; for Your Torah which You have taught us; for Your statutes which You have made known to us; for the life, favor, and kindness which You have graciously bestowed upon us; and for the food we eat with which You

constantly nourish and sustain us every day, at all times, and at every hour.

That is so much more than just food. And the third b'racha includes Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash.

And the fourth bracha and the HaRachamans that follow it, include even more things that we acknowledge and thank HaShem for.

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One further point (for now). Birkat HaMazon is a mitzva that is to be fulfilled anywhere in the world that a Jew finds himself.

We wouldn't categorize Benching as a Land of Israel dependant mitzva. And yet, the wording of the mitzva includes blessing HaShem for the Land.

The Riv'vot Efrayim (Rabbi Efrayim ben Avraham Boruch Greenblatt, 1932-2014) says that the second bracha of Birkat HaMazon, should not be seen only as part of Birkat HaMazon, but one who lives in Israel should have the additional intent (Kavana) for the mitzva of living in Eretz Yisrael when he says this second bracha. With the proper Kavana, this second bracha becomes the equivalent of a Birkat Mitzva for Yishuv Eretz Yisrael.

**PTDT**