

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

Note that there isn't something inherently problematic in our text with the acquisition of wealth. The abundance of food, water, and valuable metals are embedded into the promise of the land, but without proper acknowledgement of its true Source, wealth becomes spiritually dangerous. When the religious rhythm of *v'achalta v'savata, u'veirachta* (Deut. 8:10) is replaced by *tochal v'savata* (Deut. 8:12), arrogance fills the void left by unspoken words of gratitude. Abundance only remains a source of blessing when accompanied by words of blessing.

The *mitzvah* of reciting *birkhat ha-mazon* after eating a meal, which emerges from this verse, ritualizes the expression of gratitude and dependence on God. At its best, the Grace after Meals rightly reminds us not to take our sustenance for granted. However, the challenges of rote religious behaviorism apply here as well, threatening to turn *birkat ha-mazon* into yet another rushed and intention-less prayer. To counteract this complacency, the Jerusalem Talmud (Brakhot 56a) offers a strategy meant to infuse our prayers with meaning.

"Rabbi Ba the son of Rav Hiyya bar Abba teaches: If he ate while walking, he must stand and bless. If he ate standing, he must sit and bless. If he ate sitting, he must recline and bless. If he ate reclining, he must enwrap himself and bless. And if he did this, he is like the angels who serve God."

Life moves quickly. Too often we find ourselves eating on the run, in the car, or in between meetings. Interestingly, this text makes no claim on precisely how we eat; rather, the prescribed shift is found instead in how we express gratitude. An incremental shift in posture helps bring about the mindful recitation of our prayer. When we slow down for long enough to recognize that our physical nourishment is a gift from God, we align ourselves with God's promise.

Yet, prayer in its fullest form isn't mindfulness alone; it's a call to action. Remembering God's kindness compels us to "keep God's commandments, rules, and laws, which I enjoin upon you today" (Deut. 8:11). Right now, throughout the United States, children accustomed to receiving multiple meals each day from public schools are going to bed hungry. The prayer recited on a full stomach must dislodge the apathy that too often drives our inaction around food insecurity and pervasive hunger. *U'veirachta* is a call to channel one's gratitude into fulfilling the promise of abundance for all of God's children.



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## TORAH SPARKS

### *Eikev*

August 8, 2020 | Av 18 5780

Annual I (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25) Etz Hayyim, p. 1037

Triennial I (Deuteronomy 7:12-9:3) Etz Hayyim, p. 1037

Haftarah I (Isaiah 49:14-51:3) Etz Hayyim, p. 1056

### D'var Torah: Channeling Gratitude

**Rabbi Morris Panitz**, Director of "Immersive Experiences" American Jewish University, CY 2016-17

*V'achalta, v'savata, u'veirachta*- "When you have eaten and are satisfied, give thanks to the Lord your God..." (Deuteronomy 8:10)

These famous words are positioned between a promise and a warning. Speaking to the generation poised to enter the Land of Israel, Moses vividly describes the agricultural abundance that awaits them. "A land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing..." (Deut. 8:7). The promise of a full belly evokes the religious response of gratitude—*u'veirachta*.

However, the verses that follow depict the risks of such abundance. "When you have eaten and are satisfied (*tochal v'savata*), and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flock have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God..." (Deut. 8:12-14).

Could it be that the very fulfillment of God's promise is what leads to arrogance and distance from God?

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## D'var Haftarah: Isaiah's Words to the Weary

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, From the Archives

In this week's haftarah, the second of the seven haftarot of consolation (shiva denehamta) that follow Tisha b'Av, there are messages both of comfort and of urging the nation to repent. God exhorts Isaiah to have the strength to convey these important prophecies to God's people, as Isaiah reports: "The Lord God gave me a skilled tongue, to know how to speak timely (la-oot) words to the weary, morning by morning; He rouses my ear to give heed like disciples." (Isaiah 50:4)

What was the nature of the message that Isaiah was meant to express to the weary? This message is described by the Hebrew word "la-oot" (lamed-ayin-vav-tav), a unique usage in the Bible (hapax legomenon). The obvious result of using a unique word is that later generations, unfamiliar with the word, will have difficulty understanding its meaning. Rashi quotes one of the earliest Hebrew grammarians, Menahem ben Saruk (10th century Spain), who derives this word from the word "ait" (ayin tav) which means "time". (Mahberet – "et"). Some modern scholars associate the word "la-oot" with the Arabic word "ooth", meaning "strengthen" or "assist". We would then translate this phrase "to know how to speak words to strengthen the weary". (A. Hacham, Isaiah, Daat Mikra, p. 540)

A different meaning for this word is found in the Talmud Yerushalmi where it is used to help define a difficult word found in the Mishnah. (It is somewhat ironic to use one lesser known word to define a second lesser known word.) The Mishnah relates the law of how one says the blessing over the candle light in the havdalah ceremony: "One does not recite the blessing over the candle [for havdalah] until one has benefited (sheyai-utu) from its light." (Berachot 8:6) (This explains why we look at our fingertips using the light of the havdalah candle. See Shuchan Aruch Orach Hayyim 398:3-4)

The root of the word "yai-utu" in the Mishnah is "alef-vav-tav". The tradition of the Mishnah recorded by the Amoraic sage, Samuel, however, had an "ayin" instead of the "alef". Consequently, he used the verse from Isaiah as proof for the meaning of this verse but, in truth, it appears that he really learned the meaning of this word from the context of the Mishnah and then applied it to his understanding of the verse in Isaiah. (See Yerushalmi Berachot 8:6 Venice ed. 12c) He, therefore, understood the verse to mean: "to know how to speak words that will benefit the weary".

This brings us back to the beginning of our discussion. What was Isaiah's message? He intended to give encouragement to the spiritual weary so that they would have strength to carry on God's ways in the world.

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*collaborative environment. We welcome your support at  
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## It's (Mostly) Not About the Food

**Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty**

### **Text: Devarim 8:7-10**

*(7) For the LORD your God is bringing you to a **good land**: a land of brooks of water and springs... (8) **A land** of wheat and barley and vines and figs and pomegranates, **a land** of oil olives and honey. (9) **A land** where you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack any thing in it; **a land** whose stones are iron, and out of its mountains you will hew copper. (10) And you will eat and be satisfied, and bless the LORD your God for the **good land** which He has given you.*

- Leading words: In biblical texts, words are not random. In this text you can see the leading word – a word appearing repeatedly and conveying the essence of the passage. What is the word? How many times does it appear? Note that it appears as part of a phrase in the opening and closing of the passage. What is the advantage of this form of writing?
- When we have eaten and are sated, what will we bless? Why do you think that it does not state that we will bless for the food?
- Why do you think that a blessing for the good land is offered specifically at the moment of satisfaction with the food?
- Why is it important to bless God for the good that we are given?
- Why are we instructed to bless God for the good land after, not before, eating? (We do recited blessings before eating for a different reason – asking permission to help ourselves to God's world.)

### **Commentary: Ramban (Nachmanides) Devarim 8:10**

*... **And you will eat and be satisfied, and bless** — for when you remember the enslavement in Egypt and the affliction of the desert, and when you eat and are satisfied in the good land, you will bless the LORD for the land. And our rabbis have a tradition that this is a positive Mitzvah (commandment)...*

- Ramban gives 2 readings of the pasuk (verse). According to the first reading, why will we bless God? In this reading, is this a Mitzvah?
- Why do you think that the rabbinic tradition declared this a Mitzvah?
- Which of the two readings do you find to be a more compelling reason for blessing after a meal? Why?

- Extra challenge: Open the blessing/grace after meals. What topics are we mentioning after the meal? How are they linked to our meals? What would you like to include in this blessing? Why?