



THE BAKER'S SECRET

After listing the seven fruits of Israel, the Torah (Devarim 8:9–10) describes Israel as “a Land where you will eat bread without poverty – you will lack nothing there... And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied and you shall bless the L-rd your G-d for the good Land which He has given you.” From here the Talmud (Berachot 48b) learns that whenever one eats a meal with bread and is sated, one is required to say Grace after Meals. This raises a number of questions.

First, it is understandable for the Infinite G-d, as the source of all blessing, to bless people – but how is it possible for finite people to bless G-d? Thanking and acknowledging seem to be within the capability of humans – but to *bless* implies filling a void. What could G-d possibly lack?

Second, why does the Grace after Meals apply only to bread? Immediately prior to this verse, the Torah describes the Land in relation to the seven species. Surely they, too, require a blessing of such significance?

Fruits and vegetables are entirely natural and almost wholly dependent on factors external to human control. Their growth and quality are dictated by the nutrients in the ground and the rain from the heavens. In contrast, bread cannot grow on its own. It takes a long process involving “sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading and

baking” (Shabbat 74b). One might assume that fruits, created entirely by G-d, are holier than bread. Yet it is the very fact that bread requires human involvement that leads to its elevated sanctity.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*Derashot HaRav* p. 167) explains that in the process of bread making, where a person plays such a critical role, he or she is essentially re-creating Creation. This is the task of humankind – to partner with G-d as a co-creator, as the Torah (Bereishit 1:28) states, “Fill the earth and master it.” Bread is the symbol of our mission in life – to take that which G-d gives us, whether it is raw wheat or raw talent, and to “master it,” to develop it into much more. It is for this reason that bread, reflecting our partnership with G-d, attains the greatest level of holiness. Through the act of re-creating with that which G-d created, we bless G-d.

So why do we recite Grace after Meals after eating bread and not other foods? While it is obvious that the success of crops is ultimately up to G-d, it can be more difficult to notice G-d’s role in the creation of human-made products. Thus, one may conclude that bread is the product of humanity alone. The same extends to all of our accomplishments. While there may be no atheist in a foxhole, the opposite is also often true; one forgets to acknowledge G-d when things are going well. As the Torah

commands: “And you shall remember the L-rd your G-d, for He is the one who gives you strength to make wealth” (Devarim 8:18).

We are therefore required to refocus our minds on G-d as the source of all goodness, and to acknowledge His role. Through the Grace after Meals, said specifically after eating human-made bread, the Torah is reminding us of the ultimate Creator: “Lest you eat and become satisfied and you build good houses and settle... And you shall say in your heart, ‘my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth’” (Devarim 8:12, 17).

We must realize the power of our involvement in partnering with G-d and the transcendental sanctity that this can create. At the same time, we must never forget the Divine source; our re-creations are based upon the Creator’s creations. Tu BiShvat helps us focus on G-d-given fruits of the Land so we can renew our appreciation that ultimately all comes from G-d. And then we bless, because making blessings on life is our opportunity to transform life into the ultimate blessing.

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