



Parshas Eikev

August 11, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Holy Hedonists

by Rabbi Eli Mozes

Do you live to eat or do you eat to live? The hedonist would opt for the former; after all, what is life if not to chase the next and newest gastronomic delight. The more thoughtful of us might say, "Is that really what life is all about - a very long bucket list of foodie experiences? Life must have more meaning than that, and in order to live we must eat! Of course, once we are eating, we might as well enjoy it!"

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936) takes this concept a step further. He explains that when we eat, there is an obligation to make a blessing before eating and an after-blessing when we are done. One might think that the objective is to eat, but in order to eat, one is obligated to first recite blessings on the food. One would be wrong to think so, says Rabbi Levovitz. It is obvious, he states, that the whole purpose of eating is just to enable one to recite the appropriate blessings.

This might strike you as a bit extreme; perhaps the pious Rabbi Levovitz looked at it this way, because he probably spent five minutes daily eating, hardly paying attention to what was going into his mouth due to all of the Torah thoughts swirling through his head. His blessings, on the other hand, were surely said with intense concentration, as he talked to his Creator and thanked Him for the bountiful food He had provided. Why, his *Birchas Hamazon* could have taken a full fifteen minutes! Most of the rest of us, on the other hand, like to spend at least fifteen minutes engrossed in our meal, savoring every mouthwatering bite, while our blessings, on a good day, take five minutes, and are generally mumbled quietly while our minds are elsewhere. (I was fourteen years old when someone kindly explained to me, following a blessing I recited,

that *bruchtashemlkainumechlum* isn't a word.) For Rabbi Levovitz and those of his supernal level, the food was truly ancillary to his blessing, but can such a lofty outlook possibly be expected of us mere (hungry) mortals?

Rabbi Shlomo Wallach helps bring this down to our level. He explains that if we take a moment to contemplate the Universe and the amount of detail Hashem has put into it, we should be overcome by amazement. Consider the precision with which the world was created; the Earth is precisely the proper distance from the sun, and its orbit is perfect, so as not to have seasons that are too extreme. The biosphere and the water cycle all run in sync to sustain human life. All of this has been masterfully designed by Hashem, creating the optimal environment for humanity, because humanity is the *raison d'être* for this elaborate Creation.

But when one thinks about it some more, there is a glaring inconsistency; if man is the purpose of Creation, then why does man have to work so hard to sustain himself? There are so many creations that have an internal form of sustenance. For example, the sun was created with its own internal fuel tank of hydrogen, topped off to last about five billion years. Why couldn't humans be created in a similar fashion, with enough internal fuel to last 120 years? Hence, reasoned Rabbi Levovitz, it must be that food and the need to eat were created by the Almighty in order to provide the opportunity to make a blessing on the food, thereby fulfilling the ultimate purpose of the world - bringing honor to Hashem.

Now we have a better understanding, but it still seems impractical; how can one infuse blessings with sincerity? One

continued on back side

Stories For The Soul

Buried Deep Within

Based on a story by Rabbi Aryeh Z. Ginzberg

A young religious officer in the IDF was ordered to enter Gush Katif in 2005 to assist in the forced evacuation of the Jews living there. Although he pleaded not to have to be part of the operation, he was told he must participate.

On the day of the evacuation, the officer entered a small *moshav* and made his way to the synagogue. He pleaded with the rabbi and the residents gathered there to leave peacefully. With tears and prayers, the settlers exited the synagogue to the waiting buses.

Soon, only the rabbi remained. As the officer prepared to depart, he removed his *siddur* (prayer book) from his backpack, got on his knees, dug a hole and placed the *siddur* inside. He covered it up and prepared to leave, but was asked by the rabbi to explain his strange actions.

The soldier explained that he was confident that Jews would one day return to this place, and he was leaving this *siddur* to show that Jews had been here before and had left their hearts behind. The officer and the rabbi embraced and boarded the bus.

Eleven months later, the IDF sent the same officer, now an officer in the Engineers Corps, back to Gaza to set up a headquarters for operations. Under the cover of darkness, the group entered and put up the necessary structures. As the sky brightened, the officer looked around and saw the utter devastation of the area. Suddenly, he impulsively got down on his knees and began digging. Sure enough, he found the very same *siddur* he had buried less than a year earlier!

In shock, he began to shake uncontrollably, and cried out, "G-d, what message are you trying to send me?"

The officer was eventually directed to bring his story to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky of Bnai Brak, one of the greatest men of our generation. After hearing the entire

continued on back side

Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Most communities recite eight chapters of *Tehillim* (Psalms) for *Kabbalas Shabbos*, six before *Lecha Dodi* and two afterwards. There is a beautiful connection based on the amount of words recited in these chapters. What is it?

A: There are 702 words in these chapters, the *gematria* (numerical value) of *Shabbos*!

(Source: Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, as quoted in *Kisvei Rav Moshe Blau*)

This week's question: What prayer is recited according to Ashkenazic custom on *Shabbos* only, while Sephardic custom recites it on festivals as well?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel – the Mordechai Part II

The fact that Rabbi Mordechai studied under so many teachers gave him knowledge of a wide range of opinions of the leading Torah scholars of that era, an asset that

would serve him well when he compiled his own halachic works later. In addition to his Talmudic knowledge, Rabbi Mordechai was also expert in Hebrew grammar.

A Taste of Torah

continued from front side

approach is to wax (even more) philosophical. Why would Hashem make such a beautiful world - wouldn't a few shades of gray suffice? Did He really need to grace us with all of the colors of the rainbow? Did He really need to create so many different textures and flavors? He provided us with some ten thousand taste buds, all there to provide so many layers of enjoyment; why and for what? The answer is that Hashem was helping us "Holy Hedonists" actually mean it when we make our blessings. By stopping for but a moment to be amazed at the sumptuous delicacies which Hashem has provided, even we can truly make our blessings meaningful.

There is another way to make this practical. On *Shabbos*, there is a mitzvah to eat three meals, which is one more than what was usually eaten in the times of the Talmud. We all know what it's like on a winter *Shabbos* to try and eat *Shalosh Seudos* (the Third

Meal) when you have only just finished an extravagant *Shabbos* lunch two hours previously. You take one look at the spread and feel that you have no appetite. The Avudraham (fl. 14th century) says that this is precisely the purpose of eating a third meal on *Shabbos*. For the first two meals, you approach hungry, and there is no evidence that you are eating because it's a mitzvah. It is the third meal, when you have no appetite, that proves that you are eating all these meals for the mitzvah.

Let us try and file this away, so that the next time *Shalosh Seudos* rolls around and we don't feel like eating, we will stop and think what a wonderful opportunity we have to eat for the right reasons. As Rabbi Moshe ben Kalonymous (fl. 10th century) expressed in his classic Friday night song *Kol Mikadesh*, "and [they] feast [three times] on it (*Shabbos*) in order to bless [You] three times."

Stories For The Soul

continued from front side

story, Rabbi Kanievsky replied, "Instead of burying the *siddur*, you should have continued praying! Do not underestimate the power of prayer. For you, the sad story was over. But Hashem was sending you a message: "It's not over! Keep praying! Here is your *siddur*. Pour

out your heart for the Jewish People!"

In this week's parsha, we are commanded to serve Hashem "with all your hearts," a reference to prayer. While it can be done by rote, meaningful prayer is meant to be a heartfelt experience.

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