

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XLVI: Ekev (Deut. 7:12–11:25)

### Essay 7. Blessings before and after eating

**"וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבְרַכְתָּ"** וכו'. בַּגְּמָרָא דְּבִרְכוֹת פְּרָק שְׁלִישִׁי שְׁאֲכָלוּ (דף מ"ח) רַבִּי אֵוֹמֵר "וּבְרַכְתָּ", זֶה בְּרֵפֶת הַזֶּן וְכו'. "עַל הָאָרֶץ", זֶה בְּרֵפֶת הָאָרֶץ, "הַטּוֹבָה", זֶה "בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם" וְכו'. אֵין לִי אֵלָא לְאַחֲרָיו, לְפָנָיו מִנֵּינָן? תְּלַמּוּד לֹאמַר: "אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָךְ", מִשְׁנֵתָן לָךְ. עַד כָּאֵן בַּגְּמָרָא. יֵשׁ מְקוּשִׁים אֲמַאי מִהַפֵּךְ הַפְּסוּק הַסְּדֵר, בְּתַחֲלָה הֵנָּה לִיָּה לְמַכְתָּב בְּרַכָּה שְׁלִפְנֵיהָ וְאַחַר כֵּךְ שֶׁל אַחֲרֶיהָ.

There is a verse, **“And you shall eat, and you shall be satiated, and you shall bless the L-rd your G-d for the good land which He has given you”** (Deut. 8:10). **In the Gemara of tractate Berachot, the seventh chapter**, which is entitled, **“Three people who ate,”**<sup>1</sup> it is brought on **page 48b** that the Sages taught in a Tosefta that Grace after Meals (*Birkat haMazon*) is a Biblical requirement, based upon this verse.

Zera Shimshon then quotes Rabbi Yehuda haNasi, whose interpretation is that the verse teaches some (but not all) of the elements of the Grace after Meals. The *Birkat haMazon* includes: a Preliminary Psalm; an invitation (*zimmin*) from a leader to begin the Grace; a blessing on the food, “Who feeds all”; a blessing on the Land of Israel; a blessing on Jerusalem; and the blessing “Who is good and Who does good” (*haTov ve’haMeitiv*).

**“Rabbi [Yehuda haNasi] says: . . . ‘And you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless,’ that is [the source of] the blessing of: Who feeds all.** However, the *zimmin* blessing is derived [from the verse]: ‘Praise G-d with me [and we will exalt His name together]’ (Ps. 34:3). [He continues]: **‘For the land,’ that is [the source of] the blessing of the land.** [The adjective] **‘good’** [that modifies “the land”], **that is [the source of the blessing]: ‘Who builds Jerusalem’ . . .** They instituted [the blessing]: ‘Who is good and Who does good,’ at Yavne [and, as such, it has no Biblical source]. **This [accounts] for [Grace] after [eating]. From where [is it derived that one is obligated to recite blessings] before [eating]? The verse states: ‘Which He has given you.’** [A blessing must be recited over food] **from [the moment that G-d] gave it to you [not only afterward].”**

**One can ask why**, according to Rabbi Yehuda haNasi’s interpretation, **the verse reversed the order**, with the first part providing support for the Grace after Meals, and the last part providing support for the blessings before eating. Instead, **at the beginning of the verse, it should have**

\* English translation: Copyright © 2021 by Charles S. Stein. More essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

<sup>1</sup> Which begins on Berachot 45a.

written in support of the blessing before [eating], and afterward it should have written in support of the blessing after [eating].

וְנִשְׁ לֹאמַר דְּאִיתָא בִּירוּשְׁלַמִּי דְחֵלָה תְּנִי מִצָּה גְזוּלָה אֲסוּר לְבָרֵךְ עָלֶיהָ מִשּׁוּם "וּבְצַע בֶּרֶךְ נֹאֲץ ה'" , אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן הֵדָא דְתִמְאָ בְתַחֲלָה, אֲבָל בְּסוּף, מִצָּנָה, וְאִיפְלִיגוּ תוּ הֵתָם וְעֵי"ש. וְהִמְגִן אֲבָרְהָם (בא"ח סימן קצ"ו) כְּתִב דְּמִי שְׁגָזַל חֵיטִים אוֹ לֶחֶם וְאֲכָלָהּ דְחֵיב לְבָרֵךְ בְּרַפְתַּת הַמְּזוֹן, מִשּׁוּם דְּכִינּוֹן שְׁאֲכָלָה קִנְיָאָה בְּשִׁנּוּי, וְדָמִים הוּא חֵיב. נִמְצָא שְׁמָה שְׁאֲכָל הוּא שְׁלוֹ וּמְכָל שְׁפֵן בְּרַפְתַּת הַמְּזוֹן דְּאוֹרְיָתָא וְעֵי"ש. אֲבָל הַבֵּית יוֹסֵף פֶּסֶק דְּאִין מְבָרֵךְ לֹא בְתַחֲלָה וְלֹא בְּסוּף וְכוּ'. וְכִתְבַּת הַב"ח סִימָן הַג"ל דְּלְבְּסוּף חֵיב לְבָרֵךְ לְדַבְרֵי הַכֹּל דְּשִׁנּוּי קוּנָה, וְדָמִים הוּא חֵיב, וְאִינוּ אִפְּיֵלוּ מְנַאֲץ. וּמֵאִי דְפְּלִיגֵי בִירוּשְׁלַמִּי הוּא בְּבִרְכָה רֵאשׁוּנָה וְהִיכָא דְגָזַל מִצָּה אֲפוּיָה מִמֶּשׁ וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש.

**It can be said that it's brought in the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Challah (9a), "It's taught that [regarding] stolen bread, it's forbidden to make a blessing upon it, because, as Rabbi Hoshaya said, 'The robber who makes a blessing blasphemes the L-rd' (Ps. 10:3).<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yochanan<sup>3</sup> said, 'That which you said [regarding the blessing is correct] at the beginning [of eating], but is not [correct] at the end [of eating],' i.e., it's a mitzvah [to say a blessing]. They continued to dispute [the matter] there: "Rabbi Yona said, 'a sin cannot be a mitzvah.' Rabbi Yossi said, 'A mitzvah cannot be a sin.' Rabbi Hila said, 'The mitzvot, if you do them as they are commanded, they are mitzvot, but it not, they are not mitzvot.' "**

**The Magen Avrohom<sup>4</sup> wrote (Orach Chaim, siman 196), that one who steals wheat or bread and eats it is obligated to say Grace after Meals, because eating is a different form of acquisition, and he is obligated in compensation to the owner. It's found that the food is considered his, and in any case, Grace after Meals is a Biblical commandment, and see there.**

**But the Beit Yosef<sup>5</sup> rules that we don't say a blessing, not at the beginning of eating, and not at the end of eating, etc.**

**The Bach<sup>6</sup> wrote (in siman 196) that afterward there is an obligation to bless the food according to everyone, because of the different form of acquisition, and [the thief] is obligated in compensation to the owner, and the blessing is legitimate and is not blasphemy to say it. What is the disagreement in the Jerusalem Talmud? It is regarding the initial blessing, and a man who steals baked matzah.<sup>7</sup> The Bach attempted to unify the opinions, suggesting that no blessing**

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 10:3 might be translated as: "For the wicked boasts of his soul's desire; *the robber curses and scorns the L-rd.*" The verb "בְּצַע" means "to cut," "to break off," "to gain by violence;" and as a noun, "בְּצַע" could mean "one who is greedy," or it could mean "one who has gained dishonestly." Thus, I have rendered it as "a robber." The word "בָּרַךְ" most commonly means "to bless," but it could euphemistically mean "to curse." The word "נֹאֲץ" means "to scorn" or "to treat with contempt." Thus, the verse is most commonly interpreted as, "the robber curses and scorns the L-rd," but the Talmud cites it in the context of, "The robber who makes a blessing blasphemes the L-rd." See also Bava Kamma 94a and Sanhedrin 6b, with regard to the robbery of wheat.

<sup>3</sup> Our text of the Jerusalem Talmud reads "R' Yona."

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Abraham Abele Gombiner ("Magen Avraham") (c. 1635–1682), Polish Talmudist. Best known for his commentary on the Orach Chayim section of the Shulchan Aruch,

<sup>5</sup> A detailed commentary on the Arba'ah Turim, written by Rabbi Yosef Karo. It served as a precursor to the Shulchan Aruch, which he wrote later in life.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Yoel ben Samuel Sirkis (1561–1640), Polish *posek* (decisor).

<sup>7</sup> The last sentence appears to be the view of the Bach.

was required either before or after eating when there was an inherent problem with the food, such as produce which was untithed. He suggested that stolen food was an external problem, and while a blessing before eating would be inappropriate, a blessing after eating would be required, because the consumption of the food was a form of acquisition. However, the different views and whether the Bach can successfully address the various opinions is not relevant for this essay. Rather, the Zera Shimshon's point is to show that there are at least some opinions that hold that for stolen food, there should be no blessing before eating, but there should be a blessing after eating.

נמצוינו למדים דלפעמים יש ברכה אחרונה אף בלא ברכה ראשונה, כגון שגזל לחם דבאכילתו קנייה בשנוי ותייב לברך. ואילו הנה אומר "אשר נתן לך" מעיקרא, דהיינו שקשנמן לך אז תהיה תייב לברך, הייתי אומר דגם ברכה אחרונה אינה אלא דוקא היכא דמשלך אכלת, דהיינו שפבר נתתיבת בברכה ראשונה. אבל היכא שגזל ולא נתתיב בברכה ראשונה, או מפני שהוא מנאץ, אז הנה אמינא דיהנה פטור אף מברכה אחרונה, וכסברת הבית יוסף הנ"ל, וכדעת ר' אילא בירושלמי, אלה המצות אם עשיתן כמצותן מצות ואם לאו אינן מצות, דאפילו בסוף לא יברך.

**We find that sometimes there is a blessing after [eating] required even without an initial blessing [before eating]. One example is when one stole bread, because his eating of it is a different form of acquisition, and he was obliged to bless G-d for the food that he had eaten, but not before eating, when the food was not yet his. If [the verse] had said the closing words, “which He has given you,” at the beginning of the verse, that when He gave [the food] to you then you were obliged to bless Him prior to eating, I could have said that the blessing after [eating] is also only precisely where it is your own food that you ate, i.e., that [food] for which you were already obligated to make the initial blessing. But where the food was stolen and [the thief] was not obligated in the initial blessing, or where, because he blasphemed by saying the initial blessing even though it was inappropriate, then I could have said that he would be exempt even from the blessing after [eating], and this is as the minority opinion of the Beit Yosef above. It is also as the thinking of Rabbi Hila<sup>8</sup> in the Jerusalem [Talmud], “The mitzvot, if you do them as they are commanded, they are mitzvot, but if not, they are not mitzvot,” i.e., that even at the end of eating he should not make a blessing.**

משום הכי קאמר קרא בתחלה "ואכלת ושבעת וברכת", לא שמוענין דתייב בברכה אחרונה אפילו היכא שאינו תייב בברכה ראשונה, שאז לא מקרי שנתן לך שיהי עדיין לא קנאו.

**Because of this, Scripture first says, “And you shall eat, and you shall be satiated, and you shall bless,” to make known to us the obligation of the blessing after [eating], even where there is no obligation in the initial blessing. For then it doesn't say “that He has given to you” initially in the verse, for [the thief] has not yet acquired it.**

\* \* \*

---

<sup>8</sup> Our text of the Jerusalem Talmud reads “R' Hila.”