

PENINEI MEHKERE ERES

פניני מחקרי ארץ

HaRav HaGaon Rachamim Moshe Shayo Shlit"a

פרשת עקב תשפ"ו



וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ
"הַטֶּבֶה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ"

"And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d
for the good land that He has given you." (8:10)

Our *Chachamim* teach in the *Mishnah* (*Berachot* 7:1): "Three who ate 'as one' are obligated to recite *Birkat HaMazon* with *zimun*." The phrase "כאחד" calls for reflection. After all, it certainly doesn't mean that they all share a plate, and if it had simply said "three who ate", it would have been clear that it means that they ate together. What is the meaning and purpose of saying that they ate "as one"? The word "כאחד" comes to teach us that these three must be bound together in love, brotherhood, and peace - for there is no vessel that holds blessing like *shalom*. Only when they eat as one, in genuine unity, does the obligation of *zimun* apply. But if they are not truly eating "כאחד" — if they are divided from one another, and how much more so if there is strife among them — they are not worthy of blessing.

This is reflected in the *halacha* that the three who join in *zimun* must be fit to eat from the same bread. But if, for instance, they have each forbidden themselves to derive benefit from the other's food, they cannot combine for *zimun* — as the *Tur* writes (*siman* 196) — for in their disunity, the blessing cannot rest upon them.

The reason these three must be at peace with one another is that they are eating, as it were, at the table of Hashem — and the table is likened to the *mizbeach*. Just as the *mizbeach* in the *Bet HaMikdash* brings peace to the world, so too must those seated at the table be at peace with one another. Our *Chachamim* say (*Masechet Semachot* 8:16): "Why is iron disqualified from use on the *mizbeach* more than any other metal? Because the sword is made from it — and the sword is a symbol of curse, while the *mizbeach* is a symbol of blessing; that which signifies curse is pushed aside for that which signifies blessing. And we may reason that the following is all the more so: if stones, which neither see nor hear, neither speak nor eat nor drink — yet because they bring peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, the Torah said 'do not raise iron upon them' — then Torah scholars, who bring atonement to the world, must certainly be kept safe from all harm. Similarly, it says: 'of whole stones (אבנים שלמות) you shall build the altar of Hashem your G-d' — stones that bring peace (שלום) to the world. And we may draw the following conclusion: if stones, which neither see nor hear, neither speak nor eat nor drink — because they bring peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, Hashem said 'let them be whole before Me' - then Torah scholars, who provide atonement for the world, how much more must they be whole before Hashem."

And now that we no longer have the *mizbeach*, a person's table takes its place — as the *Gemara* writes (*Berachot* 55b; *Chagigah* 27a): the verse in *Yechezkel* (41:22) states, "The altar — wood, three cubits high... and its sides were wood; and he said to me: this is the table that is before Hashem." The verse opens referring to it as "*mizbeach*" and ends referring to it as "*table*". The meaning of this transition is that when the *Bet HaMikdash* stood, the *mizbeach* brought atonement; now, a person's table brings atonement in its place. It follows, then, that those who sit down to eat must be at peace with one another — as one person, with one heart. This is why specifically three who ate "כאחד" are obligated in *zimun* — for through *zimun*, abundance, blessing, and goodness flow upon them and upon the entire world.

Accordingly, if one of those who are eating together is a *kohen*, he should be given the honor of leading the *zimun*, for he corresponds to the *kohen* who serves upon the *mizbe'ach*. Just as the *Birkat Kohanim* serves as the channel through which blessing flows to the Jewish people, bringing blessing, goodness, and peace, so too these three elements are reflected in the blessings that follow. After *Birkat Kohanim* we pray,

"שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה" "Grant peace, goodness, and blessing", corresponding to the three priestly blessings. From the first blessing, "יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ" "May Hashem bless you and safeguard you", flows material blessing. Through the second, "יִאֲרֶה פָנָיו אֵלֶיךָ" "May Hashem illuminate His countenance toward you", comes spiritual goodness, for the Torah is called "טוב" "good". The third blessing culminates in peace, as it concludes, "וְיַשֵּׁם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם" "May He grant you peace", for peace unites the material and the spiritual into a single harmonious whole.

The same pattern is reflected in *Birkat HaMazon*. The first blessing corresponds to material sustenance; accordingly, we proclaim,

"בְּהִסּוֹד וּבְרַחֲמִים" "Who nourishes the entire world with His goodness, with grace, kindness, and mercy". The second blessing corresponds to spiritual blessing, and therefore it includes the themes of "בְּרִית וְתוֹרָה" "the covenant and the Torah". Indeed, one who omits "בְּרִית וְתוֹרָה" from this blessing has not fulfilled his obligation. The third blessing serves to unite the physical and the spiritual, a harmony achieved through the service of the *Bet HaMikdash*. It is for this reason that we pray in the third blessing for the rebuilding of the *Bet HaMikdash*, for Yerushalayim, the Holy City, and for the restoration of the kingdom of the House of David. When the Davidic monarchy is restored to its rightful place, true peace will once again prevail in the world.

All of this is encapsulated in the *zimun* itself, when we declare, "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁאֵלֵינוּ מְשֻׁלוֹ וּבְטוֹבוֹ הָיִינוּ" "Blessed is He of Whose bounty we have eaten, and through Whose goodness we live". The word "בְּרוּךְ" "Blessed" alludes to blessing; "וּבְטוֹבוֹ" "through His goodness" alludes to goodness; and "הָיִינוּ" "we live" alludes to peace, for without peace there can be

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no true life. Peace is hinted to as well in the word “מְשָׁלוֹ” “*of His bounty*”, whose letters may be rearranged to spell “שָׁלוֹם” “*peace*”. When we recognize that all of our sustenance comes from *Hashem*, peace naturally follows.

These three blessings likewise correspond to the three crowns. The first blessing corresponds to the Crown of *Kehunah*, for through the *kohen* blessing is bestowed. The second corresponds to the Crown of Torah, as it centers upon “בְּרִית וְתוֹרָה.” The third corresponds to the Crown of Kingship, and therefore we pray, “מְשִׁיחָהּ מְחִינָהּ לְמַקְוָה” “*Restore the kingdom of David, Your anointed one, speedily in our days.*”

The fourth blessing, *HaTov VeHaMetiv*, corresponds to the Crown of a Good Name, which rises above the other three crowns. In this blessing we thank *Hashem* for the past, the present, and the future: “הוּא הִטִּיב לָנוּ, הוּא מְטִיב לָנוּ, הוּא יִטֵּב לָנוּ” “*He has done good for us, He does good for us, and He will do good for us.*” Through this continual expression of gratitude, a person merits a good name, which encompasses and crowns all the other virtues.

Birkat HaMazon concludes, fittingly, with prayers for peace. We recite “ה' יְבָרֵךְ” “*Hashem will grant strength to His people; Hashem will bless His people with peace*”, and, “עוֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל” “*He Who makes peace in His heavenly heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel*”. Peace is the ultimate culmination of all blessing, for *Hashem* establishes harmony between heaven and earth—heaven representing the realm of spiritual abundance, and earth the realm of material blessing.

When I was a student in *Yeshivat Kol Torah*, there was an extraordinary *talmid chacham* who prayed with us, Rabbi Moshe Hershtler *zt"l*. He was renowned for publishing many manuscripts from the writings of the Rishonim, and this sacred work required him to spend long hours in the National Library.

On one occasion, Rabbi Moshe ate lunch at the library, and after finishing his meal he recited *Birkat HaMazon* aloud, slowly and with great concentration. When he completed the blessing, one of the library employees approached him. She explained that she had heard him say, “שָׁלוֹם נְבוֹשׁ” “*that we should not be ashamed, not be humiliated, and not stumble, forever.*”

“I was surprised,” she said, “because I know the text as ‘שָׁלוֹם נְבוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִבְּוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִבְּוֵל’ without the words ‘שָׁלוֹם נְבוֹשׁ’.” She even showed him a *siddur* in which those words did not appear and asked where he had found his version.

Rabbi Moshe, a man of uncompromising integrity, was himself puzzled. He had always recited the text that way, yet he knew that those words did not appear in the standard *siddurim*. He replied, “Perhaps I have been mistaken. But I have been saying it this way since childhood, and I believe that this was also my late father’s custom. In any event, I will

investigate the matter and let you know.”

Some time later, Rabbi Moshe discovered that this wording did indeed appear in certain *Nusach Sepharad siddurim*. Without hesitation, he photocopied the page, circled the words “וְלֹא נִבְּוֵל” in red ink, placed it in an envelope, and mailed it to her.

When the woman opened the envelope, she saw the text of *Birkat HaMazon*, with the words “וְלֹא נִבְּוֵל” prominently circled in red. Those words immediately struck her with profound force. That very day, she had been planning to enter into a civil marriage with a non-Jewish man. Seeing the circled words, she understood them as a message from Heaven—a warning not to “stumble” by marrying a non-Jew. At that moment, she resolved to end the relationship, and she also accepted upon herself to strengthen her commitment to Torah and mitzvot.

Some years later, Rabbi Moshe Hershtler *zt"l* received an invitation to a wedding at the Nof Yerushalayim Hall. Although he did not clearly remember who the families were, he thought to himself, “The hall is not far from my home. I’ll stop by, perhaps I owe one of the families gratitude, and can honor them with my presence.”

When he arrived, however, he did not recognize anyone. Suddenly, the bride approached him and said, “Rabbi, do you remember me? I am

the librarian from the university who asked you about the wording ‘שָׁלוֹם נְבוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִבְּוֵל.’ You should know that on the very day you sent me that letter, I was about to marry a non-Jewish boy. Your letter saved me. That is why I sent you this invitation. I wanted to thank you, because through you *Hashem* granted me the merit not to stumble by marrying a non-Jew. *Baruch Hashem*, I grew stronger in my Judaism, and I eventually met a young man who is *shomer Torah u-mitzvot*, whom I am marrying tonight.”

May it be *Hashem*’s will that we merit the fulfillment of the prayer, “שָׁלוֹם נְבוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִבְּוֵל” “*that we never experience shame, humiliation, or spiritual stumbling, and that we be blessed with an abundance of blessing, goodness, and peace.*”



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