

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

OUR IMPACT

Reproduced from "Living Kiddush Hashem" by Rabbi Shraga Freedman, with permission of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications.

Hashem calls the Jewish people "*bni bechori Yisrael*—My firstborn son, Yisrael" (Shemos 4:22). The Torah also tells us that we are a *mamleches kohanim*, a nation of priests; we are destined to be the leaders of the world. As Hashem's "firstborn," so to speak, we are entrusted with a much higher level of responsibility. On Monday, November 22, 1963, the United States was shaken by the assassination of President Kennedy. A state funeral was held the following Monday, and schools throughout the country were closed. Dr. Joseph Kamenetzky, the director of Torah Umesorah, asked Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l whether yeshivos should follow suit.

Definitely, Rav Yaakov said. He quoted the Kuzari: the Jewish people's relationship with the world is like that of the heart to the rest of the body. The Jews are supposed to teach morality to the nations. If such a crime could be committed, the Jewish people had failed in their mission.

It is tempting to tell ourselves that the world will always hate us, that we cannot make a difference. But it is a fundamental part of our faith that everything is connected to the Jewish people. Everything depends on whether we succeed in reflecting Hashem.

We must lead by example and educate the world about the proper way to live. If we kept the Torah perfectly, the failings we observe would not exist. If we take responsibility, we can make a difference 



gem

OF THE WEEK

LIFE MISSION

Based on excerpts from the commentary of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.

In Parashas Eikev 8:10 we learn the *mitzvah* of *bentching* from "When you eat and are satisfied, then bless G-d, your G-d...." To bless Hashem means to understand what Hashem's goals are for us, which He entrusts us who act in moral freedom, and to realize this in practice.

Whenever we have eaten from Hashem's bounty, we strengthen ourselves — satisfying what our body requires — while remembering that it is Hashem alone, your G-d, whom you owe your restoration of strength and satisfaction for the requirements of your survival.

After all this, we are obligated to dedicate all we have to Hashem, Who it is that strengthens and uplifts us so that we can serve Him, carry out his aims and realize His will on earth. The way to achieve this is through our dedication and pronounced with words of *bracha* in *bentching*. Like the maan in the midbar, eating bread and bentching cultivates and reinforces the awareness of Hashem

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powerful
PRAYER 

AL HATZADDIKIM:
WHY MENTION CONVERTS?

Among the many role models listed in Al Hatzaddikim, the introduction to this *bracha* singles out a special group of people: *geirei tzedek*, righteous converts. *Gerim* do an unbelievable and very difficult thing: they leave behind everything they grow up with, their friends, their society, the only way of life they have known—all for the truth of the Torah. Unable to live a lie, they make this huge sacrifice and convert to Judaism. In our tefillos for the welfare of *tzaddikim*, we *daven* for such people, and rightfully so 

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A BLESSING AND A DANGER

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

In the very first chapter of Sefer Mesilas Yesharim, Ramchal tells us that all facets of life are a *nisayon* for a person; poverty on one side and wealth on the other. Each can be a smashing success or a dismal failure. Both in last week's *parsha*, (Vaeschanan), and in this week's *parsha*, (Eikev) we read stern warnings about the danger of wealth. but the dangers described are quite different from each other.

In Vaeschanan, Moshe Rabeinu tells Am Yisroel that they are about to enter a land which Hashem will give them as He swore to the Avos. There they will find every thing they could want ready made, all five-star. Big wonderful cities which they haven't built, houses filled with all good, hewn cisterns, vineyards and olive orchards. All of this is just waiting for them, with no need for them to exert any effort whatsoever. What a marvelous blessing. But wait! When you have all this, the Torah warns, you may come to forget Hashem. If they would use their *seichel*, they would only become all the more grateful to Hashem for the bounty He has showered down upon them. But human nature doesn't always follow the sensible route. Just possessing wealth can cause a person to focus on the physical and the material. The more one does so, the less he concerns himself spiritual matters, and can actually forget Hashem.

The message in Eikev is very different. There the *parsha* discusses what happens after they settle in Eretz Yisroel and are living an affluent lifestyle. They will build luxurious homes, and their business will prosper, their herds of animals will increase, and they will have an abundance of silver and gold. Here this is a different, additional danger than the previously mentioned one. You will be so taken with your success that it will go to your head. You will attribute all you have accomplished to your good business acumen, thinking, "My power and the strength of my hand earned me all this wealth."

In the *shira* of Haazinu, the Torah records the history and predicts the destiny of Am Yisroel from the time they left Mitzrayim until the end of days. There the Torah states that at first they had everything, literally sitting on top of the world. But what happened then? "Yeshurun (Israel) became fat (indulged) and kicked (rebelled) ...and deserted the G-d Who made them."

We live in an affluent society, so different than what most *galus* Jews lived in throughout the ages. It is so easy for us to lose focus. As the Satmar Rebby, R' Yoelish, used to say, "It was never easier to be a Jew than in America. But it was never harder to want to be a Jew than in America."

Wealth is indeed a great blessing when used correctly. May Hashem bless all Jews with ample *parnasah*, and may they all take the Torah's warnings to heart

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The several previous *pasukim* (8:7-9) speak about Hashem bringing us into a good land, in which we will eat bread without scarceness and will lack nothing. The main object is *lechem*, and this is what our *pasuk* refers to. Only after eating bread does *Birkas Hamazon* applies *min hatorah*, and this is where an admonition is issued: We should not think that Hashem provides us only with luxuries.

Rather, the bread that sustains us is not within our power alone, the barest necessities and simplest means of existence, are a direct gift of Hashem's *hasgacha pratis*. Every breath we take depends on His decree. Further to this, *bentching* is more than giving thanks for what we have received. It's purpose is to remind us that we owe our existence to Hashem and to awaken us to our life's mission.

For this reason *bentching* consists of four *berachos*, which encompass all the factors that make up the concept of "the Jew", Hashem's guidance of the world, and Jewish history. In the first *bracha* we devote our lives to the One Who gives sustenance to all.

The second *bracha* refers to Hashem giving the land of Israel to us as an everlasting testimony of the special relationship of the fate and destiny between Hashem and His people.

The Sanctuary of the Torah on Har Tziyon is the permanent expression of the Jewish national calling of realizing Hashem's Torah. This is the third *bracha*.

The final *beracha* was added by the *chachamim* after the rebellion of Bar Kochba ended in disaster, and hundreds of thousands dying at Betar. To avoid repeating this, it became necessary to warn Jews of all generations the danger of relying on the might of their own hands, rather to entrust national future solely to Divine providence. For all future time our eyes are directed away from human assistance and turn to Hashem alone



wonder WORLD

TRUE SUSTENANCE



How can a simple loaf of bread be so complex?

The modern world has discovered that the process of grain to bread, the beginning of agriculture, originated from the Sinai Peninsula to the Persian Gulf (which includes Israel), and was named the "Fertile Crescent". The first 11 *malachos* mentioned in Tractate Shabbos are related to the growing, harvesting, and baking of bread. The process is extensive and has many facets. First the ground is plowed, then a seed is planted and gathered. The seeds are separated from the stalks, then the grain is further separated from lesser grain and the bad items removed. The next stage is grinding the grain, sifting it, then it can finally be baked into bread. When we *bentch*, we are thinking of how much Hashem takes care of us, even with something as "simple" as bread