



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Sustaining the Power of Sukkos

Dr. Yoel Schwartz

We have just concluded the most uplifting and meaningful period of the year. Since the beginning of the month of Elul, we have been focusing on how to develop and reinvigorate our relationship with Hashem. We have heard powerful words of Torah, experienced inspirational davening, and danced with our greatest gift, the Torah. The primary goal of this time is to infuse each of us with holiness; true success involves not just feeling inspired during Elul and Tishrei, but maintaining and building our connection to Hashem as we transition back into our normal routines.

How can we keep our spiritual awareness growing and thriving in the months ahead?

Feelings and emotions are ephemeral and will soon dissipate unless directed into some meaningful action. One strategy, therefore, is to add small acts or goals to our days that help cement our yearning for increased connection to Hashem. Rav Shach provides a famous example, as Rabbi Bresler mentioned in his *dvar Torah* at the end of *yom tov*. During a time of trouble, Rav Shach wanted to do something meaningful to increase his connection to Hashem. He decided that while at home, he would start to recite *Birkas Hamazon* from a *siddur* or *bentcher* instead of by heart. A seemingly insignificant act became a means to add spirituality into his life.

Similarly, shortly after the COVID-19 crisis began, Rabbi Burnstein asked us to add the paragraph of *Al Tira* after *Aleinu*, as a small, concrete, and meaningful way to increase our *tefillah* during the pandemic. Small gestures help concretize our yearning for spiritual outlets within our busy days. Each of us should look into ourselves and choose something small to add to our spiritual portfolio in our efforts toward continued growth in our relationship with Hashem.

Another strategy is to reinvigorate what we are already doing. Many of us already work *chesed*, learning, and *davening* into our daily activities. *Baruch Hashem*, we need to recognize and celebrate all we are already doing and add something small to make these actions even more meaningful. The story of Rav Shach encouraged me to look again at an act I do almost every day – namely, *Birkas Hamazon*.

Briefly, there are four *berachos* that comprise *Birkas Hamazon* (*Berachos* 48b):

- *Hazan es hakol* – The first *beracha*, written by Moshe to thank Hashem for the *man* that sustained *Klal Yisrael* in the *Midbar*.
- *Al ha'aretz v'al hamazon* – The second *beracha*, written by Yehoshua when *Klal Yisrael* entered *Eretz Yisrael*.
- *U'vnei Yerushalayim* – The third *beracha*, written by Dovid Hamelech and Shlomo as they were building *Yerushalayim* and the *Beis Hamikdash*.
- *Hatov v'ha'mativ* – The fourth *beracha*, written by the Sages in *Yavneh* for the miracle performed with the martyrs of the *Beitar* massacre: even after many years, the dead bodies were still intact and could be buried with honor and respect.

Rabbi Motti Neuberger, Associate Rabbi at the White Shul in NY, raised an interesting question in a lecture on *TorahAnytime.com*. We say *Birkas Hamazon* after eating bread, and its first two *berachos* seem to fit easily into the theme of thanking Hashem for food. But how do the *Beis Hamikdash* (*beracha* #3) or the miracle at *Beitar* (*beracha* #4) fit? In addition, we have experienced many miracles over the centuries; why was commemoration of the miracle at *Beitar*, out of all of them, added to *Birkas Hamazon*?

Rabbi Neuberger answered by quoting the *Meshech Chochmah's* explanation (on *Devarim* 8:10) of the structure of *Birkas Hamazon*. *Birkas Hamazon* does not merely thank Hashem for food; it outlines the totality of Jewish history and the development of *Klal Yisrael*.

- The first *beracha*, written by Moshe, reflects thanks for the food in the *Midbar* but also describes the first stage in our development as a nation. Hashem was with us in our infancy, taking us out of *Egypt* and giving us the *Torah*.
- The second *beracha*, written by Yehoshua, highlights the transition from life in the *Midbar* to our next stage: entering the land designated for our people from the times of *Avraham*.
- The third *beracha*, written by Dovid and Shlomo, represents the climax of our national existence: the building of our *Beis Hamikdash*. Our dreams were finally realized with the ability to connect spiritually, in peace, in our homeland.

But then tragedy struck and we lost our *Beis Hamikdash*. We were exiled from our land, and the people lost hope. Was this a signal that our covenant with Hashem was ending? How could we survive without our land and our *Beis Hamikdash*? Would a relationship with Hashem still be possible?

When the Sages saw that the bodies of those killed in *Beitar* many years earlier were still intact, they realized Hashem was sending a message that He would still be with us. The relationship may not be as overt and obvious as when we have the *Beis Hamikdash*, but Hashem still watches out for His nation; the bond remains strong. The ability to bury the *Beitar* victims reinvigorated *Klal Yisrael* with confidence and strength. Hashem would still be with us throughout our bitter *galus* – and with that assurance, we are able to go on.

The final *beracha* of *Birkas Hamazon* is not just commemorating a miracle. It gives us hope that Hashem will always be with us – even in this dark stage of our national existence – and that we can and will withstand the time until we celebrate the final stage, i.e., the time of *Mashiach*.

Taking on something new is certainly a wonderful means of keeping our spiritual spark alive. Additionally, taking a fresh look at acts we already do will strengthen our commitment and help us not only maintain the wonderful feelings of *Sukkos* but even build on them as we move forward, one step at a time, until the ultimate *geulah*, *bimheira biyameinu*.

Walking Lightly on the Face of the Earth

Amy Newman Smith

Something interesting happens at the end of *Parashas Bereishis*, just before we move into *Parashas Noach*, the first Torah reading in the month of Cheshvan. Each of the nine generations after Adam Ha-rishon is listed in the same format, i.e.:

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot **Methuselah**. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. (Gen. 5:21-23)

Then, in the tenth generation, Noach makes his appearance, and the wording changes slightly:

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son. (ibid. 28)

Why use the word "son" here before telling us his name (i.e., Noach)? Rashi observes that son, *ben*, is related to the root *b/n/h*, to build, alluding to the fact that it was from Noach that the world would be built up after the *Mabul*. But before the *Mabul*, we learn something additional about Noach:

And he named him Noach, saying, "This one will provide us relief [*zeh yinachameinu*] from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the Lord placed under a curse." (ibid. 29)

Rashi tells us two things based on this *pasuk*. The first is that prior to Noach, people did not have agricultural tools. Noach gave these tools to people, making their work easier. Second, Rashi tells us that the curse Adam Ha-rishon had received, that thorns and thistles would grow when man planted wheat, ceased in the generation of Noach. The *pasuk* says *zeh yinachameinu*, indicating a level of comfort between man and the natural world that had not been felt since Adam and Chava were expelled from Gan Eden.

We went into Rosh Hashanah with the news of devastating floods in New York, which took the life of Rabbi Shmuel David Weissmandl *z"l*. Who could forget the heartbreaking videos of Torah scrolls being lifted out of muddy flood waters to safety? HaShem promised not to destroy the world again, but given what we are seeing in the natural world day by day, week by week, should we ask if are we on track to destroy it ourselves? The pictures of melting glaciers, which are raising sea levels and causing entire islands to disappear, provide stark evidence of how the face of the planet is changing, in ways most climate scientists say are the results of greenhouse-gas emissions. "Hundred-year storms" seem to happen every year; cities are hit with hurricanes before they've even recovered from the previous one.

What are we to do when we, not HaShem, seem to be causing climate changes? Is there anything to learn from the generation of the *Mabul*? Although we certainly do not have the harmful intent they did, perhaps we can find guidance in their story.

Many midrashim discuss the nature of the sin that led HaShem to wipe out an entire generation and flood the face of the planet. *Sanhedrin* 108a says:

With regard to the verse: "And God said to Noah: The end of all flesh is come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13), Rabbi Yohanan says: Come and see how great is the power of robbery, as the generation of the flood violated every precept, but their sentence to be destroyed was not sealed until they extended their hands and engaged in robbery, as it is stated: "For the earth is filled with robbery... and behold, I will destroy them..." (Gen. 6:13).

Bereishis Rabbah 31:5 explains the nature of their robbery: each person would take slightly less than the amount they could be held liable for in court. In this way, all of a merchant's goods might be stolen but no one could be held accountable.

Similarly, if greenhouse gas emissions are causing an increase in global temperatures, humanity as a whole is responsible. Though we lack the harmful intent that characterized the *dor ha-mabul*, future generations are nevertheless being robbed of opportunities to enjoy the plants and animals that are going extinct and of the security of stable weather patterns.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and to wonder what we as individuals can do, but that is not the Jewish approach. We are called in all situations to try and to do what we can. As we read in *Pirkei Avot*, "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it" (2:21). In March 2020, I started a blog to track my own progress toward walking more lightly on the earth, exploring low-waste living strategies from the perspective of a frum Jew. It's a work in progress, but I have found that making changes in how I approach the world HaShem has gifted me with has deepened my relationship with Him in ways I could not have expected.

As with the generation of the flood, we are in a situation where no authority exists to collect damages; governments are ill-suited to solve a problem that is happening across the globe. And here lies the opportunity for the Jewish people, as a *khal* and as individuals, to make changes that can slow and ameliorate climate warming – to plant trees, both literally and figuratively. We will not see their fruits, but our children and grandchildren will.

All quotations are from Sefaria.

I invite you to visit me at www.lowwastefrum.com (or follow me on Instagram @amynewsmith).

This month's issue of *Clilei HaChodesh* is sponsored
in honor of the first *yahrzeit* of רבקה ריזול בת יצחק "במרחשון ח,
by the Schabes Family

Rabbi Moshe Berger
Scholar in Residence
(216) 533-5233
moshe@mberger.com

Sarah Rudolph
Editor
(216) 291-8918
scrudolph@gmail.com

Ronnie Shulman
Sponsorships
(614) 507-3855
rshulman1@gmail.com

YOUNG ISRAEL OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein, *Rabbi*
Rabbi Aharon Lebovics, *Associate Rabbi (Hebrew Academy)*
Yank Gecovich, *President*

Beachwood Branch
2463 S. Green Road
Beachwood, Ohio 44122



Hebrew Academy Branch
1860 S. Taylor Road
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118