

Shlom Bayyit

Eat and Feel Blessed

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord, your God, for the good land he has given you.” (*Deuteronomy* 8:10).

...and so we Jews have blessings prescribed by Torah that we recite following our meal. These blessings are the **Birkat Hamazon**; in English it's **Grace After Meals**; in Yiddish we say **Bentshn**; the often heard Yinglish translation is “**Benching**.”

What Are We Saying?

The full **Birkat Hamazon** is chanted on special occasions when we eat a meal preceded by the *Hamotzi* (one that includes bread or matzah). We begin with verses from the Book of Psalms that address the destruction of the Temple; during happy times we once again remember this sad period in our history. If three or more adults (*mezuman*) have eaten together a formal invitation to say Grace is said setting a proper mood for the blessings.

Then we chant the 4 blessings as designated in the Talmud:

1. *Birkat Hazan* – a blessing of thanks to God for providing the food.
2. *Birkat Ha'Arets* – a blessing of thanks for all past favors granted to us.
3. *Boneh Yerushalayim* – ascribed to Kings David and Solomon, these blessings are prayers for the future and include one for rebuilding Jerusalem
- Hatov v'hameitiv*- a blessing of thanks for God's goodness that was added when the Roman authorities, around 137 C.E. relented and allowed Jews to bury those who were slain during their defeat at the last Jewish stronghold.

This is followed by a series of short prayers that begin with the word *Harachaman* (the merciful one) and make requests of God. The **Birkat Hamazon** can be found in most *Siddurim* (prayer books). It may be provided in attractive booklet form at traditional weddings and other momentous Jewish occasions. The complete version is often simplified while still maintaining the essentials elements of the blessings.

Every day is not a Holiday

Traditional Jews say the prayers silently after each daily meal. During celebratory meals such as Shabbat, Festivals, Weddings, and a Brit Milah (ritual circumcision), we sing the **Grace After Meals**.

There's A Spiritual Significance

Like the blessings we say before the meal, the **Birkat Hamazon** is meant to raise our fulfillment of a physical need into the spiritual realm. Our family or congregation table becomes the Temple altar. As we pray, we strengthen our connection to God, our history, our people, and Israel.

Now That You Know

Reciting the **Birkat Hamazon** has become a regular ritual at our synagogue. We invite you to come and **Bentshn** with us after the following Festival/Holiday Meals:

- **Erev Sukkot:** Services and Dinner
- **Sukkot:** Services and Luncheon
- **Erev Simchat Torah:** Services and Dinner

- **Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah:**

- The meals are free to TBR members. Reservations are required and blessing booklets are provided. Details are available in flyers, this newsletter, and on our website. The sense of community and spirituality that you and your children will experience at these events and while “**Benching**” may very well be priceless.

