



YomTov, Vol. IV, # 17

The Power of Blessings

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Tu B'Shvat, the New Year for Trees, occurs this year Monday, February 1, 1999. (See I: 65 for background information of this holiday.) One custom associated with the 15th of Shvat is to consume those fruits which grow in the land of Israel. Our Sages decreed that before we partake of any food, fruits included, we must make a blessing. The Ben Ish Chai offers some insight about why we must make blessings before partaking of food.

In the book of Yeshaya (Isaiah 41:14) we find that an unusual expression is used to refer to the nation of Israel. The prophet writes Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, said the Lord, and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Why is the nation of Israel called a "worm?" What qualities does a worm possess that Israel should be figuratively referred to as a worm?

The Ben Ish Chai explains (Parshas Pinchas 1) that the power a worm possesses is entirely in its mouth. What ever powers a worm can exercise, through eating or boring holes, for example, comes through its mouth. Similarly, the mouth of each individual in the nation of Israel is his or her source of power. Our mouths can accomplish great feats: our mouths speak words of Torah, they utter heartfelt prayers, and with our mouths we can elevate eating and drinking to the realm of spiritual. Because our mouths contribute so much benefit to the world, and they are clearly a source of strength, it is only fitting that the nation of Israel be compared to another creature whose mouth is its source of strength - the worm.

Because our mouths are so mighty, and with them we wage wars against the powers of impurity in the word, the Sages decreed that before every time we eat and drink we must recognize G-d. The Evil Inclination recognizes the great strength of the mouth, and therefore expends a tremendous amount of energy in trying to get the mouth to come to its side. Instead of learning Torah, the mouth can engage in idle chatter, and even worse, slander and gossip. Instead of eating permissible foods for the purposes of sustenance, the mouth can eat forbidden food in the pursuit of gluttony. Instead of engaging in prayer and expressions of thanks,

- Articl
- Vi
- Redem Rabbi
- G-dly I Actions Rabbi
- Pushin Rabbi - 5759
- You ar Rabbi
- Burin Rabbi - 5756
- The Inc Rabbi
- Hangin Rabbi
- Look B Rabbi
- Guard Healthy Rabbi 5759
- Rise to Rabbi
- Simply Rabbi - 5758
- Balanc Rabbi - 3797
- Individ Shlomo
- Individ Shlomo
- Change Rabbi
- You Ca the Cou Rabbi

search TORAH.ORG



the mouth can be utter disparaging and heretical comments. Because our mouths are capable of not only doing tremendous good, but tremendous harm as well, our Sages wanted to provide the nation of Israel with a mechanism that would not only prevent us from causing harm, but that would strengthen us as well. This mechanism is the blessing. The blessing before eating gives us strength so that we will be victorious in our battles with the Evil Inclination. Because of the inherent power of the blessings, the Ben Ish Chai writes that we must therefore be extremely careful when reciting blessings. We should say them with concentration on the meaning of the words, with the words properly annunciated, and in a way that is respectful. Then the power of the blessing will be exerted, benefitting the individual and the entire nation of Israel.

The Talmud (Brachos 35) discusses why an individual must make a blessing before partaking of food. It writes "Our Rabbis have taught: It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege." The Talmud continues and relates that "Rabi Chanina bar Papa said: To enjoy this world without a benediction is like robbing the Holy One, blessed be He, and the community of Israel." Why is eating food without reciting a blessing first considered theft? Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, the famed commentator known as Rashi, explains that by not reciting the benediction before eating, you are robbing G-d of a blessing. Furthermore, you are stealing from the entire nation of Israel because the fruits suffer when people fail to make the proper blessings. Therefore, when an individual refrains from making a blessing before eating fruits, the fruits will suffer, and the entire nation will not have the bountiful harvest that should have been forthcoming.

The making of a blessing, the simple expression of thanks to G-d for sending us sustenance, should logically be part of our everyday practices. Why should we not thank the hand that feeds us? When we make a blessing before eating, we acknowledge that G-d is providing for us. We thank G-d for His provision of nourishment. Because we make this acknowledgment, the fruits benefit, and in turn, the nation benefits from the fruits. In addition, when we make a blessing, we are expressing our desire to turn the seemingly mundane action of eating into something holy. We are sanctifying our mouths. We are strengthening them so that they remain a true vessel of holiness, capable of successfully defeating the Evil Inclination in battle. The blessing made before eating fruit, "Blessed are you Hashem, our G-d, King of the World, who created the fruit of the tree," may seem simple. Yet we now know it is extremely powerful.

The New Year for Trees, Tu B'Shvat, is a day on which we pray that we continue to receive G-d's blessing in the form of plentiful fruits. We ask that we be allowed to partake from the fruit of the trees in the year to come. It is also a day upon which we should recognize who provides us with fruit, and sustenance in general. It is a day in which we should illustrate that we use the sustenance provided to us for holy purposes. There is no better way of accomplishing these tasks than by taking out a fruit, and making the blessing upon it before eating.

Mazel Tov to Rabbi and Mrs. Ruvain Chait upon their son Menachem Baruch becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Check out all of the posts on Tu B'Shvat. Head over to <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/> to access the YomTov Page. Then click on the icon for the holiday of your choice.

For questions, comments, and topic requests, please write to Rabbi Yehudah Prero.



Print Version



E-mail to a Friend