



a URJ Biennial Initiative

## A Guide to Jewish Food Blessings: Motzi and Beyond

For many of us, the first blessing we learned was some version of what we often call “the *motzi*.” This simple blessing, praising God for bringing bread from the earth, serves as a blessing over an entire meal. Of course, it takes many hands and hearts to transform grain into bread; our sages teach that this blessing reminds us of the journey from seed to loaf, from promise to fulfillment. When we make a blessing over food, we exercise a uniquely human capacity. All creatures eat, but only humans are able to acknowledge the gift of food that nourishes our bodies. When we raise our voices in blessing, we are celebrating our place in a complex food chain that may involve many, many individuals who had a hand in bringing this food to our table. We are also acknowledging the mystery of life that enables food to grow in soil and in sand, in water, in forests, and in fields. We need not believe in God in any traditional way in order to pronounce a blessing. We need only recognize that none of us, alone, can make food appear before us. Whether we use phrases that are well-worn and familiar, or create new ones, expressing gratitude has the power to improve the texture and taste of even the most simple and humble meal. When we intentionally pause before we put that first morsel in our mouths, we create a space for wonder, for awe, and for celebration.

Reform Jews have historically balanced tradition with innovation, learning from both ancient sages and the insights of each new generation. The blessings below follow the model set in *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah*, which has been widely used in the Reform Movement since it was introduced in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

There are five additional blessings that are offered over specific foods. (We are familiar with some of these blessings from the *Haggadah* itself!) The next time you are enjoying a fresh-picked apple or a slice of cake, consider what you are eating, the amazing diversity of food products we find around us daily, and the Source of all nourishment.

- **Motzi:** *a blessing over bread that serves as a blessing over any meal that includes bread, a traditionally “essential” food*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוֹחַ הָעוֹלָם  
הַמוֹצִיָּאָה לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, hamotzi lechem min haaretz.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, hamotziah lechem min haaretz.*

Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth.

- **M'zonot:** *a blessing over non-bread products made from grains including wheat, oats, rye, and barley*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי מְזוֹנוֹת.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרְאֵת מִיְּנֵי מְזוֹנוֹת.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei minei m'zonot.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, boreit minei m'zonot.*

Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, Creator of many kinds of food.

- **Ha'Gafen:** *a blessing over wine or grape juice, giving thanks for the fruit of the vine*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, boreit p'ri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

- **Ha'etz:** *a blessing over fruit*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei p'ri ha-eitz.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, boreit p'ri ha-eitz.*

**Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, Creator of the fruit of the tree.**

- **Ha'adamah:** *a blessing over produce that grows in the ground, such as potatoes*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei p'ri ha-adamah.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, boreit p'ri ha-adamah.*

Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, Creator of the fruit of the earth.

- **Shehakol:** *a blessing over all other foods*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרָה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, shehakol nihyeh bidvaro.*

or

*B'rucha at Yah, Eloheinu Ruach haolam, shehakol nihyeh bidvarah.*

Blessed are You, our God, Ruler/Soul of the world, through whose word everything comes into being.

## **Birkat HaMazon – the Grace After Meals**

Many Reform Jews pause before eating to give thanks, but few of us take time after eating to mark our appreciation for the nourishment of food, company, and more. The blessing before meals is short—we are hungry and have a limited attention span. But after we've eaten, we repeat the *Birkat Hamazon*, a longer, more complex blessing that concludes each meal, reminding us that “when you have eaten and are satisfied, bless.”<sup>iii</sup> The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas taught, “saying grace is an act of the greatest importance.... We do not recognize the miracle this represents because we live in a world which, for the moment, has plenty of everything, and because our memory is short. Yet those who live in less fortunate countries understand that to be able to satisfy one's hunger is the marvel of marvels...”<sup>iii</sup> After you “brush up” on the basic food blessings before eating, consider times to incorporate a *Birkat HaMazon* into your everyday, communal, and festive meals.

We present two versions of *Birkat HaMazon* here:

The traditional *Birkat Hamazon* is a combination of four blessings: praising God for sustaining us with food, prayers for the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, and thanks for God's goodness. Often, when we come together for meals, we sing the first portion aloud. We often add additional selections on holidays and other special occasions. Here is what is often called "the short version":

## BIRKAT HA-MAZON

## ברכת המזון

*(Leader)*

Cha-vei-rai n'-va-reich

חברי נגדך

*(Community followed by the Leader)*

Y'-hi sheim A-do-nai m'-vo-rach

יהי שם יי מברךך

Mei-a-tah v'-ad o-lam

מעתה ועד עולם

*(Leader)*

Bir-shut cha-vei-rai n'-va-reich E-lo-hei-nu

ברשות חברי נגדך אלהינו

She-a-chal-nu mi-she-lo

שאכלנו משלו

*(Community followed by the Leader)*

Ba-ruch E-lo-hei-nu she-a-chal-nu mi-she-lo

ברוך אלהינו שאכלנו משלו

Uv-tu-vo cha-yi-nu

ובטובו חיינו

*(Community)*

Ba-ruch hu u-va-ruch sh'-mo

ברוך הוא וברוך שמו

*Friends, let us praise God. Let the name of God be praised from now to eternity. Let us praise our God of whose bounty we have partaken. Let us praise our God of whose bounty we have partaken and by whose goodness we live. May God and God's name be praised*

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai

ברוך אתה יי

E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam

אלהינו מלך העולם

Ha-zan et ha-o-lam ku-lo b'-tu-vo

הזן את העולם בלו בטובו

B'-chein b'-che-sed uv-ra-cha-mim

בחן בחסד וברחמים

Hu no-tein le-chem l'-chol ba-sar

הוא נותן לחם לכל בשר

Ki l'-o-lam chas-do

כי לעולם חסדו

Uv-tu-vo ha-ga-dol ta-mid lo cha-sar la-nu

ובטובו הגדול תמיד לא חסר לנו

V'-al yech-sar la-nu ma-zon l'-o-lam va-ed

ואל יחסר לנו מזון לעולם ועד

Ba-a-vur sh-mo ha-ga-dol

בעבור שמו הגדול

Ki hu Eil zan um-far-neis la-kol

כי הוא אל זן ומפרנס לכל

U-mei-tiv la-kol u-mei-chin ma-zon

ומטיב לכל ומכין מזון

L'-chol b'-ri-o-tav a-sheer ba-ra

לכל בריותיו אשר ברא

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai ha-zan et ha-kol

ברוך אתה יי הזן את הכל

*Blessed are you Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who nourishes the entire world, with God's goodness, with grace with Kindness, and with mercy. God gives nourishment to all flesh, for God's kindness is eternal. Through God's kindness, mercy and compassion all existence is eternally sustained. God is forever faithful. God's surpassing goodness fills all time and space. Sustenance there is for all. None need ever lack, no being want for food. We praise You, O God, the One sustaining all.*

Ka-ka-tuv: v'-a-chal-ta  
 V'-sa-va-ta u-vei-rach-ta  
 Et A-do-nai E-lo-he-cha  
 Al ha-a-retz ha-to-va a-sher na-tan lach  
 Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai  
 Al ha-a-retz v'-al ha-ma-zon.

כְּתוּב וְאַכְלֶתָּ  
 וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ  
 אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ  
 עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל הַמְּזוֹן

*As it is written in the Torah: "You shall eat, be satisfied and bless Adonai your God for the good land given you."  
 We praise You, O God, for the earth and for sustenance.*

U-v'-nei Y'-ru-sha-la-yim ir ha-ko-desh  
 Bim-hei-rah v'-ya-mei-nu  
 Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai  
 Bo-neh v'-ra-cha-mav  
 Y'-ru-sha-la-yim, a-mein

וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ  
 בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ  
 בּוֹנֵה בְּרַחֲמָיו  
 יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אָמֵן

*And build Jerusalem, O God, speedily in our day. We praise You, O God, whose compassion builds Jerusalem.*

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav  
 Hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu  
 V'-al kol Yis-ra-eil v'-im-ru a-mein.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרוֹמָיו  
 הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ  
 וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

*The one who makes peace in the heavens will make peace for us and all Israel, and we say, Amen.*

A-do-nai oz l'-a-mo yi-tein  
 A-do-nai y'-va-reich et a-mo va-sha-lom

יְיָ עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן  
 יְיָ יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם

*May God give strength to our people. May God bless all peoples with peace.*

An alternative blessing, based on a Talmudic prayer, can be recited:

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא מַלְכָּא דִּי עֲלָמָא מְרִיָּה דְהַאי פְּתָא

*B'rich rachamana malka di almah marai de hai pita.*

Rabbi Shefa Gold has written this English interpretation: "You are the Source of life for all that is and your blessing flows through me."<sup>iv</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive explanation of this blessing formula, see Sue Levi Elwell, ed., *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah* (New York: CCAR Press, 2002), xii-xiii.

<sup>ii</sup> *Birkat HaMazon*

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from *Nine Talmudic Readings*, translated and with an introduction by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 133. Quoted in *The Open Door*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Based on Talmud Berachot 40b.

<http://www.ritualwell.org/holidays/passover/partsoftheseder/graceaftermeals/primaryobject.2006-03-08.3483776361>