

Parasha Meditation Beshalach

Shemot 10:1-13:16

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Eating in Holiness – A Preparation for Receiving Torah

Introduction:

Eating Manna in order to Merit Torah

In this week's Parasha we learn about the manna that the Jewish people received directly from Hashem during their wandering in the wilderness.¹ The Talmud states that eating manna was a spiritual preparation for receiving the Torah less than two years afterwards. "The Torah was only given to the generation who ate Manna..."² What is the connection between eating manna and meriting Torah? Abarbanel explains that by eating manna, the children of Israel were constantly dependent upon Hashem's mercy. By becoming accustomed to continuously thanking Him for His kindness, their faith would be strengthened.³ When we make *berachot* (blessings) over food with deep intention to really thank Hashem – the source of our sustenance – we likewise open ourselves to be a suitable vessel for all of Hashem's abundance, including the Torah from Heaven.

Manna – A Physical Form for Supernal Light

According to Rav Tzaddok of Lublin, the eating of Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden was on a complete different dimension. The fruits in the Garden provided spiritual nourishment, the embodiment of the holy letters of the Torah.⁴ Therefore, prior to receiving the Torah – the Tree of Life – the ultimate rectification for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the Jewish people needed first to return to eating spiritual food. The manna had no particular physical form. This is why it would give you whatever taste you desired. Manna, like the fruits of Eden is a physical form for supernal light. It includes no mixture of evil, since no evil descends from Heaven. It contained no waste; every spark of it was absorbed completely by the body.⁵

The Manna – A Gauge for a Person's Spiritual Level

Based on a person's spiritual level, the manna would arrive daily either far away in the desert or directly to the doorstep. Thus, the generation who ate manna gained awareness of their personal spiritual level, and learned to elevate their physical being to become a vessel for spiritual sustenance. In this way the manna was a perfect preparation for developing the vessel to receive Torah – our ultimate spiritual sustenance, elevating us once again to the level of ingesting the holy letters of the Torah.

¹ *Shemot*, Chapter 16.

² *Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach*, Chapter 20.

³ Abarbanel on *Shemot* 16, p. 134.

⁴ *Pri Tzaddik*, for Rosh Hashana, Ot 5.

⁵ Rav Chaim of Vollozin, *Ruach Chayim, Avot* 3.



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The Month of Shevat – The Time for Rectifying Eating

It is not coincidence that we read the Torah portion about the manna during the month of Shevat, and in the week of TubShevat. According to *Sefer Yetzira*, the month of Shevat is the time for rectifying eating – elevating the sparks.⁶ “For a person does not live by bread alone, but by everything that emanates from Hashem’s mouth.”⁷ While the body receives nutrients from the food, the soul ingests holy sparks “that emanates from Hashem’s mouth.” In order to elevate these sparks, we need to practice mindful eating in addition to working on reciting our blessings with deep intention. The TubShevat Seder, where we infuse eating fruits with reading Torah verses pertaining to them, is a special opportunity to rectify eating. With Hashem’s help, every year we celebrate TubShevat at Midreshet B’erot Bat Ayin through our annual meditative Tub’Shevat seders where we practice mindful eating and elevating the fruits by connecting them with recital of appropriate Torah verses, singing and meditating. For those of you who are unable to celebrate Tub’Shevat with us, please try out the special eating meditation I have written for you below.

Meditation:

Here is an eating meditation in honor of TubShevat. This week chose at least one meal where you will focus completely on eating as a mitzvah in the most conscious mindful way. Decide that during this meal you will not allow anything to distract you from working on eating in holiness.

1. You will not be doing anything else while eating, such as checking your email, watching television, even “kosher tube,” reading or talking. Turn off your phone or make a conscious decision not to pick it up until after you have completed your meal, and recited the appropriate after-blessings.
2. You may choose to eat this special meal alone or in the company of others who are ready to share your silent eating meditation.
3. Prepare a wholesome natural meal that you enjoy. Make your meal colorful and appealing to your eyes, and serve it in beautiful dishes.
4. Set the table perhaps with candles and beautiful flowers.
5. Prepare yourself to partake of your meal, sit comfortable on your chair with your back straight. Take a few complete breaths, which will allow the oxygen to enter into all your limbs and facilitate digestion.

6. Place your plate of food in front of you. And recite the following Torah verse three times:

צַדִּיק אָכַל לְשִׂבְעַת נַפְשׁוֹ וּבָטֵן רְשָׁעִים תִּהְיֶה חָסֵר

“The righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, but the stomach of the wicked is always lacking”⁸

⁶ *Sefer Yetzira*, Chapter 5.

⁷ *Devarim* 8:3.

⁸ *Mishlei* 13:25.

7. Take a good look at the food, look at its colors and textures. Look at how it shines. Think about how all this food is a loving gift from Hashem. What do you appreciate about the food? What can you thank Hashem for in bringing you this food? Why is this particular food important to you?

8. Now is the time to recite your *berachot* (blessings) before eating your food. Imagine the King of the Universe giving you the fruit of the earth – handing it to you directly as a present so that you may receive such blessings. Through this food you have the opportunity to attach yourself to the Land of Israel and to Hashem.

9. Recite all your *berachot* slowly and with deep intention. Bless Hashem for being the Creator of your sustaining food, of the fruit of the tree, of the fruit of the earth, and for everything that came into being by His word.

10. Take a bite of the appropriate food after each blessing and chew it really well, until it becomes liquid. Remember digestion starts in the mouth. Try to chew each bite thirty-two times corresponding to the thirty-two teeth and the thirty-two pathways of wisdom.⁹

11. As you chew remember to breathe and visualize how your table is a *מִזְבֵּחַ/mizbeach* – an altar, and how your eating in holiness will be an atonement for any wrongdoing this week.

12. Breathe through your nose, and continue to chew with intention, extending the life of the food in your mouth, extracting its sweetness and holy sparks. It takes a lot of self-discipline, and you can develop patience by eating slowly and chewing every bite so many times. For me, it's a work in progress.

13. Enjoy the pleasure of the tastes and offer thankful thoughts to Hashem with every chew.

14. Chose a Torah verse to recite and meditate on, in your mind's eye as you chew. Meditate peacefully with your rhythmic chew, to unite your eating with Hashem – the source of all your goodness.

15. When you are done eating recite your after-blessings slowly and mindfully, and return to your everyday life with a heightened awareness and mindfulness in your daily eating.

⁹ *Sefer Yetzira* 1:1, this part of the eating meditation is based on Arizal, *Sefer Likutim, Parashat Ekev*, Chapter 8.

Notes:

Sefat Emet explains that the reason why there is no Torah as the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael*, is that the food in the Land of Israel is prepared through the Mitzvot of the land. We merit Torah according to our level of eating in holiness. Therefore, on the Holy Shabbat, when eating the Shabbat meals, we merit more Torah.¹⁰ There are only two blessings directly from the Torah: The blessing before learning Torah and Grace after Meals.¹¹ Our Rabbis established that we also recite blessings *before* eating. According to the Arizal, when we eat in holiness, we reveal new aspect of Torah. We absorb a spark of Torah consciousness with every bite of food. Therefore, just as the Torah requires us to recite blessings before learning Torah, so do we recite blessings before eating. The blessing that we recite *before* eating is actually a blessing for the Torah we are going to absorb from this act of eating.¹²

¹⁰ *Sefat Emet, Parashat Beshalach, Year 5656.*

¹¹ *Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 21a.*

¹² Based on Sarah Yehudit's *News and Muse, from a Still Small Voice, Rosh Chodesh, Shevat, 5769.*



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About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work.

For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

Come Learn With Us!

Beginner and advanced levels are offered for women of all ages and religious backgrounds. Whether your interest in Judaism has recently been ignited, or you are seeking a wider perspective, Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin offers the opportunity to improve your learning skills while strengthening your commitment to Judaism within the parameters of Halachah – all while engaging your inner creative spirituality, working the Land, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Support Our School!

You have the unique opportunity to help us continue to build and amplify the light of Torah on the Land of Israel. With your help we can increase our ability to provide women an extraordinary Torah environment where they can build a solid Jewish foundation which will have an impact for generations to come.

