

CHAPTER 9: INCIDENTAL OBSERVANCES AND BLESSINGS □

PARAGRAPH 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

One of the most mundane -- though utterly vital -- things we do day after day is eat and drink. And outside of the concerns for the food's kosherness, whether today is a fast day or not and the like, very little Torah-based thought goes into our meals. But that's a problem, simply because everything we do **ought** to be exalted on one level or another that way, since everything matters on a high, cosmic level (as we'd indicated). So G-d in His wisdom exhorted us to raise the level of our meals and snacks.

That's why we were enjoined by the Torah to recite Birkat Hamazon ("The Grace after Meals") as well as other blessings before and after eating. For by doing that we sanctify what we'd just eaten, we funnel it into the great rush of material things serving to help perfect the world, and we thus use our most basic urges in the service of G-d. (Understand of course that we couldn't ever hope to sanctify unholy things no matter how hard we try; it would be absurd to think we could recite a blessing over stolen food, for example, eat it, and walk away a better Jew.)

We do a lot of other routine things every day, of course. And we're to sanctify them too along the same lines. Understand though that some things are more vital and potent than others in that process, depending on their makeup and on the place, time, and spirit in which they're used. But be that as it may, everything kosher, ethical, and just that we come in contact with that isn't already a part of the mitzvah-system can and ought to be used in G-d's service. It wouldn't do to use those sort of things on a distinctly mundane level or for merely superfluous purposes. Since that would only defy G-d's plans and defeat our own higher purposes.

We're thus also asked to recite a blessing before smelling aromatic things, when we see natural wonders, when we catch sight of the season's first blossoms, and more. For all goodness comes from G-d, everything good helps humankind when used in that spirit, and otherwise non-descript things become good and ultimately beneficial along the way.

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