

# GRATEFUL BREAD

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

It is rare to read two Torah portions together, each with nearly the exact verse. This week we read two portions: B'har, which commands the laws of shmita in which the Jewish nation lets its land lie fallow, and B'chukosai, which entails both blessing and curses bestowed upon the Jewish nation in response to its behavior.

But in each portion there is a similar blessing. The Torah tells us, both B'har and in B'chukosai, that if we deserve blessing then "you shall eat to satisfaction and live securely in your land." (Leviticus 25:19 & Leviticus 26:5) Each time the Torah talks about eating to satisfaction, an agricultural issue, it suffixes a security issue. Now there are verses that deal with the curse of war and the blessing of peace. But why mention tranquility with eating?

Yankel was a vagabond. Every Friday he would spend the last of his few zloty at the bathhouse and barber and, well groomed, he would present himself in the synagogue as a respected businessperson from out-of-town. Then he would usually get a sumptuous Shabbos meal at the home of the wealthiest Jew in town. One Friday afternoon he was in the city of Lodz and inquired about the wealthiest Jew. "Velvel, the banker," he was told "is definitely the wealthiest Jew. But he is also the stingiest. You never get a chance to eat the delicious dishes that he serves you!"

"How's that?" asked Yankel.

"Well, as soon as you take your first bite he engages you in conversation. You begin to speak, and as soon as your eyes leave your plate, a waiter comes and snatches your food away!"

With a game plan in mind Yankel posed as a businessman from Warsaw, and got invited to Reb Velvel's magnificent home. The table was set with exquisite china, and the delicious smells wafting from the kitchen made Yankel's hungry mouth water.

After kiddush and challah, the first course was served, a succulent piece of white fish stuffed with gefilte fish. As Yankel speared it with his fork a voice boomed from the head of the table.

"So, Yankel, tell me, how is my cousin Shloime feeling? You must know Shloime, the tailor of Podolska Street in Warsaw?"

Yankel kept his fork embedded in the fish and held tight as he nodded somberly. "He's dead."

"What?" shrieked Reb Velvel, "Shloime is dead? How can that be?" He ran to the kitchen and shouted for his wife, while Yankel managed to finish his fish in comfort. He even got in a few nibbles off an

adjoining plate. After the shock wore off, they served the soup.

After the first sip, the banker was quick to his old ways. "You don't happen to know my father's brother Reb Dovid the bookbinder, do you?"

With the waiter poised to pounce, Yankel nodded again. "He died too!"

"What?" cried the stunned host. "How can that be? I just got a letter from him last week!"

He ran next door to tell his brother the terrible news -- while Yankel calmly finished his soup.

The main course, with chicken, kugel and tzimmes also saw the death of more members of the Warsaw community, each tiding throwing the banker into a tizzy. Meanwhile Yankel ate his portion and all the portions of those who were sickened by the terrible news that they had just heard.

By the time dessert came, the banker got hold of the scheme.

"What's going on?" he shouted. "Are you trying to tell me that the entire Warsaw has dropped dead?"

"No," answered Yankel, "what I am trying to tell you is that when I eat, the whole world drops dead!"

The blessing of plenty is worthless without serenity. Peace in your land is not only a blessing for military men. It is a blessing that enhances every aspect of life, from breaking ground to breaking bread. What good are storehouses of plenty or a wonderful economy without the peace and harmony in which to enjoy them?

Calm and composure are the greatest blessing. For without them, the bread of plenty can still be bread of affliction. The Torah does not give half-baked blessings. It tells us that we will eat our bread to satisfaction because it guarantees us peace in our land. For we must not only pray for sustenance, but also health, well being, and serenity with which to enjoy it.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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The author is the Dean of the [Yeshiva of South Shore](#).

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