

# NOBODY'S NEUTRAL!

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And you will eat and be satisfied and you will bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He gave you. (Devarim 8:10)*

*...and you will eat and be satisfied. Watch yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn and serve other gods and prostrate yourselves to them. Then the wrath of G-d will blaze against you...(Devarim 11:15-17)*

A person only rebels when satisfied. (Rashi)

Two times in this week's portion we are treated to the phrase, "and you will eat and be satisfied". One time we are given the commandment to "bentch" - make the blessings we do after eating. In the other case we are given a stern warning about not turning to idolatrous behavior. Is there so much danger in a few slices of bread that it requires that much policing? The answer must be, "Yes!" Let's appreciate, "Why?"

For a few years I met once a week with a certain businessperson at his office in Manhattan early in the morning. It was my first appointment of the day. I used to come in with my muffin and hot coffee fresh from the bagel-shop that was conveniently located next to the place where the commuter bus pulled in. On my way into the office I said, "HI!" and "BYE!" to the receptionist once a week for years.

One day I didn't have time during the session to eat the muffin or drink the coffee till I was about to leave. So I parked my self inconspicuously in the reception area and ate the muffin and drank quickly the now cold coffee. Upon completion of the foodstuff I began a full paragraph of reciting to fulfill the obligation to bless after one is satisfied.

While in the middle of quietly chanting the prescribed blessing, the secretary started to ask me, "Don't I see you selling diamonds on 47th Street? Isn't that you I see selling diamonds on 47th Street?" I wasn't in a position to answer her for an additional few moments. Afterwards, I apologized for not answering her. I did not mean to be evasive or rude in any way. I explained to her that I was in the midst of saying an after blessing for the food I had just eaten. She looked at me with great wonderment and said with an almost ministerial tone, "After-blessing!? We make a blessing-grace-before we eat!" I nodded in acknowledgement and informed her, "I also made a blessing before I ate. We do that too. However, who remembers to make a blessing, and express thanks after they've already eaten?" Her jaw dropped in amazement and all she could say was, "Word man! That's wisdom!"

The blessings we make before we eat are Rabbinical. They give shape and format to the natural feelings of gratitude we all experience when a delicious slice of whatever finds its way onto our plate. After having eaten to a state of fullness, though, the equation changes. The Torah didn't come to tell me to breath or walk or to advise on any other activity or attitude that is commonly found in a healthy human heart.

To turn to the past and to take account of what has already been consumed is an act of great moral strength. To pay a debt out of principle not just on impulse and to engender that habit of attitude is of enormous benefit to the human sprit if practiced over the course of a lifetime.

The Chassam Sofer, one of our greatest sages, when informed that someone in the community was conducting a slander campaign against him sat down and immediately drifted into deep thought. His students asked him what he was thinking so deeply about at this moment of crisis. He is reported to have responded, "I'm trying to remember what favor I did for this person, that now he hates me so much!"

I think the mechanics of his psychological insight are abundantly clear. Nobody enjoys being indebted. The choices are only three: 1) Deep Denial 2) Rage and Rejection 3) Humility and Eternal Gratitude. Nobody's Neutral!

Have a good Shabbos

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