Jewish Tribune – Eikev

**The Blessing of Benching**

The Mashgiach was walking down Meah Shearim when he passed a quiet Beis Hamedrash that would no doubt fill up after the break for lunch. He noticed an old Yerushalmi sitting at the back who had just finished his modest lunch and was now benching. But this was no ordinary benching. The Mashgiach had seldom seen such concentration and fervour.

It had clearly made an impression on the Mashgiach, because when he happened to be walking there a few days later at the same time, he made a point to look out for the Yerushalmi and indeed, saw the same sight again. It again made a powerful impression and the Mashgiach sensed there was more going on here.

He waited for the Yerushalmi to finish and then engaged him in conversation. He told him how striking and inspiring it was to witness his benching and asked if there was any background to this. The Yerushalmi was initially reticent but eventually told his remarkable story.

The Yerushalmi was actually born in Europe and grew up in a small town, not far from Lublin. One day, when he was boy of 6 or 7 years old, his Rebbe announced that the great Rav Meir Shapiro would be coming to cheder the next day to address the boys. Everyone should dress in their Shabbos clothes to mark this momentous occasion. There was electricity in the air. The godol hador, Rav Meir Shapiro would be coming to their cheder!

The bid day arrived, and Rav Meir Shapiro arrived. The Yerushalmi was now transported back to another time. He nostalgically remembered the regal image of Rav Meir Shapiro addressing the whole cheder. He even remembered what he had said all those years ago.

The Lubliner Rov asked the boys a question. “Which letter is missing from Benching?”

Rav Meir Shapiro answered that the final פ (ף) was missing. Quoting the Be’er Heitev in Shulchan Aruch (195,2), he added that whoever benches Birkas Hamazon with proper concentration will not only be assured of having plentiful and dignified parnosso but will be spared from אף and קצף – anger and destruction where the letter ף appears.

This made an impression on the little boy who immediately undertook to do just that. To bench with kavono. And he kept his word from that day on.

Fast forward ten years. The little boy was now a teenager who had just transported on a cattle cart to Auschwitz. Amidst the noise and confusion, he suddenly found himself on a line awaiting the fate of his selection.

He remembered Rav Meir Shapiro and the assurance of the Be’er Heitev and offered a silent prayer to the Ribbono shel Oilam. “I have done my part and benched beautifully for all these years. I now want to “cash in” the reward. Please do Your part and let me survive.

He was sent to the right and quickly found himself in another line. A kind-hearted prisoner told him to tell the SS officer that he was a cook; and he spent his time in Auschwitz in the kitchens, avoiding a fate far worse. After liberation he made his way to Eretz Yisroel where he built a beautiful family in the Holy Land.

The mitzva of Birkas Hamazon appears in our Sedra and is listed by the Chinuch as mitzva number 430. Because of its’ familiarity, we sometimes forget that it is no less important than hearing the shofar, shaking lulav or eating matza on Pesach.

Aside from it being a Mitzva min HaTorah, said with proper concentration (the Be’er Heitev notes the importance of using a bencher and not reciting it off by heart), it also offers the assurance of the Be’er Heitev - of having plentiful and dignified parnosso and being spared from אף and קצף – anger and destruction where the letter ף appears.

Beautiful blessings indeed.

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