

A Torah Minute com™

By the Hakham

Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe, 'a"h

A PROJECT OF MIDRASH BEN ISH HAI (MIDRASH.ORG)

5781 פרשת כי תצא

5781/2021 Parashath Ki Thesei

Birkath Hammazon with one's eyes open or shut

Making Birkath Hammazon (Grace after meals), after eating the required quantity of bread, is a positive commandment from the Torah for men and, some say, for women also. There is an interesting difference of opinion concerning how it should be said.

The Mishnah Berurah says that one must read from the text and not say it by heart. This is the prevalent custom amongst Ashkenazim. Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a"h, says in Ben Ish Hai that one must close one's eyes when saying Birkath Hammazon. This is based on what the Rashash (H"R Shar'abi) wrote in his Siddur. As such, this is the appropriate custom for Sefardim.

This assumes, of course, that one can read it correctly by heart. It is obvious, that one who does not know the Birkath Hammazon fluently by heart, must read it from the text. Additionally, if he feels that his Kawwanah (intent) would be hampered, or he would get distracted if he read it by heart, he should also read it from the written text.

(See Sh. 'A. 185:1. Mishna Berura, ibid, 1. Ben Ish Hai, 1st year, Parashath Huqqath, Oth 2)



מדרש בן איש חי
Midrash BEN ISH HAI

Ki Thesei: Torah of the Ben Ish Hai on His Hillula

The 13th of Elul, is the Hillula of Morenu Rabbenu Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a"h, the Ben Ish Hai, and today's Torah is taken from his works.

"גְּדִלִים תַּעֲשֶׂה-לָךְ עַל-אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת בְּסוֹתֶךָ" Twisted threads (Gedilim), shall you make for yourself, on the four corners of your covering" (Debarim 22:12). Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a"h, writes that arrogance is in three parts of the body: the head, the eyes and the heart. The acronym for these three words in Hebrew, Rosh, 'Einayim, Leb (ראש, עינים, לב), is Ra'al (רעל), which means poison.

The way to avoid arrogance in these three parts of the body is to see them as being very lowly (Dallim). The word for twisted threads in Hebrew is Gedilim and when the Torah says that you shall make for yourself Gedilim, we can read it as "3 Dallim" (ג' דלים). This tells us that these three parts of the body must be made lowly in your thoughts and that is how you should visualize them.

This humility must be on your "four corners" (אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת), which refers to the four corners of your world. In other words it must be in all aspects of your life. Doing so provides a "cover" for you (בְּסוֹתֶךָ), to protect you against the spiritual accusers (Meqatregchim). The reason it does so is because giving up arrogance for humility brings forgiveness (Mehila).

(See 'Od Yosef Hai, Parashath Ki Thesei)

For the 'Ilui Neshamah of
Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe, 'a"h.
יעקב אליהו עבדאללה פרג' חיים בן רחל, ע"ה

Why the Emphasis on Repentance in Elul?

Rosh Hodesh Elul is always two days (the 30th of Ab and the 1st of Elul). Apart from being the last month before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, on which days we plead for a good year and for forgiveness, the month of Elul is a time of Teshubah (repentance) for an additional reason.

On the 17 of Tammuz, Moshe Rabbenu, 'a"h, descended from Mount Sinai with the first Luthoth (Tablets of Stone) and broke them. Two days later, on the 19th of Tammuz he ascended again to ask for G-d's pardon. On the 40th day, which was the 29th of Ab he came down again. G-d told him that He had forgiven the Jewish people as per Moshe Rabbenu, 'a"h's request (סְלַחֲתִי כְדַבְרֶיךָ), and told him to bring 2 new tablets of stone from Earth.

On the first day of Rosh Hodesh Elul (30 Ab), Moshe Rabbenu once again ascended the mountain and finally returned 40 days later, on Yom Kippur, with full pardon (כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה). For this reason, we must start our sincere process of repentance from the beginning of Elul, throughout this auspicious period till Yom Kippur.

Speaking between the silent 'Amidah and the repetition

The Hazan must be very particular not to speak at all between the silent 'Amidah and the Hazarah (repetition). Of course, it is not only the Hazan but all members of the congregation who must be very careful not to speak between the silent 'Amidah and the repetition.

Unfortunately, there are those who feel that the wait before the Hazan starts the repetition is a perfect time to enter into discussions with the person standing next to them. The Gurei HaAri wrote that it is a very serious transgression, even for an individual, to speak at that time.

How much more so must the one who is leading the congregation be stringent not to speak between the silent 'Amidah and the repetition.

(See Kaf Hachayim, 53, Oth 16)



Women's Corner - by Rabbanith Ruth Menashe 'a"h

Time for Introspection, Part 1

We are a few days into the month of Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness. Rosh Hodesh Elul marks 40 days before the Day of Atonement - Yom HaKippurim. It is incumbent upon each of us, my dear friends, to take a few minutes of our hectic schedule to prepare ourselves for this period of time when the focus on the act of repentance is most pronounced and emphasized.

Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a"h, tells of a couple who was engaged in the following conversation. The husband asked his wife for her age, to which she replied "twenty-five." "Not possible," the husband claimed, "we've been married for twenty years." His wife explained by saying that only the years in which she followed the path of the Torah can be counted as her meaningful years. The rest of her life was wasted and therefore could not be added to her age.

The Ben Ish Hai comments on the above advising us to introspect and examine our life on this earth. The only element which determines the quality of our life is serving our Creator, which is done by following the path which He has paved for us.

(To be continued)