

# Food for Thought

Hazon's Curriculum on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life



Nigel Savage  
Anna Stevenson

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Contemporary Life

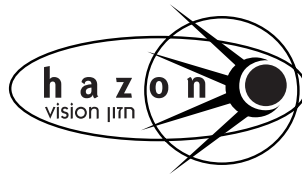
Hazon means “vision.”

Hazon is a non-profit founded in 2000. We’re based in New York, rooted in the Jewish community, and focused on the interaction between Jewish tradition and the wider world around us.

Hazon works to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community, as a step towards a healthier and more sustainable world for all.

Our fast-growing food work – CSAs, a blog, an annual conference, a family-education project, and now this curriculum itself – all create opportunities to reflect on what and how we eat. Learning leads to doing. If these texts and questions help you to learn more deeply and act more ethically, then food for thought will indeed lead to nourishment in the widest sense – for our families, our community, and the physical world upon which all life depends.

*“The Torah is a commentary on the world,  
and the world is a commentary on the Torah”*



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Nigel Savage  
Anna Stevenson

Hazon

New York, NY

We are incredibly delighted to share this first draft with you.

There are some amazing texts here, and we hope you'll find them interesting, thought-provoking, and perhaps even life-changing. And at the same time, this really is a first draft. We plan to complete the revised edition that will be published by Torah Aura in 2008. With that in mind, we hope that you'll not only read it and enjoy it, but that you'll read it with a sharp eye, and a sharp pencil! If we've made a mistake, or left something out, please let us know. Also, if you'd like to get involved with further developing this material, or if you'd like to teach it in your school or community, we'd love to hear from you. Please send an email to both of us.

We apologize to copyright holders who we were unable to contact despite many efforts and look forward to their making contact with us. We have been advised that short selections from longer works are permitted by the fair use clause. Complete citations for passages in this book are listed in the Notes.

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Food for Thought: Hazon's Curriculum on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life

by Nigel Savage & Anna Stevenson

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In loving memory of Rebecca Rosenstein and Margaret  
Stevenson, strong women, cooks, and teachers both;  
and to my family and friends who have taught me to cook, and  
to think; and for all the people who are working to make the  
world and their lives a better place: love and thanks.

- AMS

To my mother, my role model for cooking and hosting  
warmly and effortlessly;  
and to my father, an astonishing example of eating healthily,  
kosherly, and with remarkable self-restraint. Please G!d by me!  
and in loving memory of my Grandma  
and her chopped & fried fish.

- NSS

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*"The miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread. Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence in this warm world within the cold and empty stellar distances will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine—which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes."*

– Wendell Berry

## Chapter 2

# Gratitude, Mindfulness & Blessing our Food



How has Jewish tradition understood gratitude? Why is it important to develop a sense of gratitude and how might we do so today?

In this section, we explore how habits can obscure our awareness of daily miracles, and how blessings can reawaken our sense of mindfulness, and we investigate traditional and non-traditional tools that inculcate gratefulness and open our eyes to the world.



*"A teacher from Berkeley told me about a time when her students washed and trimmed and cut up ingredients and made a big salad. 'Now wait,' she said, 'before we start eating, let's stop and think about the people who tilled the ground, planted the seeds, and harvested the vegetables.'*

*The kids stood up at their desks and gave the salad a standing ovation."*

– Frances Moore Lappé

## 2.1 Stealing from God

The rabbis understood the world's produce to be a sacred, divine gift. As such it was "kadosh," meaning both "sanctified" and "separate"—and, in consequence, forbidden from our enjoyment unless we made a blessing, acknowledging the divine creation and, in a sense, de-sacralizing the food and therefore enabling us to eat it. The texts in this section explore this rather fascinating idea.

### Everything belongs to God

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.

לְיְהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלִאֲתָהּ

– Psalm 24:1

### Without benediction, sacrilege

*The word "me'ilah" literally means food that has already been offered to God on the altar (and which is prohibited from human use).*

*What do you think of this idea?*

Our Rabbis have taught: It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a benediction, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege. What is his remedy? He should consult a wise man. What will the wise man do for him? He has already committed the offence! — Said Raba: What it means is that he should consult a wise man beforehand, so that he should teach him blessings and he should not commit sacrilege.

– Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Berakhot 35a

תנו רבנן: אסור לי לאדם שיהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה, וכל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה – מעל. מאי תקנתיה – לך אצל חכם. – לך אצל חכם – מאי עביד ליה? הא עביד ליה איסורא! – אלא אמר רבא: לך אצל חכם מעיקרא וילמדו ברכה, כדי שלא יבא לידי מעילה.

### Putting good energy back into the universe

*What does this passage suggest about the relationship between people and God?*

What does it mean, "Whoever enjoys produce in this world without pronouncing a blessing is called a robber"?

*Another way to think about stealing from God is to consider the effect of our actions on future generations - see p. 70*

...By means of the blessing one draws down shefa [the flow of Divine abundance]. The angel who is assigned to that fruit [which one is eating] is filled by the shefa so that a second fruit can replace the first. One who enjoys the first without blessing it...eliminates the spiritual element it contained....As a result, the angel's power is annulled, since it no longer possesses the shefa [that it needs in order to replace the fruit.]

– *Peri Eytz Hadar*, translated by Miles Krassen

### Did you steal that apple?

I was teaching about Tu B'Shevat to a number of people at the Orangetown Jewish Center. We were talking about this idea of food being stolen from God. What does that mean, exactly? "Sir," I said to a man at the front of the room, "what was the last thing you ate before you came here?"

"An apple," he replied.

"Great," I said. "An apple. Did you steal that apple?"

"No," he replied, "I bought it at Shoprite."

People smiled. But he was quite right. When most of us want an apple, we go to a store and we buy one. With stores and markets as the intermediating mechanism by which we obtain our food, which necessarily involve *not* stealing – what could this text possibly imply, and how can a berakha make a difference?

I said, "Sir, if someone had given you a million dollars, would you have been able to make that apple?" And people smiled again, this time with a different sense of awareness.

The point of "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24) is to remind us that we enjoy the natural fruits of creation. We ourselves did not create and could never create them. A berakha is different than saying "Thanks for dinner, Mom," (though we should say that, too). When the rabbis of the Talmud suggested not merely that we say a berakha before eating, but that failing to do so represented a case of theft, this is the key idea they were reminding us of: we might buy an apple or we might grow it, but we can never create it, and its creation is an everyday miracle.

– *Nigel Savage*

- What do you think the impact of saying a berakha before you eat has been (or could be) on your life?
- Which sets of wise people might you consult in order to learn how to eat healthily and responsibly?

## 2.2 Paths to mindfulness

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Being alive and being human means not only *that* we experience but also that we can *reflect* on our experience. And the more we do so, the more we notice the world, the details, the hundred different species of tulips, the countless florets in a head of cauliflower. The more we are returned to our best selves. Simply by requiring that we pause a minute to reflect on our food and ourselves before we eat, berakhot can help us become more mindful of the food we eat. We think that there is great value in this—for the Jewish people and for the whole world.

### Seeing again for the first time

*Jewish tradition also has a berakha for seeing a beautiful sunrise. Do you think it serves the same purpose as food berakhot?*

Because we eat two, three or four times every day, it's easy to forget how wondrous that is. It's like the sunrise or the sunset. The sun rises and sets every day. If it's an especially beautiful sunrise, we may notice it. But if it's not "special" we may not even see it.

*How is noticing a sunrise different or similar to noticing the source of your food?*

But if we can see it as if for the first time, each sunrise becomes very special and very beautiful. And so with each meal we create.

– Bernard Glassman, *Instructions to the Cook*

### Radical amazement

*These words of Heschel's have become famous. What does he mean exactly?*

*How would your life be different if you carried this consciousness with you on a daily basis?*

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.

– Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

### Stop and bless

*What is the central point you think that Rabbi Ba is making? What might this mean in your life?*

R. Ba the son of R. Hiyya b. Abba teaches: If he ate while walking, he must stand and bless. If he ate standing, he must sit and bless. If he ate sitting, he must recline [formally] and bless. If he ate reclining, he must enwrap himself and bless. And if he did this, he is like the angels who serve God

– *Talmud Yerushalmi, Berakhot 7:5*

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רבי בא בר חייה בר אבא אכל  
מזלך שימך ומברך אבל שימך ישב  
ומברך אכל ישב מיסב ומברך אכל  
מיסב מתעטף ומברך אם עשה כן הרי  
הוא כמלאכי השרת

## Eating a tangerine

I remember a number of years ago, when Jim and I were first traveling together in the United States, we sat under a tree and shared a tangerine. He began to talk about what we would be doing in the future. Whenever we thought about a project that seemed attractive or inspiring, Jim became so immersed in it that he literally forgot about what he was doing in the present. He popped a section of tangerine in his mouth and, before he had begun chewing it, had another slice ready to pop into his mouth again. He was hardly aware he was eating a tangerine. All I had to say was, "You ought to eat the tangerine section you've already taken." Jim was startled into realizing what he was doing.

It was as if he hadn't been eating the tangerine at all. If he had been eating anything, he was "eating" his future plans.

A tangerine has sections. If you can eat just one section, you can probably eat the entire tangerine. But if you can't eat a single section, you cannot eat the tangerine. Jim understood. He slowly put his hand down and focused on the presence of the slice already in his mouth. He chewed it thoughtfully before reaching down and taking another section.

– *Thich Naht Hanh, Miracle of Mindfulness*

*This text doesn't have a question, it has a suggestion:*

*Eat a tangerine ☺*

*(And try to eat it slowly, with full awareness...)*

## Gratitude means noticing

Why is eating a vegetable one of the steps to freedom? Because gratitude is liberating. And how do we get there? We focus on the details.

Close your eyes: You are holding a piece of parsley, which you are about to dip into salt water. But before that – what things needed to happen to get this parsley into our hands? Who placed the parsley seeds into the ground? What sort of conditions did it grow in? Was it a hot summer? What did the soil feel like? How was the parsley harvested? What did it look like at that perfect moment when it was mature and ready to be picked? Who picked it? Where did the parsley travel next? Was it packed into cardboard boxes? How did it travel to the store or farmer's market? Who unloaded and unpacked it? Who placed it on a scale and weighed it so it could be purchased? Think for a moment about the number of hands that played a part in getting the parsley to this table and into our hands.

Now open your eyes: Look a little more closely at the parsley in your hand – what does it look like? How many leaves does it have? What does that specific color green remind you of? What does the stem feel like? Imagine what it tastes like...

Take a piece of parsley and dip it in salt water. Then we say the blessing together, and then we eat. *Blessed are You, God, our God, Sovereign of the universe, who brings forth fruit from the earth.*

– *Leah Koenig (Pesach 2006)*

*How does your experience of eating change when you know what has gone into the preparation of the food?*

- What are the similarities and differences between the contemporary Buddhist perspectives of Glassman and Thich Naht Hanh and the traditional Jewish understanding of mindfulness and gratitude?
- How does Jewish tradition encourage or discourage emphasis on the human role of food production?

## 2.3 The blessings we say

Jews have been saying food berakhot for over 2000 years. The French Revolution and the rise of modernity challenged the theology of traditional religion, and undermined prayer in many ways. The postmodern era enables old traditions to be reassessed in new ways. We understand the saying of berakhot as a key exemplar of this move. Rather than asking, “Do you believe in God?”, we want to open conversation about the broader nature of gratitude in relation to food. Can traditional berakhot engender post-traditional mindfulness? And wouldn't it be ironic if post-traditional mindfulness in fact re-connected us to the world of the ancients?

### Food Blessings

*Why do you think these particular categories for food berakhot arose? If you could establish different sorts of food berakhot, what would they be?*

*Over bread:*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, the One who  
brings bread forth from the earth.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
הַמְצִיא לָנוּ לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

*Over food made from wheat, oats, rye,  
barley, and spelt:*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of  
types of nourishment.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
בֹּרֵא מִיְּנֵי מִזְוָה:

*Over wine:*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the  
fruit of the vine.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
בֹּרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

*Eitz or Adamah? Notice that when you think about which prayer to say, you're thinking about how the food you ate grew. Was it planted this season? Is it a perennial that produces new fruit every year? Can you imagine the tree or the field, where your food grew?*

*Over tree fruit:*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of  
fruit of the tree.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
בֹּרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ:

*Over fruit from the earth:*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of  
fruit of the earth.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
בֹּרֵא פְּרֵי הָאָדָמָה:

*Over meat, fish, milk, eggs, and cheese, as  
well as beverages (other than wine):*

Blessed are You, God, our God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, that  
everything comes to be through God's  
word.

בְּרַחֵם אֱתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
שְׂוֹעֵל נְהִיָּה בְּדִבְרֶךָ:

*What is the difference between saying a berakha over a natural phenomenon, such as a rainbow, and saying a berakha over food?*

*One last thought on berakhot: If you don't usually say food berakhot, trying saying them for a week, or even a day, and see how they influence your experience of eating.*

## Wait - what was that berakha?

If they brought before him types of desserts, he recites over them the blessing, “Creator of types of sweets.” Over edible seeds he recites, “Creator of types of seeds,” and over other herbs he recites, “Creator of types of herbs.” And over greens he recites, “Creator of the fruit of the ground.” R. Judah says, “[He recites,] ‘Praised be the one at whose word the earth sprouts.’” R. Meir says, “Even if one saw a loaf [of bread] and said, ‘Praised be He who created this loaf, how nice it is,’ that serves as its blessing.”

If one saw figs and said, ‘Praised be He Who created these figs, how nice they are,’ that serves as their blessing.” R. Yose says, “Anyone who departs from the formula which the sages established for blessings has not fulfilled his obligation.”

– *Tosefta Berakhot 4:4-5*

הַבִּישֵׁי לִפְנֵי מִינֵי תְרֻמָּה מִטְרֵךְ עֲלֵיהֶן  
 בִּרְאָה מִינֵי כֶסֶפִּין, עַל הַזְּרָעִים אֵי בִרְאָה  
 מִינֵי זֵדִים, וְעַל הָרִשְׁאִים אֵי בִרְאָה מִינֵי  
 רִשְׁאִים, וְעַל יִרְקוֹת אֵי בִרְאָה פְּרִי  
 הָאֲרָמָה. ר' יְהוּדָה אֵי טְרֵךְ מִצְמִיחַ  
 אֲרָמָה בְּדִבְרֵי. ר' מֵאִיר אֵי אֶפְלוֹ רֵאָה  
 אֵת הַפֶּת וְאָמַר בְּרֵךְ אֲשֶׁר בִּרְאָה אֵת הַפֶּת  
 זֶה כִּמָּה הִיא נְאֻם זֶה בְּרִכְתּוֹ.  
 רֵאָה אֵת הַתְּאֵנִים וְאָמַר טְרֵךְ שִׁבְרָא  
 אֵת הַתְּאֵנִים וְאָמַר בְּרֵךְ שִׁבְרָא אֵת  
 הַתְּאֵנִים וְהִלֵּל כִּמָּה נֶאֱמַר הֵן זֶה בְּרִכְתּוֹ. ר'  
 יוֹסֵי אֵי כָּל הַמְּשֻׁנָּה מִמִּטְבֵּעַ (ר') שֶׁמִּטְבֵּעַ  
 חֻכְמִים בְּבִרְתּוֹ לֹא יֵצֵא.

*What is the significance of the word “even” (afilu) in what Rabi Meir is arguing? What can we infer about the previous formulations by contrast?*

*What does this discussion in the Tosefta show about the development of food berakhot?*

*Do you agree with R. Meir or R. Judah?*

## God Language

*Some people have amended the traditional God-language of berakhot to reflect their theological outlooks and ethical concerns. While reciting the blessings shown here and those in the liturgy, the following elements can be combined to create alternative formulas.*

<i>Barukh 'atah adonai</i>	ברוך אתה יהוה	Blessed are you Adonai/Lord
<i>Berukha 'at yah</i>	ברוכה את יה	Blessed are you Yah
<i>Ne'varekhh 'et</i>	נברך את	Let us Bless
<i>eloheynu</i>	אלקינו	our God
<i>he-shekhina</i>	השכינה	the Shekhina
<i>'ein ha-chayim</i>	עין החיים	Source of Life
<i>melekh ha-'olam</i>	מלך העולם	Sovereign of the universe
<i>chey ha-'olamim</i>	חי העולמים	Life of all the universe
<i>ruach ha-'olam</i>	רוח העולם	Spirit of the universe

*How do these phrases differ in meaning and outlook?*

– *Kol Hanesama (Reconstructionist Prayerbook)*

- If you regularly say berakhot, how does this practice help you feel gratitude? If you don't normally say berakhot, how do you feel when you do?
- What are the arguments for using the traditional formulations? Or less traditional ones? Which do you chose to say, and why? And if you don't traditionally say a berakha, which of these most makes sense to you?

## 2.4 Birkat Hamazon, the grace after meals

Deuteronomy 8 includes the phrase, “you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless.” These three Hebrew words led to the entire Jewish tradition of *bensching*—of saying blessings after we have eaten. Whether you said Birkat Hamazon as a kid at summer camp with lots of banging on the table, or you say it after every meal, or never at all, this remarkable prayer is a fascinatingly rich reflection of the evolution of the Jewish relationship to food and to the world.

### Food for all

*Given that we know there is so much hunger in the world, what does it mean to praise God for being “hazan et ha-kol,” “Feeder of the world”?*

Because of God’s great goodness, we have never lacked food, nor will we ever lack it—on account of God’s great name—since God feeds and provides for all and is good to all, and who supplies food for all God’s creatures which God brought into being. You are blessed, God, who provides food for all.

וּבְטָבוֹ הַגָּדוֹל תִּמְיֵד לֹא—חֶסֶד לָנוּ וְאֵל—  
יְחַסֵּר לָנוּ מִזֶּן לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּעִבּוֹר שְׁמוֹ  
הַגָּדוֹל, כִּי הוּא אֵל זֶן וּמִפְרֵנֶס לְכָל, וּמַטִּיב  
לְכָל, וּמַכִּין מִזֶּוּ לְכָל—בְּרִיּוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר  
בָּרָא. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַזֶּן אֶת—הַכֹּל.

### Land, food & covenant

*What are the components of the Jewish people’s relationship with God as listed here? How do they compare with other lists (such as in the Amidah, or in Dayenu in the Pesach Hagadah)? Why do you think these elements are included in the grace after meals?*

We thank You, Lord our God, for having given the heritage of a lovely, fine and spacious land to our fathers, and for having brought us out, Lord our God, from Egypt, and for rescuing us from slavery, and also for Your covenant which You sealed in our flesh, as well as for Your Torah which You taught us, and Your laws of which You told us, and for the life, grace and kindness You have granted us, and for the food which You supply and provide for us constantly, every day, all the time, and at every hour.

נוֹדָה לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל שֶׁהִנְחַלְתָּ  
לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ חַמְדָּה טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה,  
וְעַל שֶׁהוֹצֵאתָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם וּפְדִיתָנוּ מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים, וְעַל  
בְּרִיתְךָ שֶׁחִתַּמְתָּ בְּבִשְׂרֵנוּ (בְּנוֹ), וְעַל  
תּוֹרַתְךָ שֶׁלַּמְדַּתָּנוּ, וְעַל חֻקֶּיךָ  
שֶׁהוֹדַעְתָּנוּ, וְעַל חַיִּים חֵן וְחֶסֶד  
שֶׁחֻנַּנְתָּנוּ, וְעַל אֲכִילַת מִזֶּן שֶׁאַתָּה זֶן  
וּמִפְרֵנֶס אוֹתָנוּ תִּמְיֵד בְּכָל—יּוֹם  
וּבְכָל—עֵת וּבְכָל—שָׁעָה .

See Deuteronomy 8, §1.3

So for everything, Lord our God, we thank You and bless You—may Your name be blessed in the speech of all living beings, constantly, for all time. For it is written: “And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God for the good land He gave you.” You are blessed, Lord, for the land and for the food.

וְעַל הַכֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ , אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים  
לְךָ, וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתְךָ, יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמֶךָ בְּפִי  
כָל—חַי תִּמְיֵד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּכַתּוּב,  
וְאֲכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכַתְּ אֶת—יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה עַל הָאֶרֶץ וְעַל הַמִּזֶּן.

### Rebuild Jerusalem

*How would the nature of being Jewish be different if this paragraph was not included in the bensching? Discuss this, then read the text from Rabbi Joy Levitt on the opposite page, and then read this text again. How, if at all, does your understanding differ?*

And may You build up Jerusalem, the holy city, rapidly in our lifetimes, You are blessed, God, who in your mercy builds up Jerusalem. Amen.

– Birkat Hamazon

וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה  
בְּיָמֵינוּ, בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, בּוֹנֵה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ  
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, אָמֵן.

## Brich Rachamana

Blessed is the Merciful One,

Ruler of the world,

Who created this bread

You are the source of Life for all that is,  
and your blessing flows through me.

– Hebrew from Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Berakhot 40b. We think that the English words (which can be sung to the same melody but which are not a direct translation) are by Shefa Gold. If we're wrong, and you're the author, or you know who is, please let us know!

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא  
מְלִכָּא דְעָלְמָא  
מְרִיבָה דְהָאֵי פִיתָא

In 1990 Roger Kamenetz was a participant in a group of rabbis and Jewish leaders who traveled to Tibet for an interfaith conversation with the Dalai Lama. He subsequently wrote a book about the experience called *The Jew in the Lotus*. Rabbi Joy Levitt was a participant on the trip. This excerpt is from a review of the book that she wrote the following year.

## Praying for our holy city

The Tibetans became very moved upon learning that Jews pray for the rebuilding of Jerusalem after meals in their homes. They immediately made plans to see if they might write a Tibetan prayer articulating their yearning for Lhasa.

I was stunned by the new light suddenly cast on this very familiar prayer. I have recited grace after meals on Shabbat my entire life, and yet had never really grasped its role in preserving the Zionist dream in the hearts and minds of Jews throughout the generations. Since my return from India, I have never recited those words without thinking both of the Tibetans and of my deep longing for Zion at peace.

– Rabbi Joy Levitt, *The Dialogue with the Dalai Lama*

What role, if any, does the Birkat Hamazon play in your personal relationship to the Land of Israel? If you don't regularly say the Birkat, what do you think the effect might be if you did?

- Do you normally say a grace after meals? Which one? Why? If you don't normally say one, how do you think it might feel to do so?
- What are the similarities and differences between the contemporary Buddhist perspectives of Glassman and Thich Naht Hanh and the traditional Jewish understanding of mindfulness and gratitude?
- How does Jewish tradition encourage or discourage emphasis on the human role of food production?

## 2.5 Eating our words

Jewish tradition includes the idea of the *d'var torah*—the obligation to speak words of Torah whenever a group of people has gathered to eat. We trace here the elements of this idea and ask the question: how do the words we speak during a meal influence not only the meal itself but also the nature of what it means to be Jewish?

### If three have eaten...

*The joke in yeshiva was, of course, that we'd be eating together and someone would say "iiiiiffff three people..." And we would say, "Yofi! We've just fulfilled our obligation to learn words of Torah, by learning that we are obligated to learn words of Torah when we eat together!"*

- Rabbi Avi Finegold

*Why do you think this applies to three people but not two or four?*

Rabbi Shimon said: If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken over it words of Torah, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, for it is written (Isaiah 28:8) "All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean." But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, for it is written (Ezekiel 41:22) "He said to me, "This is the table that stands before the Lord."

- Pirkei Avot 3:4

רְבִי שִׁמּוֹן אָמַר, שְׁלֹשָׁה שֶׁאֵכְלוּ עַל  
שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְלֹא אָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה,  
כְּאִלוּ אֵכְלוּ מִזֶּבְחֵי מֵתִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר  
(יִשְׁעִיָּה ב'ח), כִּי כָל שֻׁלְחָנוֹת מְלֵאֵי קִיא  
צֵאָה בְּלֵי מַקֵּם. אֲבָל שְׁלֹשָׁה שֶׁאֵכְלוּ עַל  
שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְאָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה,  
כְּאִלוּ אֵכְלוּ מִשֻּׁלְחַן שֶׁל מַקְדִּים בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (יחזקאל כ"א), וַיִּדְבֵר אֵלַי  
זֶה הַשֻּׁלְחָן אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי ה':

### The D'var Torah

*Why do you think it was not deemed sacriligious to discuss words of Torah at the table?*

I love that Jews have the tradition of giving a dvar Torah at a Shabbat meal. At a dinner party, conversation flits about, from really engaging debate to lighthearted banter, and this is enjoyable. Someone may have important news or an exciting new idea to share. But it's different than the choreographed *d'var torah*. This is the scene:

You've eaten, you're full. You're schmoozing. Then someone taps a glass and says, "In this week's *parsha*, we learn that..." And we give the person our attention, and for two or five or more minutes we follow an exegetical journey in Torah, contemporary ideas, values, challenges. It could be cute, it could be profound. We hear them say, "and this makes me think of..." And we also are provoked to think, without the complication of conversation to obscure our thinking before we articulate it. And we hear, 'In conclusion, I bless us all that...' and the learning ends with the gift of an idea or questions to ponder.

We not only eat, but share pieces of ourselves with others at the table, bringing Torah once again out of history and into the dining room, and creating time and space for to simply enjoy the wisdom of our tradition.

- Anna Stevenson

*"The reason only one person was created [in the Genesis story] is to teach you that whosoever kills a single soul the Torah considers to have killed a complete world. And whosoever sustains and saves a single soul, it is as if that person sustained a whole world."*

*- Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*

## Chapter 8

# Food & Ethics: the implications of our food choices



The story of our food does not begin and end on our plate. Food is produced somewhere, by someone, under some circumstances. More and more people are asking not only, "Is this food good for my body?" but also, "Is this food good for the world?"



Jewish tradition has long made the connection between food and social justice, exhorting us whenever possible to share our table with the hungry and to remember the orphan, the widow, the stranger. We were once slaves in Egypt; our memory of our experience of injustice is intended to be a constant reminder to do justice in the world.

*"There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread."*

*- Mahatma Gandhi*

The texts that follow raise a broad range of issues. The common thread is the relationship between ethical living and ethical eating.



**Orlah**

<sup>23</sup> When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. <sup>24</sup> In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Lord; <sup>25</sup> and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit — that its yield to you may be increased: I the Lord am your God.

– *Leviticus 19:23-25*

כִּטְבֵי תְבֵאוֹ אֶל הָאָרֶץ, וְנִטְעַתֶם כָּל עֵץ מִאֲכָל וְעֵשְׂרֵת שָׁנָה אֶת פְּרִיָּו שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיוּ לָכֶם עֲדָלִים לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ. בַּדְּבִשָּׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית, יִהְיֶה כָּל פְּרִי קִדְשׁ וְהָלָלִים לַיהוָה. בַּדְּבִשָּׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁית, תֵּאָכְלוּ אֶת פְּרִי, לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם, תְּבִיאָתוֹ; אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

How many years? Tu B'shevat, the 15th of the month of Shevat, is the new year of the trees. Originally it was, in a sense, the beginning and end of the "tax year," so that you'd know when to bring the tithes from your tree to the Temple.

If you were to plant a fig tree in your garden, and had to wait five years before you could eat any of the fruit (and in the fourth year you gave all the figs away), how would you feel? What sort of self-restraint would that signify, and engender?

**Tithing / "aser t'aser"**

<sup>22</sup> You shall surely tithe every year a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing that is brought from the field. <sup>23</sup> You shall consume the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the Lord your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever.

– *Deuteronomy 14:22-23*

עֲשֵׂר תַעֲשֶׂה, אֶת כָּל תְּבוּאֹת זְרַעֲךָ, הַיֵּצֵא וְהַשְׂרֵה, שָׁנָה שְׁנָה, וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּמִקְוֵם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמֵי שָׁמַיִם, מִמֵּנִשֶׁר וְהִגִּדְךָ תִירְשֶׁד וַיִּשְׁרְדָהּ, וּבְכֹרֶת בְּקֹרֶד וַעֲאֹנָד; לִמְנוֹן תִּלְמָה, לִירְאָה אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל הַיָּמִים

Hebrew signifies intensity by doubling a verb. So what in English is here translated as "You shall surely tithe," is in Hebrew "aser t'aser." "Eser" in Hebrew means ten. "Aser t'aser" means, most literally, something like "ten-percenting, you shall ten percent." "Tithing", which sounds vague, is actually very literal.

**Tithing today**

I have one friend who tithes a portion of her income each year, and she explicitly uses this language— "tithing"— to make clear to herself and her family that she is fulfilling her contemporary understanding of the biblical obligation, not merely "giving charity". She's quite clear that not everything that is "tax deductible" is to her, tithing— and some sorts of tithing (giving to a homeless person) are not tax deductible.

Think about tithing a proportion of your income in the next week to those deeply in need.

– *Nigel Savage*

- What are the different agricultural rules, and what are the reasons given for them? What do they all have in common? How are they different?
- What do you think our obligation to the orphan, stranger and widow could be or should be if we are not producing our own food, and/or if we are not living in the land of Israel (where technically these laws don't apply).
- The Torah reiterates the refrain "the stranger, the orphan and the widow"—signifying the weakest, poorest and most vulnerable members of their society. Who in your community or city or country is the weakest, the poorest and the most vulnerable? How might you help?

## 8.2 Our sphere of obligation

Caring for the stranger, the orphan and the widow is a constant refrain throughout Jewish tradition, and Jews have always been at the forefront of social justice issues—within and beyond the Jewish community. We thank God in the Birkat Hamazon for ‘feeding the world’—but we know in fact that many people are hungry every day, all over the world. Many of us are privileged to live in a world where we can meet our basic needs; yet for many even the ability to sit and study about food might be considered a luxury. What is our obligation to share what we have with others? If we can never do enough to fix all the world’s problems, how do we prevent our hearts from being hardened yet also protect ourselves from feeling overwhelmed? How should we act, as individuals and as communities, both to help people in need individually, and to create a healthier world for all in the future?

### Shepherds and watchmen of orchards

*What is the difference between a watchman of an orchard and the owner of an orchard?*

*On whom is this text placing the obligation to avoid the possibility of theft?*

One may not buy wool, milk or kids from shepherds [of the flocks of others]. Nor may one buy wood or fruit from the watchman of orchards... [Even in circumstances where it is permitted to buy something,] in all cases in which the seller asks that the goods be hidden, it is forbidden [to make such a purchase]...

– *Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Bava Kama 10:9 (Mishna)*

אין ליקחים מן הרועים צמר וחלב וגדיים  
ולא משומרי פירות נעים ופירות...  
וכולן שאמרו להטמין אסור...

### Our sphere of obligation

*This text is the clearest explication of the traditional understanding of how we change the world. It presumes that we can't, by ourselves, fix the whole world, but that we begin where we can and move out in concentric circles from there. What do you think of this? What might this mean with regards to how you eat?*

The support of oneself comes before anyone else. A person is not obligated to give tzedakah until a basic livelihood has been attained. After that is support of parents, then the support of grown children, then siblings, then all other relatives, then neighbors, then members of one’s local community, then members of other communities...

– *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 252:3, Rema*

פרנסת עצמי קודמת לכל אדם, ואינו  
חייב לתת צדקה עד שיהיה לו פרנסתו  
ואח"כ יקדים פרנסת אביו ואמו, אם הם  
עניים, והם קודמים לפרנסת בנו. ואחר  
כך בנו, והם קודמים לאחיו, והם  
קודמים לשאר קרובים, והקרובים  
קודמים לשכנינו, ושכנינו לאנשי עדה,  
ואנשי עירנו לעד אחדות.

### Jews & non-Jews

*The texts on this page do not require that Jews help only other Jews. In what situation, if any, do you think it would be appropriate to first offer help within the Jewish community?*

In a city where non-Jews and Jews live, the tzedakah collectors collect from Jews and non-Jews and support Jewish and non-Jewish poor; we visit Jewish and non-Jewish sick and bury Jewish and non-Jewish dead, and comfort Jewish and non-Jewish mourners, and return lost goods of non-Jews and Jews, to promote the ways of peace.

– *Talmud Yerushalmi, Masekhet Demai 4:1*

אין ממחין ביד עניי נטרים בלקט  
בשכחה ובפאה מפני דרכי שלום: ת"ד  
מפרנסים עניי נכרים עם עניי ישראל  
ומבקרים חילי נכרים עם חילי ישראל  
ויקברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל  
מפני דרכי שלום

**You can taste the working lives of the fruit-pickers in the berries you eat**

I can't believe it, but nine berries later, each one has provided a different experience; some implode in my mouth, others slowly melt, others are sweet and silky, some are warm and smoky. It's amazing that such a small package can produce such a powerful experience.

*Have you ever had the experience of tasting a fruit that was absolutely incredible? What made your experience so incredible?*

I try to get Anthony to expound on what makes these so good. I want to hear about technique, some secret that I can take with me. Instead, he says, "If you want good fruit, you have to treat your pickers well, good trellising for ease of picking, good outhouses, hot coffee at the right times."

Hot coffee! Good outhouses! I was expecting him to tell me about pruning or a particular blend of compost or special irrigation techniques. And yet, if you believe as I do that food embodies the energy of the people who grow and harvest it, then coffee and outhouses and the well-being of those doing the work are as important as any technique.

– *Michael Abelman, Fields of Plenty*

**What is Fair Trade?**

The following list briefly describes the ten principles of Fair Trade

- Create opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers
- Maintain transparency and accountability at all levels of the trade system
- Provide a means to build producers' independence
- Promote Fair Trade
- Payment of a fair price
- Promote gender equity
- Ensure safe and healthy working conditions
- Respect the UN Convention on Rights of the Child
- Encourage responsible environmental practices
- Build trust in long-term trade relationships



*There are many products that can be purchase Fair Trade certified, among them: coffee, tea, chocolate, and bananas*

– *IFAT: the International Fair Trade Association*

**Negotiating our responsibility**

You shall not hate your brother in thy heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.

לא תלך רגל בְּעֵמִיקוֹ, לֹא תִגְמֹר עָלָי  
 דָּם רָעוּף: אָנֹכִי יְהוָה לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת  
 אַחִיקָה, בְּלִבְבְּךָ: וְזָכַח הַיְבִיחַ אֶת עַמְּמִנְךָ,  
 וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חֲטָא. לֹא תִקֵּם וְלֹא  
 תִשָּׂר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאֶהְיֶה לְרָעוּף בְּעַמְּךָ:  
 אָנֹכִי יְהוָה .

– *Leviticus 19:18-19*

- In what ways does buying produce that may have been grown with unfair labor and environmental practices constitute buying goods that have been stolen? What about them is stolen?
- How does the fact that our food is grown outside our community change the hierarchy of our obligation?
- If you reflect on the texts on these two pages together, how might you see that they influence each other? In what way, if at all, do they prompt you to eat differently?

## 8.3 When ethics and economics conflict: an ancient example

The first example of large-scale food planning and subsidies is the story of Joseph and Pharaoh in the Torah. Seven years of plenty, seven years of famine, and a process to buy, store and distribute the grain over the entire fourteen-year period. So food production and distribution since ancient times has required complicated choices to be made. The texts on these pages from different eras and different worlds address a series of complex issues. The Talmudic passage below is especially remarkable. Read these texts carefully, an introduction to the complexities of planning food production in a world of six billion people.

### Vegetables at the market

*The first part of this text is about the relationship between short term choices, longer term implications, and learned human behavior. What do you think of each of Rav Huna's choices? If you had the money, would you chose to replicate his behavior or not?*

Raba said to Rafram b. Papa: Tell me some of the good deeds which R. Huna had done. He replied: ...

On the eve of every Sabbath [Friday] he would send a messenger to the market and any vegetables that the [market] gardeners had left over he bought up and had them thrown into the river. Should he not rather have had these distributed among the poor? — [He was afraid] lest they would then at times be led to rely upon him and would not trouble to buy any for themselves. Why did he not give the vegetables to the domestic animals? — He was of the opinion that food fit for human consumption may not be given to animals. Then why did he purchase them at all? — This would lead [the gardeners] to do wrong in the future [by not providing an adequate supply].

...When he had a meal he would open the door wide and declare, Whosoever is in need let him come and eat.

Raba said: All these things I could myself carry out except the last one because there are so many in Mahuza.

— *Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Ta'anit 20b-21a*

אמר ליה רבא לתפרם בר פפא: למה  
לן מר מהני מילי מעלייתא דהוה  
עביד רב ורנא! אמר ליה: ...  
וכל פניא דמעלי שבתא הוה משרד  
שלוחא לשיקא, וכל ירקא דהוה פייש  
לדו לגנאי זבין ליה, ושדי ליה  
לנהרא. אלתביה לעניים! זמעין  
דשמכא דעתידה, אלא ארע למיבן.  
אישדייה לבדמה: קסבר מאבל אדם  
אין מאב לין לבהמה. אלא ליזבניה  
כלל! נמצאת מבשילין לעתיד לבא.  
כי הוה ליה מילתא דאסתתא ודי מלי  
כזא דמיא דתלי ליה בסיפא  
דבגא. ...

כי הוה כרך דיסתא וזוה פתח לבביה  
ואמר: כל מאן דצריך לעני אליבאל.  
אמר רבא: טילח מצניא מקיימנא,  
לבר מהא ואלא מצעא למיעבור,  
משום דנפיש בני חילא דמחוזא.

*How does Raba's comment shed further light on this passage?*

## **Ripe for Reform: Six Good Reasons to Reduce U.S. Farm Subsidies and Trade Barriers**

U.S. agricultural policies have remained fundamentally unchanged since the 1930s. Today the U.S. government continues to subsidize certain farm commodities through direct price supports and tariff rate quotas that limit imports. Americans pay a high price for this ongoing government intervention in agricultural markets. Reducing farm subsidies and trade barriers would benefit Americans in six important ways.

One, reform would deliver lower food prices to tens of millions of American households, especially low-income families that spend a large share of their income on food. Last year U.S. farm programs transferred \$16.2 billion from U.S. food consumers to producers.

Two, reform would lower costs for U.S. industries, such as confectioners and other food processors, that use agricultural commodities in their final products and would promote trade negotiations to open markets abroad for U.S. exporters.

Three, reducing farm subsidies would save U.S. taxpayers tens of billions of dollars during the next decade. Many of those subsidy payments currently go to large farms and agribusinesses, not to smaller “family farms.”

Four, agricultural reform would enhance the environment by reducing the amount of top soil lost and damaging fertilizers and pesticides used by American farmers. It would liberate farmland to be used for reforestation, recreation, and other more environmentally friendly purposes.

Five, agricultural reform would benefit farmers themselves by promoting production of crops that are in demand by consumers. Farm reform would stimulate innovation and productivity gains on the farm and promote more economic diversity and dynamism in rural communities.

Six, lower farm trade barriers would raise incomes of farmers in poor countries, reduce global poverty, create a more hospitable climate abroad for U.S. foreign policy, and enhance U.S. security.

– Daniel Griswold, Stephen Slivinski, & Christopher Preble

## **Supply & Demand**

The free market has never worked in agriculture and it never will. The economics of a family farm are very different than a firm’s: when prices fall, the firm can lay off people, idle factories, and make fewer widgets. Eventually the market finds a new balance between supply and demand. But the demand for food isn’t elastic; people don’t eat more just because food is cheap.

– George Naylor, *President of the National Family Farms Coalition*, as quoted in Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*

*How do you understand this text in relation to the passage above?*

- What creative policies do you think Rav Huna might suggest if he were the US Secretary of Agriculture today?

## 8.4 Let all who are hungry come and eat

Many of us are active in helping our communities in many ways—but feeding people is not always the first thing that we think of when we want to work to make the world a better place. Jewish tradition has a strong voice for social justice, and feeding the hungry in particular. Every year on Passover, we symbolically open our doors to share our table and our food with people less fortunate than us. It is powerful that our celebration of our own freedom necessarily reminds us of the condition of others who are less free than we are. But in practice...how often has anyone ever taken you up on the invitation?

### How much is enough?

To understand the last sentence of this text, you need to know that the rabbis of the Talmud saw the word 'eshel' (which literally means 'tamarisk tree') as an acronym that refers to Abraham's hospitality:

- achilah (he fed them)

-sh'tiyah (he gave them drinks)

- v'linah (and he provided a place for them to stay)

Most people do not even reach the level of Job in this passage, much less Abraham. But this passage is, as you see, consistent with a strong thread in Jewish tradition about providing for those in need. If you were to choose to be a living part of this chain of tradition, how might you emulate Job—or Abraham?

When the great calamity befell Job, he pleaded with the Holy One. "Master of the Universe, did I not feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the naked?" The Holy One answered Job, "Job, you have not yet reached half the measure [of hospitality] extended by Abraham. You sat in your house waiting for guests to come to you. To him who was accustomed to eat wheat bread, you gave wheat bread; to him who was accustomed to eat meat, you gave meat; and to him who was accustomed to drink wine, you gave wine. But Abraham did not act this way. He went out, getting about in the world. When he met prospective guests, he brought them to his home. Even to him who was not accustomed to eat wheat bread, he gave wheat bread; to him who was not accustomed to eat meat, he gave meat; and to him who was not accustomed to drink wine, he gave wine. Not only that, but he got busy and built spacious mansions along the highways, and stocked them with food and drink, so that whoever entered ate, drank, and blessed Heaven. Therefore, unusual satisfaction was given to Abraham, and whatever any person requested was to be found in his house, as it is written "And he planted a tamarisk tree (*"eshel"*) in Be'er Sheva

— Avot de Rabbi Natan 7 on Genesis 21:33

וכשבא עלי הויה פרענות גדול אמר לפני הקב"ה רבוני של עולם לא הייתי מאכל לרעבים ומשקה צמאים שנאמר ואוכל פתי לבריא לא אכל קצת ממנה (אע"פ לאטמו) ולא הייתי מלביש ערומים שנאמר ומגו כבשי קצחמם (שם שם כ'). אעפ"כ א"ל הקב"ה לאעב אעב עדיין לא הגעת לחצי שיעור של אברהם. אתה יושב וישוה בתוך ביתך וארחין נכנסים אצלך את שודרתי לאוכל פת חטים ואכלתי פת חטים את שודרתי לאוכל בשר האכלתי בשר את שודרתי לשתות יין השקדתי יין. אבל אברהם לא עשה כן אלא יצא תמהדר בעולם וכשימצא ארחין מכניסין בתוך ביתו את שאין דרכו לאוכל פת חטין האכלתי פת חטין את שאין דרכו לאוכל בשר האכלתי בשר ואת שאין דרכו לשתות יין השקדתי יין. ולא עוד אלא עמד ובנה פלטרין גדולים על הודים והניח [שם] מאכל ומשקה וכל הבא ונכנס אכל ושתה וברך לשמים לפיכך נעשית לו נוח רוח. וכל שחצה שאאל מצי בתוך ביתו של אברהם שנאמר ויסע אשל בבאר שבע (בראשית כא'ג):

**To each his own**

To one for whom bread is suitable, give bread; to the one who needs dough, give dough; to one for whom money is required, give money; to one for whom it is fitting to put the food in that one's mouth, put it in.

– *Sifre on Parshat Re'eb*

*What might be the modern equivalent of the four things listed here? In your community? In Israel? Elsewhere in the world?*

**Let all who are hungry come and eat**

This is the bread of affliction, which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, come and eat; All who are in need, come and partake in the Pesach offering. Now we are here, next year we will be in the Land of Israel;

Now we are slaves, next year we will be free.

– *Pesach Haggadah*

הָא לַחֲמַת עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲבֵלֵי אֲבוֹתָנָא  
 בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכֹפֵן יִתְּנֵי  
 וְיִיכַל, כָּל דְּעָרִיד יִתְּנֵי וְיִפְתּוּח. הַשְּׁתָּא  
 הִבֵּיא לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.  
 הַשְּׁתָּא עֲבָדִי לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חֵרִין.

*What does it mean for Jewish people to have recited 'Ha lachma d'anya' at Passover every year for 2000 years?*

**Feeding God**

God says to Israel, “My children whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it to you as though you gave sustenance to Me.” Does God then eat and drink? No, but whenever you give food to the poor, God accounts it to you as if you gave food to God.

– *Midrash Tannaim on Numbers 28:2*

*With this understanding, think about fulfilling this mitzvah directly, by giving a sandwich to a homeless person, or check out Hazon Yeshayah, to help feed poor people in Israel. Or volunteer at your local homeless shelter. [www.hazoniyeshaya.org](http://www.hazoniyeshaya.org)*

- What is your personal experience with giving tzedakah, especially feeding people who are hungry? How much do you give? How do you decide what you give?
- Contemporary society makes it difficult to literally invite strangers into our house. How can we still fulfill the obligation of Passover, and the prophets, and Jewish tradition generally, which exhort us to share our table with the hungry?

## 8.5 L'dor va'dor: our children and our children's children

In Jewish tradition the world-to-come is an important and central idea. It is a tangible reality that we must all work to create. At the same time, we pragmatically recognize that our future is not in heaven as much as it is in our children. Much of our philanthropic giving and community organizing in the Jewish community is focussed around family and Jewish continuity. How does our tradition of valuing our children and their future inform our discussion about food?

### Choni ha-Ma'agel

*Why seventy years? "For the Lord said: When Babylon's seventy years are over, I will take note of and I will fulfill you my promise of favor: to bring you back to this place."  
(Jeremiah 29:10)*

*People often read this text as a metaphor. But imagine it literally. What will be the date 70 years from the day you're reading this? What do you think the world will look like then? The place you are right now? And if you planted a tree, what tree would you plant, and where?  
And as a bonus: Go plant it!*

*Another saying that we like is this:*

*The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.*

R. Johanan said: This righteous man [Honi] was throughout the whole of his life troubled about the meaning of the verse, "A Song of Ascents, When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like unto them that dream." Is it possible for a man to dream continuously for seventy years? One day he was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.

– *Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Ta'anit 23a*

אמר רבי יוחנן: כל ימיו של ארז  
צדיק היה מצטער על מקדא זה  
(תהלים קכ"ז) שיר המעלות בשבוע ה'  
את שיבת ציון היינו כחלמים. אמר:  
מי איכא דנייט שבועין שנין בחלמא?  
ימא חד ויה אול בארזא, חיייה  
להויא גברא דהיה נטע חרובא, אמר  
ליה: האג עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר  
ליה: עד שבועין שנין. אמר ליה:  
פשיטא לך דחייית שבועין שנין? אמר  
ליה: האי [גברא] עלמא בודובא  
אשכחתי, כי היכי דשגלי לי אבהתי  
שגלי נמי לבראי.



*Where the past and the future meet: Hallel, kneading dough for challah at Hazon's 2006 Food Conference*

*What does this picture make you think about, in light of the text on the opposite page? What kinds of things can we plant, literally or figuratively, for generations to come?*

*For more on Challah see 4.3*

### Sustainability

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

*– Brundtland Commission report to the United Nations on Sustainability (1987), “Our Common Future”*

### Thanks, kids

We do not inherit the Earth from our parents, we borrow it from our children.

*– Native American Saying*

### Half-Dipper River

A river behind Eihei-ji, the Zen temple [Dogen] founded in Japan, contained an abundance of water. Mountain streams and waterfalls flowed into it. Nevertheless, when Dogen went to the stream, he would take a dipper of water and then put back half a dipper for future generations. That river is still called Half-Dipper River.

*– Bernie Glassman, Instructions to the Cook*

*What are the ways that you're contributing to leaving the world in better shape than you found it?*

- Do you have children? How, if at all, has your attitude towards food and sustainability changed since having kids? (If you don't have children, but might one day, how do you think you might answer this question?)
- In what ways do you think your community or city are most sustainable? In what ways are they least sustainable?

## 8.6 Meat eating and non-meat eating

There are many reasons people choose to eat little or no meat, including concern for animals, health, environmental issues, ethical concerns about commercial meat production, and many others. Within Jewish sources, there are some very vocal proponents of vegetarianism. Rav Kook was vegetarian, except on shabbat. Professor Richard S. Schwartz is an active contemporary proponent of vegetarianism from the Jewish perspective. And there are also many sources in Jewish tradition that clearly permit meat eating.

### Eat Plants

*What can we learn from the fact that the Torah includes both of these texts?*

*Do you find it helpful to look for a basis for meat-eating or not-meat-eating in the Torah?*

<sup>29</sup> God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food

– Genesis 1:29

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי לְכֶם אֶת כָּל  
עֵשֶׂב דֶּרֶעַ דֶּרֶעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ  
וְאֶת כָּל הַיֵּץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ פְרִי עֵץ דֶּרֶעַ דֶּרֶעַ  
לְכֶם יְהִי לְאֹכְלָהּ׃

### Eat Meat

<sup>3</sup> Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. <sup>4</sup> You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.

– Genesis 9:3–4

כָּל רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא חַי לְכֶם יְהִי לְאֹכְלָהּ  
כַּדְרִק עֵשֶׂב נֹתְתִי לְכֶם אֶת כָּל אֵף בְּשָׂר  
בְּנִפְשׁוֹ יָמָז לֹא תֹאכְלוּ׃

### Only on special occasions

*Isaac to Esau: “Hunt me some game, and make a tender morsel that I love and bring it to me and I will eat it in order that my soul bless you before I die.” (Genesis 27:7. See §3.1)*

*Why did Isaac request a meal of hunted game? Were not there sufficient goats in his flocks, and do they not taste like venison anyway?*

A person should only eat meat on rare appointed occasions, and the reason is that a person should not become accustomed to eat meat, as it is written “You shall eat meat with all your desire. Eat it, however, as you eat the gazelle and the deer,” (Deut. 12:21-22). This means that you should eat meat by circumstance [accident] rather than in a set way. For the gazelle and the deer are not easily found around human dwellings for they are wild, and their habitation is not with people, but in the deserts and forests. Consequently, they can only be eaten in small quantities for not everyday does such a miracle occur to that a herd of gazelles appears when one is hunting. Consequently, since one eats of them rarely, he will not come to habituate himself to eating ordinary meat since it gives birth to cruelty and other bad qualities in the body of a person. For it is the birds of prey that kill and eat meat, and the lion that kills prey and eats. Therefore it says that in the future “The lion like the ox will eat straw. For there will be peace between all the living creatures” (Isaiah 11:7). Therefore, Isaac said, “Hunt me game,” (Genesis 27:7) for he did not want to eat meat except if it was according to the circumstance [of the hunt].

– *Kli Yakar on Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Chulin 84a*

### **Current methods of commercial beef production**

The ever-increasing cattle population is wreaking havoc on the earth's ecosystems, destroying habitats on six continents. Cattle raising is a primary factor in the destruction of the world's remaining tropical rain forests. Millions of acres of ancient forests in Central and South America are being felled and cleared to make room for pastureland to graze cattle. Cattle herding is responsible for much of the spreading desertification in the sub-Saharan of Africa and the western rangeland of the United States and Australia. The overgrazing of semiarid and arid lands has left parched and barren deserts on four continents. Organic runoff from feedlots is now a major source of organic pollution in our nation's ground water. Cattle are also a major cause of global warming... The devastating environmental, economic and human toll of maintaining a worldwide cattle complex is little discussed in policy circles... Yet, cattle production and beef consumption now rank among the gravest threats to the future well-being of the earth and its human population.

—Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*

### **Looking for transparency**

The industrialization—and brutalization—of animals in America is a relatively new, evitable, and local phenomenon. No other country raises and slaughters its food animals quite as intensively or as brutally as we do. No other people in history has lived at quite so great a remove from the animals they eat. Were the walls of our meat industry to become transparent, literally or even figuratively, we would not long continue to raise, kill, and eat animals the way we do. Tail docking and sow crates and beak clipping would disappear overnight, and the days of slaughtering four hundred head of cattle an hour would promptly come to an end—for who could stand the sight? Yes, meat would get more expensive. We'd probably eat a lot less of it, too, but maybe when we did eat animals we'd eat them with the consciousness, ceremony, and respect they deserve.

—Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

- Do you eat meat? How often? Why or why not? How do you feel about it?
- Do you think that people should eat meat?
- Would you be more or less likely to eat meat if you saw how the animal was raised and slaughtered?

## 8.7 The Age of Awareness

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“Sometimes I feel the more I learn about food, the less there is that I can eat” said one participant at Hazon’s 2006 Food Conference. The challenge is not that we don’t want to do good, we do. But we can’t always see the entire picture—because it is too big, or because it is carefully hidden from us. The systems we are dealing with are huge—so that even if we can understand the situation, we’re aware that our individual actions effect change only in a tiny way. We cannot even, as a people, in our own behavior, directly effect all the changes we would like. But the Jewish people has always played a role in seeking to perfect the world. We now have the opportunity to add our distinctive voice to a global conversation about the nature of human life on this planet. This we not only can do, we actually must do.

### Tzedek, Tzedek

*When the situation is clearly in front of us, it is easy to know what to do. But our information is muddled; the double call of “Justice! Justice!” reminds us that we should indeed seek out the truth—and it may not always be self-evident.*

Pursue justice. Justice!  
– Deuteronomy 16:20

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדוּ

### Citizens of a global world

If a person of learning participates in public affairs and serves as judge or arbiter, he gives stability to the land. But if he sits in his home and says to himself, “What have the affairs of society to do with me?... Why should I trouble myself with the people’s voices of protest? Let my soul dwell in peace!”—if he does this, he overthrows the world.

– Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Shabbat 99b

### Important:

It is not your duty to complete the work but neither may you desist from it.

– Pirkei Avot 2:21

לֹא עָלֶיךָ תִּמְלָאָה לְגַמְרָהּ, וְלֹא אֶתְּהַבֵּן  
וְיָרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה. אִם לֹא

# about the authors



**Nigel Savage**, originally from Manchester, England, founded Hazon (Hebrew for “vision”) in 2000.

In 2000 Nigel led Hazon’s first major project, a 3000 mile Cross-USA Jewish Environmental Bike Ride, in which participants cycled from Seattle, WA to Washington, DC, to raise environmental awareness in the American Jewish community. They ended at the White House where they received an award from the EPA.

Nigel has taught in a variety of settings, including the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities, the Wexner Heritage Conference, the UJA Young Leadership Conference, the leadership retreat of the Dorot Fellows in Israel and the World Union of Jewish Students. His articles have appeared in various publications including *The Forward* and the *Jerusalem Report*.

Before founding Hazon Nigel was a professional fund manager in the English equivalent of Wall Street, where he worked for the Rothschilds and was co-head of UK Equities at John Govett & Co. He has an MA in American Jewish History from Georgetown, and learned at Pardes, Yakar, Hebrew University and Jerusalem Fellows.

He is Vice-President of the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center and he was one of the founders of Limmud NY.

Nigel is infamous in the UK for his cameo appearance in the cult Anglo-Jewish comic movie, *Leon The Pig Farmer*. He is also believed to be the first English Jew to have cycled across South Dakota on a recumbent bike.



**Anna Stevenson** grew up in North Vancouver, British Columbia. She moved to New York in 2000 to attend the Jewish Theological Seminary and Barnard College, where she earned a BA in Urban Studies and a BA in Bible Studies in 2004.

She joined Hazon as an intern, working on the first beit midrash about Jews and food in 2003. She then helped to launch Tuv Ha’Aretz, Hazon’s Community-Supported Agriculture Project at Anshe Chesed in 2004, and after that was the New York Ride Coordinator for the 2005 and 2006 New York Jewish Environmental Bike Rides. Finishing this curriculum brings her work at Hazon full circle, and Anna is extremely grateful for the whole experience.

Anna is looking forward to spending a summer at Adamah, farming at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT in summer 2007.

# bring hazon to your community!

## 2007 Tuv Ha'Aretz Sites



### **Atlanta, GA**

Shearith Israel and TaylOrganics

### **Berkeley, CA**

Chochmat HaLev and Eat Well Farm

### **Houston, TX**

JCC Houston and Home Sweet Farm

### **Long Island, NY**

Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore and Garden of Eve Farm

### **Manhattan, NY**

Congregation Ansche Chesed and Garden of Eve Farm

### **West Orange, NJ**

JCC MetroWest and Starbrite Farm

### **Philadelphia, PA**

Kol Ami / Kehillah of Old York Road and Lancaster Farm Fresh

### **St. Paul, MN**

St. Paul JCC and Easy Bean Farm

### **Washington DC**

Tifereth Israel and Good Fortune Farm

### **Modi'in, Israel**

Chava V'Adam

## Min Ha'Aretz: Hazon's Family Education Project

Hazon is launching a family education curriculum on Jews and food at Beit Rabban Day School in New York, NY, in Spring 2007. For more information on bringing this curriculum to your school or community, contact David Franklin at [davidf@hazon.org](mailto:davidf@hazon.org).

Thank you to our funders - without whom none of this work would have been possible.

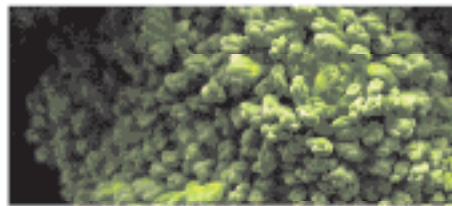


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## Food for Thought

# Hazon's Curriculum on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life

Learn from Jewish tradition and explore your own relationship to the food you eat and the way you eat it. This cutting-edge curriculum enables you to look at Jewish texts through fresh eyes—and to apply three thousand years' of Jewish wisdom about food to a broad range of contemporary issues.

*Food for Thought* is suitable for adult education groups, rabbis, college classes, high schools, Hillels, educators—and anyone else who want to learn in serious and creative ways about Jews, food, and the multitude of choices we face today.

### Topics Include:

- Gratitude, mindfulness & blessing our food
- Kashrut
- Bread & Jewish tradition
- Hospitality & social separation
- Health & nourishment
- Land & place: local foods & the land of Israel
- Food & Ethics: The implications of what we eat



**Nigel Savage** is the founder and Executive Director of Hazon. He holds an MA from Georgetown University, and learned at Pardes, Yakar, the Hebrew University and the Jerusalem Fellows.

**Anna Stevenson** has worked for Hazon since 2003. She guided the launch of Tuv Ha'Aretz, the first Community-Supported Agriculture program in the American Jewish community. She holds BAs from Barnard College (in Urban Studies) and from the Jewish Theological Seminary (in Bible).

Hazon is a New York-based non-profit that works to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community, as a step towards a healthier and more sustainable world for all.

