

MISHNAS CHAYIM

Parshas Beshalach 5771 אה משע"א פרשת בשלח תשע"א

MON AND BENTCHING (GRACE AFTER MEALS)

In this week's *parshah*, we are introduced to one of the most amazing phenomena that accompanied the Jewish people throughout their sojourn in the desert. This is the *mon* (manna), a remarkable form of nourishment that fell from Heaven.

Mon is characterized by numerous fascinating qualities. Perhaps it is best-known for its highly customized taste, as the *mon* would adapt to the preference of the eater. Imagine what would happen if – upon being served cauliflower – we would just think cotton candy, and – presto!

A LIGHT MEAL

Along with some of these qualities come some vexing *halachic* dilemmas. One of these involves the process of digestion. One of the advantages of being on a *mon* diet is that the consumer is basically unfettered by the prospect of waste; the *mon* would simply be absorbed directly into the various bodily limbs that were in need of nourishment. This arrangement presents a complication in the area of after-blessings, however. The Gemara in Berachos (48b) tells us that *birkas hamazon* (*bentching*) was recited after eating *mon*, as the first blessing of *bentching* ("*Hazan es ha 'olam...*") was composed in response to the granting of the *mon*. Yet, the very act of *bentching* on *mon* is apparently no simple matter, an issue raised by the Chazon Ish

נדפס לזכות רפו"ש של מלכה בת זיסל דבורה בתוך שאר חולי ישראל (*Orach Chaim 25:4*). The problem stems from a *halachah* mentioned in the Mishnah in Berachos, where *bentching* is given a certain time limit. The Mishnah states (8:7):

עַד אֵימָתַי הוּא מְבָרֵדְּ, עַד כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּתְעַכֵּל הַמָּזוֹן שֹׁבּמעיו.

"Until what point may someone (still) *bentch*? As long as it takes for the consumed food to be digested."

If digestion is the "deadline" for *bentching*, then how is it ever possible to *bentch* on *mon*? The very nature and benefit of *mon* seems to be that it bypasses the digestion process in the first place!

R' Chaim Kanievsky (Ta'ama Dikra, parshas Beshalach) takes the approach that this issue actually helps to further clarify the precise workings of this most curious item. Mon is not merely a certain generic substance that just happens to adopt the taste desired by the particular consumer. Rather – to some extent – its very essence undergoes some type of transformation, assuming the properties of the eater's choice food. As such, when about to be consumed by someone thinking of bread, the *mon* becomes, in a sense, a shtik broit (a piece of bread). Consequently, the absorption into the body's limbs will be delayed by a duration of time equal to that of the regular digestive process of bread. And so, the mon-eater could comfortably bentch during this time span.

An illustration (which also serves as evidence) of this notion comes from the comments of Rashi

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of יעטא בת משה ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah. (to Bamidbar 11:5). Apparently, whereas the mon could adopt the taste of every food, there were five exceptions: cucumbers, watermelon, leek, onions, and garlic. Someone who concentrated on any of these foods when eating their mon would not achieve the desired taste. What accounted for the uniqueness of these particular items? According to Rashi, these foods could be harmful to nursing mothers. As a result, they were rendered "inaccessible."

Now, if *mon* was a constant, characterized by fixed properties with only its taste changing based on consumer preference, Rashi's explanation would be difficult to stomach. Why should there be a difference – to a nursing mother or anyone – based on taste alone? She could eat her *mon* with impunity while thinking of Cheerios, but if she later dreamed of garlic during a *mon*-meal, she'd be plagued by after-effects? Didn't she eat, in essence, the exact same thing for breakfast and lunch? It must be, then, that the *mon* underwent changes in more areas than just taste; it actually adopted some of the physical characteristics of garlic, enough to do damage.

BROCHOS BEE

This particular feature of *mon* – its ability to assume the actual traits of its consumer's preference—carries with it some other far-reaching ramifications. A question arises regarding the proper blessing to be recited after eating *mon*. To clarify, we have already seen that *bentching* is appropriately recited over *mon*. There was room to contemplate, however, if this is *always* the case. In other words, does the *mon*'s quality-oftaste fluctuation affect its after-blessing? Should we assume that one would *bentch* after eating *mon* only if he had chosen to "eat bread" and



experienced the taste of such? Or do we say that – regardless of its taste – *mon*, like other foods, has its particular fixed blessing, and therefore one would always recite *birkas hamazon*, regardless if he felt like he ate mashed potatoes?

This issue would seem to revolve around the above discussion. If mon were a generic substance, experiencing only a change to its taste, it would stand to reason that it would be accorded one standard after-blessing. Bentching would be called for in all instances, regardless of taste, as that is the blessing deemed most appropriate. However, if we assume that the very essence of mon changed to adapt to the choice of its consumer, the proper blessing would likely be affected. When the mon becomes a shtik broit, one would recite birkas hamazon; but someone with a fetish for eggplant parmesan would end up making a borei nefashos.