



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת היום

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

### Parshas Beshalach 5771 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

(*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):

עד אימתי הוא מברך, עד כדי שיתעכל המזון שבמעיו.

“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

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(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-of-taste fluctuation affect its after-blessing? Should we assume that one would *bentch* after eating *mon* only if he had chosen to “eat bread” and

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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*.