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The Grateful Bread: Improvisational Gratitude (and Other Ways to Say Thanks)

[Elective 3]

AUTHOR(S):	Adam Allenberg
SUMMARY:	We all think food is important, yet we often do little to appreciate our food at camp. And when we do, our blessings sometimes come across as stale, insincere or, at its worst, disrespectful. Embrace the power of gratitude and explore the many ways we can offer our thanks in this session, where we will explore the spiritual power, and physical benefits of gratitude. Using a collection of blessings, songs, rituals, and cheers to end the meal, we will assemble the ingredients necessary to find post-meal gestures that suit your camp community, across a variety of settings. -Adam Allenberg
TOPIC(S):	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why bless our food?2. What does food symbolize, other than nourishment?3. What are different ways to show gratitude for our food?
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	At the end of the session, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe three or more themes in Birkat Ha-mazon.• Share at least one alternative food blessing.
AUDIENCE:	Intended for professional development for staff-in-training and all levels of staff, but could be modified for oldest campers (as problem solving skill building). Individual techniques could be taught to groups of 10-1000 in 10-25 minutes.
TIMING:	60 minutes (individual units can be broken down into 25-45 minute individual programs)
APPENDICES:	Songs and Blessings for Food.pdf The Three Pillars of Jewish Food.pdf
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Lots of markers of all colors 30 copies of: Songs and Blessings for Food.pdf The Three Pillars of Jewish Food.pdf
SET-UP DETAILS:	Anywhere! Chairs for all!



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SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

0:00-0:12 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

- How did you choose this session?
- What do you hope to learn?

Welcome to the The Grateful Bread! My name is Adam, I use he/him pronouns, and I...

0:12-0:25 SETTING THE TABLE AND OUR AGENDA

In our time together in this track we will try to understand the role of blessing food in our tradition, the themes of our traditional birkat ha-mazon and some alternatives to that collection of blessings.

- **What makes the table where we share food a sacred place?**
 - TAKE ANSWERS – COLLECT ON WHITE BOARD
- Introduce the Three Pillars of Jewish Eating (text handout from appendix)
 - Eating – Being Sated – Blessing/Expressing Gratitude
 - Consider Pirkei Avot 3:3 (3:4 in some collections) and/or Chagigah 27a both available in the Appendix: *Three Pillars of Jewish Eating*
- **How is the table at camp a sacred place?**

BEFORE WE EAT – WASHING HANDS

- a. We all now understand, more than we ever thought we might, the importance of handwashing. Our tradition has long maintained that handwashing is preferred before ritual meals (and some follow a custom to wash afterward as well). In the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, this was to both guarantee cleanliness and purity of the sacrifices offered there, but also, in the case of washing afterward, to remove the excess of salt, blood and more that may have been on your hands.
- b. Now it is understood as a necessary safeguard to prevent us from spreading disease and infection.
- c. While it is now commonplace to wash or use hand sanitizer before meals at camp—soap and water are always preferable when possible—consider also the power of water as a tool for transition from the busyness of camp life and into the relative calm of the cabin/camp table.



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d. Questions to consider:

- i. What blessing could be offered to help acknowledge this new state of cleanliness? This point of transition?
- ii. What else could be done to acknowledge the need to enter the meal not only with clean hands, but also with clean minds, respectful mouths, and non-judging eyes?
- iii. How can we see mealtime as an opportunity to “lift up” our hands to offer them for a greater/better/higher purpose? To offer meals as a small checkpoint in the day?

CLASSIC JEWISH HANDWASHING BLESSING

Blessed are you, YHVH
our God, Ruler of All-
Creation, Who has
sanctified us with Your
sacred obligations and
commanded us to **lift up**
hands.

*Baruch Atah Adonai,
Eloheinu Melech Ha-
olam, asher kidshnu
b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu **al**
nitilat yadayim.*

ברוך אתה ייְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
קָדְשָׁנוּ בְמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל נִטְלַת יָדֵינוּ.

START THE MEAL TOGETHER (AS A CABIN, UNIT OR CAMP)

2. I have seen and heard complaints about camps that begin (and end) meals whenever a single person starts eating, which is to say, not together. But if the table and the dining room are communal spaces, and the act of eating together is a sacred act, then why do we treat meals like a free-for-all? What signifies the start of the meal?
3. Let's look at a classic American-Jewish version of the blessing we start most meals with – Ha-Motzi (see Blessings and Song for Meals).

SPECIAL ATTN: GRATITUDE FOR COOKS, SERVERS, HOSTS, ETC.

4. Often at camp, we remember to thank the kitchen staff once or twice a session, or worse, entire summer. But were it not for these people thinking about your stomach and your needs, while you are out doing other things, camp would not be possible.
5. Where have you seen this done well and how did they do it?
6. What are ways that we can show appreciation for all those food workers at our camps daily? Weekly?
7. How can we honor a Shabbat for them?

0:25-0:55 HA-MOTZI AND BIRKAT HA-MAZON

HA-MOTZI – THE ONE-WHO-BRINGS-FORTH

Learning once with [Rabbi Steven Greenberg](#), when he was traveling as a Scholar-in-Residence for [Hazon](#), he taught that blessings are an acknowledgement of that for which we have no real control. We can plant the seed, water it, tend to it, and still only hope that we reap its nutrient-rich rewards. This is a humbling arrangement, for which only immense gratitude is a fitting response. When we say blessings before we



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eat something, we take our place in a lucky chain of connections that rendered this miracle possible. Our Creator, therefore, is the One-Who-brings-forth.

First, look at the English songs we often learn to offer before Ha-Motzi (page one, Songs and Blessings for Food), the blessing we recite over bread. Are either of these versions familiar to you? Do you know it with different words? What do you think of these lyrics? What else could they say?

OPTIONAL: Take 5 Activity!: Take time now – 5 minutes – to write your own introduction to Ha-Motzi

BIRKAT HA-MAZON: GRATITUDE FOR MORE THAN FOOD

Many of us know of or know intimately the classical end of meals Birkat Ha-mazon, lit. “The Blessing of Sustenance”. Let’s get into its incredible messages and what it has to teach us. See – Songs and Blessings for Food, starting on page 2.

The melody that is best known and sung all over the Jewish map was composed in the 20th century by Cantor Moshe Nathanson¹ (1899-1981), while working with Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (Kaplan’s synagogue in New York City, the founding site of Reconstructionist Judaism).

But first –

- Why offer a blessing/collection of blessings after the meal too?
- What is gained from a blessing after that cannot be captured before eating?

Let’s collect answers and ideas from the group.

There are some MAJOR themes covered here.

1. Food (Creation)
2. Land (Revelation)
3. Israel (Redemption)
4. Abundance of Goodness
5. Justice

Talmud Bavli, Brachot 48b

On the topic of the blessings of Grace after Meals, the Gemara adds that the Sages taught in a baraita that the order of Grace after Meals is as follows: The first blessing is the blessing of: Who feeds all; the second is the blessing of the land; the

תנו רכון, סדר ברכות הפקזון כה
היא: ברכה ראשונה — ברכת
”הן”, שנייה — ברכת הארץ,

¹ Fun note: Moshe Nathanson supposedly selected the words and rhythm to Hava Nagilah, based on a niggun attributed to the Sadigurer Chasidim, for his musicology professor Abraham Zevi Idelsohn (1882–1938) at Hebrew University.



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third is: Who builds Jerusalem; and the fourth is: Who is good and does good. On Shabbat one begins the third blessing with consolation and ends with consolation and mentions the sanctity of the day with mention of Shabbat in the middle. Rabbi Eliezer says: If one wishes to recite the supplement for the sanctity of Shabbat in the blessing of consolation: Who builds Jerusalem, he recites it there; in the blessing of the land, he recites it there; in the blessing instituted by the Sages at Yavne, Who is good and does good, he recites it there. And the Rabbis say: He may only recite the mention of the sanctity of Shabbat in the context of the blessing of consolation.

שלישית — "בונה ירושלים", רביעית — "הטוב והמטיב", ושבט — מתחל בנטחה ומסים בנטחה, ואומר קדושת היום באפקע. רבי אליעזר אומר: רצה לאומרתה בנטחה — אומרתה, בכרכפת הארץ — אומרתה, שתקנו חכמים ביכנה — אומרתה. וחכמים אומרים: אין אומרתה אלא בנטחה בלבד.

0:55-1:00 BREAK

Let's look at some examples from our Blessings (and songs) for Food.

- a. REVIEW—
 - i. (AN OLD) BLESSING FOR FOOD (YIDDISH→HEBREW)
 - ii. PRAYERS FROM INTERFAITH WORKER JUSTICE (v. 1 & 2)
 - iii. V'ACHALTA SONG
- b. TIME PERMITTING: WRITE YOUR OWN!

1:05-1:25 BRICH RACHAMANA

Continuing our exploration of gratitude and the different ways that are possible to express thanks for the food we eat together, we will learn a shortened version of the Jewish *birkat ha-mazon*, reserved for times when one is in a rush, under duress (and being chased by bandits!).

1. LEARN THE (CON)TEXT – SOURCE FOR SHORTER BIRKAT HA-MAZON AND TEXT MOST COMMONLY USED
2. NOAH ARONSON TUNE – RECORDING [HERE](#).
3. NOAH ARONSON TUNE + TABLE DANCE – YOU’LL WANT THIS [INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO](#).

TIME PERMITTING:

4. (AN OLD) BLESSING FOR FOOD (YIDDISH→HEBREW)
5. PRAYERS FROM INTERFAITH WORKER JUSTICE (v. 1 & 2)
6. V'ACHALTA SONG



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ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

The Take Aways –

1. Saying Ha-Motzi and/or Birkat Ha-mazon does not need to be an all or nothing affair. Consider teaching just one of the options on the resources shared. Or write your own!
2. Being grateful for our food should begin with thanking those who grow, harvest, ship, prepare, cook, serve, and clean-up our meals. God plays a part, but so do a lot of other people who deserve our gratitude.
3. Meals are a time to share that which is important and dear to us. Blessings are a way to frame that. Ask your campers and fellow diners over a meal, “What is important to you?”