

The Sacred Table: A Tasting Menu for Nourishing Camp Community

Digging In and Giving Thanks

[Specialty Track 2]

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SUMMARY:	<p>Through the lens of the tripartite command in Deuteronomy/<i>Devarim</i> 8:10—</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>When you have eaten, been satisfied, and given thanks to YHVH, your God, for the good land which They have given you.</p> </div> <div style="font-family: serif; text-align: center;"> <p>וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ:</p> </div> </div> <p>--we will establish a three-pillared approach to making food, meal times and the dining hall the second sacred place at camp. <i>Submitted by Adam Allenberg</i></p>
TOPIC(S):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a Jewish meal? 2. What is Jewish food? 3. What is Jewish eating?
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	<p>At the end of the session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what makes a Jewish meal different from a secular meal. • Name three parts of their camp's menu, mealtime and/or dining hall culture that concerns them and identify under which of the three pillars of Jewish eating it may be addressed.
AUDIENCE:	<p>Can be adapted for any age group in an overnight setting and can be broken into three individual programs. Best designed for cabin groups no larger than 20.</p>
TIMING:	90 minutes (individual units can be broken down into 25-45 minute individual programs)
APPENDICES:	None

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<p>MATERIALS NEEDED:</p>	<p>Ritual hand washing cups (2x) Cloth towels (for handwashing) Cloth napkins (bonus) Paper (1pp) Pens (1pp) Snack i.e. piece of fruit or bag of chips (1pp)</p>
<p>SET-UP DETAILS:</p>	<p>Ideally these programs should take place in the dining hall.</p> <p>If not, we should have a room where we can sit around a two-3 rectangular tables (pushed together to form one large, but not long, table) so that we can see one another and simulate dining together.</p>

SESSION TIMELINE:

0:00-0:05 PREPARATORY WRITTEN REFLECTION
0:05-0:45 GOOD MEALTIME ETIQUETTE
0:45-0:50 BREAK
0:50-1:05 MINDFUL EATING / EATING MEDITATION
1:05-1:25 BRICH RACHAMANA
1:25-1:30 CLOSING WRITTEN REFLECTION – 5 MINUTES

SESSION OUTLINE:

0:00-0:05 PREPARATORY WRITTEN REFLECTION

Please take some time to think about what you are bringing into today's learning. Feel free to reflect on whatever you're bringing into our learning or any of today's prompts:

- How have I been eating at this conference? What could I change to be better fed? Better hydrated? To get better energy? To sleep better?
- What are the features of my eating habits that I have thoughtfully chosen and worked hard to reinforce?
- What foods make me feel good? Energetic? Refreshed?

0:05-0:45 GOOD MEALTIME ETIQUETTE

One of the greatest challenges in a large camp dining room is to teach and reinforce etiquette at the table. Most of us dismiss the idea of etiquette as confining, stuffy, or old-fashioned. However, observing polite etiquette at the table and extending that to the entire dining room is also a way we show respect to our fellow diners, the staff who prepared the meal and will clean up after the meal, and to our individual selves. Let's explore etiquette as a means to demonstrate the care we profess for ourselves, our friends, our campers, and our colleagues.

1. 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 into the relative calm of the cabin/camp table.

- 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?
 - i. 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

<p>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.</p>	<p><i>Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al nitilat yadayim.</i></p>	<p>ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על נטילת ידיים.</p>
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2. START THE MEAL TOGETHER (AS A CABIN, UNIT, OR CAMP)
 - a. 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?
 - b. 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).
3. GRATITUDE FOR COOKS, SERVERS, HOSTS, ETC.
 - a. 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.
 - b. Where have you seen this done well and how did they do it?
 - c. What are ways that we can show appreciation for all those food workers at our camps daily? Weekly?
 - d. How can we honor a Shabbat for them?
4. WELCOME NEW STAFF, CAMPERs, AND GUESTS AT THE MEAL BY NAME.
 - a. Mealtimes are one of the major areas of sensitivity for new campers and staff. It is a time of day and space within a community that often has many rules and regulations. We should not assume that those who are new or visiting will know these rules.
 - b. Related to this point is that people should not be left alone, to fend for themselves, or to discover what everyone else already knows.
 - i. Be proactive. Establish a tradition in your dining hall and at your table to:
 - ii. Welcome guests, new campers, and staff by name.
 - iii. Have someone “host” or guide them through the meal. Where do you pick up your food? What if you have special dietary preferences and/or restrictions? What happens at the end of the meal?
5. NO LOUD MUSIC
 - a. Music is an important part of all cultures, not just camp. But the decibel levels that I have experienced and have been reported to me by directors, counselors, and parents is alarming. Not only is it unhealthy for our ears, it's unnecessary.
 - b. Making a larger point – loud music prevents real conversation at the table. The table we share and the food we pass to one another is one of the most important backdrops to life. Not only at camp. Therefore, meals should be a time when cabinmates and co-

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counselors check in with each other. What has happened so far today? What needs attention later today? Who is having a good day? A difficult day?

- c. If we are missing opportunities to be present with ourselves, our bodies, our campers and our co-staff members, all because it's fun to have loud songs to dance in the aisles to, we are misappropriating the intention of the space and setting in which we find ourselves.
6. NO WANDERING THE ROOM
- a. Similar to the point we just made, campers and staff should not be wandering the room eating, meeting, or planning. This is a time for your body to be replenished and for your soul to take pleasure in food. To treat this time as an annoying formality that prevents you from socializing or getting more work done is, again, assigning features to this space that are inappropriate. We are not simply refueling with calories, but also caring for our mental and physical well-being.
7. END THE MEAL TOGETHER (AS A CABIN, UNIT, OR CAMP)
- a. Much like starting the meal together, to signify the sanctity of the meal and being gathered together, ending the meal is an important ritual act as well.
 - b. What signifies the end of the meal?
 - c. We will end our session today with an alternative way to end our camp meals.

0:45-0:50 BREAK

0:50-1:05 MINDFUL EATING / EATING MEDITATION

8. GUIDED MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE—

Rabbi Ba the son of Rav Hiyya bar 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, Brachot 7:5*

This teaching, in short, reminds us that we are to approach the food we eat with intention, our words of blessing and the state in which we offer them, matter.

Take a piece of fruit from the bowl or a snack offered on the table. Preferably something you have not yet eaten today.

Guided Meditation: Close your eyes: You are holding a food which you have not eaten today but will eat shortly. What things needed to happen to get this food into our hands? Who placed its seeds into the ground? Under what sort of conditions did it grow? Was it a hot summer? What did the soil feel like? Did it get enough water or struggle to find moisture in the soil? How was it harvested? What did it look like at that perfect moment when it was mature and ready to be picked? Who picked it? Where did it travel next? How did it get into your hand?

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 this food to this table and into our hands.

Now open your eyes: Look a little more closely at the food in your hand – what does it look like? What features do you see? Colors? Textures? Before tasting, first imagine what it tastes like...

Now, take a taste of your food.

What is different about eating this way?

Want to take this back to camp? Feel free to listen to examples and [get ideas here](#).

9. MINDFUL DINING AND EATING FOR CAMPERS AND STAFF

- a. Being mindful eaters is challenging at camp. But making conscious choices and balancing your diet at camp with your life at camp is critical to maintain your physical and mental health. Consider this permission to care about such things at camp and



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permission to remind your fellow staff members and directors of the necessity of good eating to have a healthy camp. You should ask the following questions daily.

- b. Are kids eating? Are they eating well? Are they eating enough? Are they eating a diversity of foods?
- c. Are you? Are your friends?

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!).

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

1:25-1:30 CLOSING WRITTEN REFLECTION – 5 MINUTES

Feel free to write on one or all of the following questions, or simply write what you’re thinking about and taking away from today’s learning:

- When do I eat so quickly or without thinking that I do not enjoy the food I’m eating?
- What patterns in my eating or my diet would I change, if I simply paused before falling into existing habits?
- What are the ways I can express gratitude when I dine with others? When I dine by myself?

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

Want to teach your camp *Brich Rachamana*? Try teaching it to individual cabins, one at a time. Then get the best from each cabin to be table leaders. You can teach all of camp this version in a few hours, with only a couple of days to reinforce it.