

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted November 23, 2006, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

HOW TO GIVE THANKS AT THANKSGIVING

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Those readers from the United States are beginning to get ready for our holiday of Thanksgiving. There is a sort of standard meal that everyone is supposed to eat: turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, green beans and pie. So how should we give thanks for such a meal?

This year, instead of stumbling, comatose, from the table to the couch, take a second to thank God for the food you just ate.

If you ate bread with the meal and you said "HaMotsi" then you are obligated to say the full Birkat HaMazon after the meal.

If you said some other blessing, such as, "Blessed are You...by whose word everything comes into being" then you can say a shorter form of thanks after the meal.

Some people use the blessing stated below as a (very) short Blessing after the Meal:

If one saw a loaf of bread and said, "How fine a loaf this is! Blessed be the Omnipresent Who created it!"
(B. Berachot 40b)

Later on in this same passage, the following form of blessing is suggested:

Blessed be the All-Merciful, the Master of this bread. (B. Berachot 40b)

We might think that was a good abbreviation, but one sage says we can't say a blessing without that standard beginning ("Blessed are You Who....):

Rabbi Jose says: Anyone who alters the formula for benedictions laid down by the Sages has not fulfilled his obligation....Rav said that any blessing in which God's name is not mentioned is no blessing. Rabbi Yochanan said that any blessing in which God's kingship is not mentioned is no blessing. (B. Berachot 40b)

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with the ritual rules of etiquette about "Motsi" and "Birkat Hamazon"? (If you have ever eaten a kosher meal on an airplane, have you ever wondered why the bread is especially labeled as "m'zonot", i.e., bread that does not need "Hamotsi" said over it? This then means that the diner does not have to ritually wash his hands before eating nor say the long Blessing after Meals.) Should we have to say the full Birkat Hamazon regardless of whether we eat bread or not?
2. If you were to compose your own prayer of thanks, what would it be? Will you say it after your Thanksgiving meal this year?

3. For those of you not in the United States, do you have a national holiday that has this sort of rigidly-defined meal associated with it (besides Pesach)? If so, what is it?