



From Week 1: The Foods of Eden

1. Genesis 3:6

And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating, and that it was desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was good for gazing, and she took of its fruit and she ate, and she gave to her husband with her as well, and he ate.

2. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* pg. 120

Gd forbade man the orgiastic esthetic experience, the acquisition of the pleasure-impulse [as imperative]; he was not allowed to overemphasize the moment of wantonness, making the beauty ideal the fascinating force in human life.

3. Genesis 3:19

By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the earth, for you were taken from there. You are dust, and you will return to dust.

4. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Genesis 3:6

Many have asked: What was the sin of his offspring? These are words of air, for man and animal share one spirit through which he lives and senses in this world. As one dies, so dies the other, aside from the higher portion which Man possesses above the animal.

5. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* pg. 7

The nihilism, instability, helplessness and vulnerability of man – human life and death – are popular themes of prophets who contrast him with the eternity, unchangeability, everlasting life and omnipotence of the Creator.

6. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* pg. 52

The mitzvah of burial indicates the validity of the demand the earth makes on man. She insists upon the return of a part of her own self.

7. Genesis 1:29

And Gd said: Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with fruit of the tree bearing seed, to you it shall be for food.

8. Genesis 2:16-17

¹⁶And the Lord Gd commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. ¹⁷But of the tree of good and evil, you shall not eat therefrom, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die.

Blessings: An Introduction

9. Saturday Night Live, *Pious Housewife* skit, 1993 (<https://snltranscripts.jt.org>)

[open on suburban household, kitchen, as housewife Tina readies her daughter's lunch for school]

Tina: [overzealous in all activities of her day] Alright, darling! Now, you have a real good day at school! But.. let's pray first. [they drop to their kness beside the island] ... Please be with Blair today in school. Help her with her Algebra test. Praise be Your name.

Together: For you are the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever and ever. Amen!

[Husband Darrell enters kitchen, seeming anxious to leave for work]

Darrell: Praise the Lord! [laughs sardonically] How's my little girl? all ready to go?

Daughter: Yep!

Tina: Now, should we pray for you at the office, and your big meeting today, before you go?

Darrell: Oh, didn't we just *do* that when I got out of the shower?

Tina: Well..

Darrell: Why don't you pray.. that we're not late for Blair's bus!

Tina: [laughs]

Darrell: Come on, we gotta go!

Tina: Okay, I love you!

Daughter: Bye, Mommy!...

Darrell: I love you! Goodbye!

Tina: Goodbye! Praise Him! Call me!

Darrell: Alright.

[Darrell and daughter exit; Tina drops back on her knees to continue praying]

Tina: ...Hear me. Turn your countenance toward Blair and Darrell, as he stops the car and then he drives out on the street.. then to 161, and smiles on them, would you, please? All the way to the Franklin Overpass, where Blair catches her bus. [stands, then realizes she forgot something and quickly drops back on her knees] Oh! Oh! Thank you for bringing Luke and Laura back onto General Hospital.. and please be with them as they battle that old Frank Smith and his evil schemes!

10. *Nishmat*, Shabbat morning service, Ashkenaz

If our mouths were full of song like the sea, and our tongues with joyous song like its multitude of waves, and our lips with praise like the broad reaches of the heavens, and our eyes illuminated like the sun and the moon, and our arms outstretched like the eagles of the heavens, and our legs as swift as the harts, we would not suffice to thank You, Hashem, our Gd and Gd of our ancestors, and to bless Your Name, our King, for one of the thousands of thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of benevolences, miracles and wonders You have performed with our ancestors and with us...

11. Isaiah 40:28

Do you not know, have you not heard? The Gd of the universe is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the earth, He does not tire and He is not exhausted, and there is no limit to His wisdom.

Not just fluff

12. Talmud, Berachot 35a

One may not benefit from this world without reciting a blessing. Anyone who does benefit without a blessing is trespassing on sacred property... Rabbi Yehudah taught, citing Shemuel: Anyone who benefits from this world without a blessing is as though he had benefited from property dedicated to Gd; it is written, "The earth and its fullness belong to Gd."

13. Genesis 1:29

And Gd said: Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with fruit of the tree bearing seed, to you it shall be for food.

14. Talmud, Menachot 43b

Rabbi Meir taught: One must recite 100 [מאה] blessings daily; it is written, "Know, Israel, what [מה] Gd expects of you."

15. Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 18:21

Samuel II 23:1 terms King David, "the one who was elevated above [על]" – This is parallel to the 100 [על] blessings. Each day, 100 Jews died; David enacted 100 blessings, and then the plague halted.

The value of the blessing

16. Sample blessing

You are blessed, Gd, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

17. Types Bread; Wine; Tree fruit; Annual produce; Shehakol; Spices

18. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 672-673

Our Sages regarded it as their duty not only to call us from the turmoil of life to a gathering to Gd but to approach us in life itself in order to make vivid for us the thought of Gd in life and to help us towards an active life in the service of Gd... The thoughts of Gd acquired in the Divine inner worship must be held on to firmly in active life, so that life be not divided for us into hours of prayer and hours of activity, standing before Gd in the former but in the latter not walking before Him. What would the Divine inward worship be worth if it did not return us to active life in a holier, stronger, more Gd-filled state, and if it did not transform our whole life into Divine service?

The blessing after eating

19. Deuteronomy 8:10

And you shall eat, and you shall be sated, and you shall bless Hashem, your Gd, for the good land He has given you.

20. Talmud, Berachot 48b

"And you shall eat, and you shall be sated, and you shall bless" – This is the blessing of "He who nourishes"...

"for the land" – This is the blessing for the land.

"the good [land]" – This is the blessing for rebuilding Jerusalem, which is called "the good mountain".

"He has given you" – This is the blessing of "the good, who provides good".

21. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 677

Even for us today – for the scattered Israel that dwells in other countries – the fact that the land of Israel was once granted to us by Gd and, since lost, will one day again be ours, is of holy significance. This fact demonstrates Gd as the Sustainer of our physical existence and teaches us to see in all possessions and enjoyments a Gd-granted means to His service. In these Berachot, the Land of Israel takes its appropriate pride of place among the other facts that form the foundation of Israel – namely, the Divine covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, and the Revelation at Sinai.

The language of "berachah"

22. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 623

From men to Gd, it means nothing but to bless – i.e. either to further by deed the purpose set by Gd for free development, which is the good that He wishes – namely, to fulfill His will; or to declare to Him the furtherance in word – namely, to resolve to fulfill His will.

23. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Genesis 2:3

"Berachah [Blessing]" refers to an increase of good.

24. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 46:1

Each blessing has both the direct 'Blessed are You' and the hidden 'Who sanctified us' because Gd is both revealed and hidden.

A closing thought

25. Talmud, Berachot 20b

The serving angels asked Gd: Master of the Universe, It is written in your Torah, 'He will neither show favor nor take a bribe,' but You show favor to the Jews, as it is written, 'Gd will turn His face to you!'

Gd replied: How can I not show favor to the Jews? I wrote in my Torah, 'You shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your Gd,' and they are careful with themselves even to the point of an olive-sized or egg-sized amount!'