

Food For Thought

Hazon's Sourcebook on
Jews, Food & Contemporary Life

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Hazon means "vision."

We work to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community, and a healthier and more sustainable world for all.

We effect change in three ways: through the direct impact of transformative experiences; thought-leadership (writing, speaking, teaching, curriculum development, and advocacy); and by capacity-building: supporting and networking great projects and people in the US and Israel.

Our fast-growing food work – the largest faith-based Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) network in the country, plus our award-winning blog, The Jew & The Carrot (jcarrot.org), Food Conferences, Food Guide, our Jewish Food Education Network, or curricula materials (from which these texts are extracted) – all create opportunities to reflect on what and how we eat.

Learning leads to doing. If these texts and questions help you to learn more deeply, to eat more consciously, and to act more ethically, then Food for Thought will indeed lead to nourishment in the widest sense – for our families, our communities, and the physical world upon which all life depends.

*"The Torah is a commentary on the world,
and the world is a commentary on the Torah"*



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Wait - what was that bracha?

If they brought before him types of desserts, he recites over them the blessing, 'Creator of types of sweets;' over edible seeds he recites, 'Creator of types of seeds;' and over other herbs he recites, 'Creator of types of herbs;' and over greens he recites, 'Creator of the fruit of the ground.' Rabbi Judah says: [He recites,] 'Blessed are You at Whose word the earth sprouts'.

Rabbi Meir says: Even if one saw a loaf [of bread] and said, 'Blessed are You Who created this loaf, how nice it is,' that serves as its blessing. If one saw figs and said, 'Blessed are You Who created these figs, how nice they are,' that serves as their blessing.

Rabbi Yose says: Anyone who departs from the formula which the sages established for blessings has not fulfilled his obligation.

– *Tosefta Brachot 4:4-5*

The Stones

Our sages taught:

A man should not move stones from his ground to public ground.

A certain man was moving stones from his ground onto public ground when a pious man found him doing so and said to him, "Fool, why do you move stones from ground which is not yours, to ground which is yours?"

The man laughed at him.

Some days later the man had to sell his field, and when he was walking on that public ground he stumbled over those stones.

He then said, "How well did that pious man say to me, 'why do you move stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?'"

– *Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Bava Kama 50b*

Grow your own

Rabbi Ahai ben Yoshiya says: One who purchases grain in the market—to what may such a person be likened? To an infant whose mother died, and they pass him from door to door among wetnurses and (still) the baby is not satisfied. One who buys bread in the marketplace—to what may such a person be likened? It is as if he is dead and buried. But one who eats from his own (what one has grown himself) is like an infant raised at his mother's breasts.

He used to say: During the time that a person eats from what he has grown himself—his mind is tranquil. Even one who eats from that which his father has grown or from that of his mother's or son's, his mind is not tranquil—and you do not [even] need to say [food grown] from that of others [non-relatives].

– *Avot de Rabbi Natan 31:1*

הביאו לפני מיני תרגימה מברך עליהן
'בורא מיני כסני', על הזרעים הוא אומר
'בורא מיני זרעים', ועל הדשאים הוא אומר
'בורא מיני דשאים', ועל הירקות הוא
אומר 'בורא פרי האדמה'. רבי יהודה אומר
'ברוך מצמיח האדמה בדברו'.
רבי מאיר אומר: אפילו ראה את הפת
ואומר 'ברוך אשר ברא את הפת זו כמה
היא נאה', זו ברפתה. ראה את התאנים
ואמר 'ברוך שברא את התאנים הללו,
כמה נאין הן', זו ברפתה.
רבי יוסי אומר: כל המשנה ממטבע שטבעו
חכמים בברכה – לא יצא.

תנו רבנן:

לא יסקל אדם מרשותו לרשות הרבים.

מעשה באדם אחד שהיה מסקל מרשותו לרשות הרבים,

ומצאו חסיד אהה, אמר לו:

ריקה, מפני מה אתה מסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות

שליך?

לגלג עליו.

למים נצרך למכור שדהו, והיה מהלך באותו רשות

הרבים ונכשל באותן אבנים.

אמר: יפה אמר לי אותו חסיד מפני מה אתה מסקל

מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שליך?

רבי אחאי בן יאשיה אומר: הלוקח תבואה

מן השוק, למה הוא דומה? לתינוק שמתה

אמו ומחזירין אותו על פתחי מיניקות

אחרות ואינו שבע. הלוקח פת מן השוק,

למה הוא דומה? באלו חפור וקבור. האוכל

משלו דומה לתינוק המתגדל על שדי אמו:

הוא היה אומר: בזמן שאדם אוכל משלו,

דעתו מיושבת עליו. ואפילו אוכל אדם

משל אביו ומשל אמו ומשל בניו, אין

דעתו מיושבת עליו ואין צריך לומר משל

אחרים.

What is your homeland like?

I was in the Philippines interviewing members of remote hill tribes about their land and livelihood. On a sweltering day in the forested terrain of the Banwa'on people, a gap-toothed chief showed me the trees, streams and farm plots that his tribe had tended for centuries. It was territory, he insisted, they would defend with their lives. As the sun finally slid lower in the sky, he introduced me to a frail old woman who was revered by the others as a traditional priestess. We sat under a sacred tree near her farm and looked out over the Ma'asam River. She asked through an interpreter, "What is your homeland like?"

She looked at me with an expectant smile, but I was speechless. My eyes dropped. Should I tell her about my neighborhood on the edge of Washington, D.C., the one where I then lived with my wife, Amy, and our son, Gary? The one where we could not let Gary play outside because of the traffic?

She repeated the question, thinking I had not heard. "Tell me about your place." Again, I could not answer. Should I tell her about the neighborhood we had previously fled, the one where the dead bodies of young men kept turning up in the alleys?

The one where police helicopters were always shining their spotlights through our windows? The one that had since erupted in riots and suffered the psychotic nonchalance of a serial killer? I said nothing.

The truth was I lacked any connection to my base in Washington, D.C., and for some reason, for the first time, it shamed me. I had breakfasted with senators and shaken hands with presidents, but I was tongue-tied before this barefoot old woman.

"In America," I finally admitted, "we have careers, not places." Looking up, I recognized pity in her eyes.

– Alan Thein Durning, *This Place on Earth*

Vegetables at the market

Raba said to Rafram bar Papa:

Tell me some of the good deeds which Rabbi Huna did. [Rafram bar Papa] said to him: [...]

On the eve of every Sabbath he would send a messenger to the market and any vegetables that the [market] gardeners had left over he bought up and had them thrown into the river.

Should he not rather have had these distributed among the poor?

[He was afraid] lest they would then at times be led to rely upon him and would not trouble to buy any for themselves.

Why did he not give the vegetables to the domestic animals?

He was of the opinion that food fit for human consumption may not be given to animals.

Then why did he purchase them at all? This would lead [the gardeners] to do wrong in the future [by not providing an adequate supply].

...When he had a meal he would open the door wide and declare, Whosoever is in need let him come and eat.

Raba said: All these things I could myself carry out except the last one because there are so many [people] in Mahuza.

– *Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Ta'anit 20b-21a*

Aseh L'cha Rav

Joshua the son of Perachia and Nitai the Arbelite received from them.

Joshua the son of Perachia would say:

Make for yourself a teacher,
acquire for yourself a friend,
and judge every man favorably.

– *Pirkei Avot, 1:6*

אָמַר לֵיהּ רַבָּא לְרַפְרָם בַּר פַּפָּא:
לֵימָא לָן מָר מְהֵנִי מִיְלֵי מַעֲלִייתָא דִּהְוָה
עֵבִיד רַב הוּנָא! אָמַר לֵיהּ: ...

וְכָל פְּנֵיָא דְמַעְלֵי שְׁבִתָּא הָוּה מְשַׁדֵּר
שְׁלוּחָא לְשׁוּקָא, וְכָל יִרְקָא דִּהְוָה פְּיִישׁ לְהוּ
לְגִינָאֵי – זְבִין לֵיהּ, וְשַׁדֵּי לֵיהּ לְנַהֲרָא.

וְלִיתְבִּיהּ לְעֵנִיִּים?
זְמַנִּין דְּסַמְכָא דְעֵתִיָּהּ, וְלֹא אָתוּ לְמִיזְבִּין.
וְלִשְׁדִּיָּהּ לְבַהֲמָה?
קְסַבַּר מֵאֲכַל אָדָם אִין מֵאֲכִילִין לְבַהֲמָה.
וְלֹא לִיזְבִּיָּהּ כְּלָל?
נִמְצְאָת מְכַשִּׁילִין לְעֵתִיד לְבָא.

כִּי הוּוּ כְרֵד רִיפְתָּא הוּוּ פִתַּח לְבַבִּיהּ וְאָמַר:
'כָּל מֵאֵן דְּצָרִיד – לִיתִי וְלִיכֹול.'

אָמַר רַבָּא: כּוּלְהוּ מְצִינָא מְקַיְמָנָא, לְכַר
מְהָא דְלֹא מְצִינָא לְמִיעֵבַד, מִשּׁוּם דְּנִפְיִשִׁי
בְּנֵי חִילָא דְמַחוּזָא.

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִתַּאי הָאֲרַבְלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר,
עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב,
וּקְנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר,
וְהוּי דוֹן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת: