
Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WHAT IS ASKED OF US? "ONLY" TO...: Speaking to his people, Moses presents the totality of Torah's requirements as bearable, reasonable, attainable, and no difficult burden at all. Using his dramatic rhetoric of question-and-answer, he says (Deuteronomy 10:12):

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you? Only to revere the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him—thus to worship the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul! Just that; no more, no less. How striking! Is this so simple and easy? "Only" reverence, complete obedience and love, and total devotion to God! Is this a small, light matter? Why then does Moses use the expression "only" ("ki im")? The talmudic sages argue that for Moses all this was elementary and basic. Speaking from his own vantage, he could say "ki im"—God expects "just" full dedication to Him—for in his view this is indeed essential duty. Another rabbinic interpretation of the "only" phrase is that the "only" attainment which is fully in human hands is the reverence of God; all other attainments, wealth, health, children, and the like, are in the hands of God. Rashi, considering the following verse (13), provides new insight: What God demands of us is not for Himself; "only" for our own good!

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE LOVE-BOND between God and Israel is unparalleled: It is unbreachable and unimpeachable. This is a fundamental doctrine of the Prophets, most dramatically expressed by Hosea, Jeremiah, and with special vigor, by Isaiah (49:14-15): "Zion said: 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Master has forgotten me!' Will a mother forget the infant at her breast? Will she withhold compassion from the child of her womb? Yet even if a mother may forget, I will never forget you!" Even the most supreme love in nature, the mother's for her baby, fails to compare with this celestial love of God for His people. This unique love-bond between God and Israel is unconditional, limitless, unfailing, everlasting. The belief of the people in this prophetic concept of their special divine election—that it is eternal, unchangeable, and unbreakable—has proven to be a sustaining factor in Jewish survival.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

IMAGERY OF WOMANHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD is applied to God by the prophet (Isaiah 49:14-15) illustrating His love for His people: "Zion was saying: 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me!' Would a woman forget her nursing baby, a mother fail to nourish the child of her womb? Yet even they might forget, but I shall never forget you!" Incomparable and sublime is God's love, higher than the highest degree of human compassion known to us, of a mother to her helpless infant. She occasionally may lose or abdicate her motherly devotion; circumstances beyond her control may compel her to do so. But God's loving devotion to His people is firm forever. This prophetic conviction, put to constant test throughout the heroic-tragic history of the Jews, heartening the people and bewildering their enemies, is dramatized by portraying God as mother. In Hebrew Scriptures both feminine and masculine qualities are interchangeably attributed to God, in metaphoric manner only. Unlike other gods who beget, are born and die, the One God of Israel is above any biological or sexual definition. He is the Creator, not a procreator. Far from any corporeality or physical likeness, He has neither gender nor genealogy, is neither male nor female. Only in a purely poetic sense is God perceived in Jewish liturgy and literature in terms of parenthood — both as father and mother — to mark His endlessly sustaining love.

RABBI ZVI Y

"THE GREAT, MIGHTY AND AWESOME": This formula of divine adoration, now fixed in Jewish liturgy, has endured a tortuous history, reflecting Jewish tragedy and heroic survival. The origin of this phrase is in Moses' Deuteronomic address to the people exclaiming that "your God" is superior, powerful, and revered (*gadol, gibbor, nora*; yet nevertheless (or consequently), just and compassionate (Deut. 10:17). Divine supremacy is crowned with divine modesty and benevolence (Talmud Meg. 31a).

Jeremiah, however, praying to God on the eve of the First Destruction, omitted the third title (Jer. 32:17), he admits that God is great and mighty, but not that God is awesome. Strangers terrorize the land ("God's palace"); where is God's awesomeness?

Daniel, praying in Babylonian exile, omitted the second title (Dan. 9:4), admitting that God is great and awesome, but not that God is mighty: Strangers oppress the people ("God's children"); where is God's might?

These great leaders were truthful. They did not say what they did not mean. They knew that God seeks truthfulness, not flattery. Only after Zion's restoration did Ezra and Nehemia restore to their own liturgy the old Mosaic formula of "triadic divine glory" (Neh. 9:32).

Jewish survival has become the enduring testimony to divine grandeur; that God is, indeed, "the great, mighty and awesome," as revealed in the heroics of Jewish survival (Talmud Bavli Yoma 69b).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SEVEN FRUITS are named by Moses in his praise of the land of Israel (Deut. 8:8): "A land of wheat and barley, grape vines, fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive-oil and date-honey." The Bikkurim rite (Ex. 34:26; Deut. 26:2), the offering in the Temple from the First Crops, is only from these seven. Wheat and barley have their harvest in spring between Pesach and Shavuot. While the wheat grains ripen later, around Shavuot, the barley grains ripen earlier around Pesach. On Pesach the barley harvest is celebrated by the Omer offering of a sheaf of barley from the first crops; on Shavuot the wheat harvest is celebrated by the Lechem-Bikkurim offering of two loaves of wheat from the first crops. Pesach and Shavuot, respectively, mark the beginning and the conclusion of the grain harvest season in Israel, spanning seven weeks. During this exciting season all the other mentioned species of fruit—grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, palm-dates—are in blossom, colorfully and fragrantly displaying the enchanting beauty and bounty of the land. The Bikkurim offerings from them take place variably and periodically after their harvest, during the summer between Shavuot and Succot. The final ingathering of all fruit crops, before winter, is marked and celebrated by Succot with gratitude and anticipation for continued plenty.

Friday, August 21, 1992

EEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BIRKAT HA-MAZON – RECITAL OF BLESSINGS TO GOD AFTER MEALS – is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): “When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.” The rabbinic formula of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* consists of four parts: The first part, which originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope: It acknowledges God as the One who sustains all creatures. The second, from the days of Joshua’s conquest of the land, is a thanksgiving for the Divine gift of the holy Torah and the holy land. The third, originating after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion. The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar-Kochba’s revolt (c.135 C.E.), is a concluding expression of gratitude in general for all the good things in life. Despite and especially after a catastrophe, our sages aimed to instill a spirit of joy and gratitude. By the content of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, a Jew is reminded, after enjoying his meal, of his national heritage and destiny. While celebrating life, a Jew commemorates his Jewish experience.

Friday, August 2, 1991

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~~BY RABBI~~ **EHUDA**

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Even (and especially) after a catastrophe, our Sages aimed to imbue a spirit of joy and gratitude. When a Jew enjoys his meal, he is reminded by the content of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* of his national heritage and destiny. While celebrating life, the Jew celebrates his Jewishness.

THOUGHT OF T

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BIRKAT HA-MAZON – BLESSING GOD AFTER MEALS – is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. The rabbinic formula of Birkhat Ha-Mazon consists of four parts: The first part, originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope: It acknowledges God as sustainer of all creatures. The second part, from the days of Joshua's conquest of the land, is thanksgiving for the divine gift of the holy Torah and the holy land. The third part, originated after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion. The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar-Kokhba's revolt (c 135 CE), is a concluding expression of gratitude for all the good things in life. Even, and especially, after a catastrophe, our sages aimed to instill a spirit of joy and gratitude. When, as Jews, we enjoy our meals, we are reminded by the content of Birkhat Ha-Mazon of our national heritage and destiny. While celebrating life, we Jews celebrate our Jewishness.

August 5, 1977

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF "BERAKHA" (blessing God)? The Hebrew phrase "barukh ata hashem" with which every "bèrakha" starts is commonly translated "Blessed are You" (referring to God). This is misleading. The true meaning is: "You (God) are the source of all blessings." We do not "bless" God in the ordinary sense of "wishing" or "granting" Him anything. God is above all this; and who are we to presume to give blessings to Him? A "blessing" is offered to God not in a contributive but in an attributive sense. It is an expression of our recognition that all the marvels and benefits of life stem from God: To Him belongs the world in its entirety; and to us He gave it to cultivate and enjoy its beauty and bounty with responsibility and gratitude. We say a "berakha" to God over our food (Deut. 8:10) not in order to repay Him for His goodness, but to evoke our human awareness, thereby enrich our capacity to enjoy His goodness. A "berakha" bestows no blessings upon God; but it endows man with the divine gift of appreciation and gratification. The purpose of "berakha" in Judaism is to increase man's consciousness and thus intensify his joy of living.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MAN'S CONCEIT is the theme of Moses' speech to his people, faced with the prospect of prosperity (Deut. 8:17-18): "Beware of saying in your heart: 'My own strength, the might of my own hand, have made for me all this wealth.' Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the strength to make the wealth." Torah teaches that it is man's strength (ko'ah) which gains him his wealth (hayil); but it is God who provides man with the needed "ko'ah" to seek and achieve "hayil." The term "ko'ah" includes all man's faculties, his intuition and reason, his initiative and stamina, his insight and skill – all his qualities, physical as well as mental. All this must be developed and utilized by man himself for his benefit and success: "hayil." "Hayil" means might, riches and affluence as well as valor, virtue and integrity; essentially it indicates man's accomplishments. In the wake of any human achievement, be it materialistic or spiritual, lurks the threat of arrogance and conceit. Piety as well as prosperity both may lead to self-delusion: either self-reliance or self-righteousness. From Avot (2:9): "If you have learned much Torah, do not pride yourself; it is for this purpose that you have been created." Torah entrusts man with the duty of creativity on all levels; but also teaches him to live with humility.

Candlelight time 7:58 Sabbath ends 9:00
Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Aug. 23:
EKEV: Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25
HAFTARAH: Isaiah 49-14:51:3

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

YIRAH AND AHAVA (reverence and love) are two complementary aspects of human devotion to God (Deut. 10:12): "What does God ask of you? Only that you revere Him, and walk in all His ways; and that you love Him, and worship Him with all your heart and soul." "Revere" implies a sense of awe and admiration; "love" a feeling of desire and attraction — the former in awareness of God's remoteness, the latter in quest for His closeness. Are the two compatible?

The terms "yirah" and "ahava" in Judaism are essentially behavioral; more than emotions they indicate actions: to be reverently careful not to do what is prohibited, and lovingly loyal to do what is obligatory. Thus reverence and love are two sides of the same coin: Devotion to God.

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JUSTICE AND VICTORY are expressed in biblical Hebrew by the same term – *tzedek*. Thus, in Isaiah's rhetorical question (49:24), "Can spoils be taken from a hero, or captives retrieved from a victor?" – the Hebrew for victor is *tzadik*. In the same vein, enlightenment and success are expressed in biblical Hebrew by the same term, *sekhel*, connoting both perception and affluence. Thus, the title *maskil* applies in biblical literature to both the wise and the successful – the one who excels in understanding as well as the one who excels in all life endeavors.

This intriguing linguistic usage points to the biblical idea that true victory is achieved by justice, and true success by wisdom. The *tzadik*, the just, is ultimately the victor. The *maskil*, the wise, is truly the successful.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

RIGHTNESS AND VICTORY.

These two seemingly unrelated concepts, are expressed in biblical Hebrew by the same term – *tsedek*. Thus, in Isaiah's rhetorical question (49:24), "Can spoils be taken from a hero, or captives retrieved from a victor?" – the Hebrew for victor is *tsadik*, a term usually reserved for a just and righteous person. A victorious hero is thus projected – in a prophetic, ideal world – to be in the right. Moreover, historically speaking, victory is in some cases a culmination of our rightful quest for survival. It is an expression and exercise of justice, of *tsedek*. We may recall the words of Winston Churchill promoting the urgency of Allied victory over the Nazi forces in World War II: *Victory at*

all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival."

In the same vein, the two ideas of enlightenment and success are expressed in biblical Hebrew by the same term, *sekhel*, connoting wisdom and perception on the one hand and prosperity and affluence on the other. Thus the title "*maskil*" applies in biblical literature to both the wise and the successful - the one who excels in understanding as well as the one who excels in all life endeavors.

This intriguing linguistic linkage points to the biblical idea that true victory is achieved by justice and true success by wisdom. The *tzadik*, the just, is ultimately the victor. The *maskil*, the enlightened, the successful.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: *The Jewish idea of prayer is rooted in the verse, "To serve Him with the wholeness of your heart and being." (Deut. 11-13.). Says the Talmud: "Such service is tefila (prayer)." More than supplication to, adoration of, or confession before God, Tefila, a reflexive act, involves man's self-expression and self-examination. Whereas the word "prayer" suggests imploring God, "tefila" implies exploring oneself. Reflecting man's innate yearnings to the Creator of all, tefila is a mode of "korban" (commonly translated "sacrifice"), in its original meaning of coming closer to God. It is man's pouring out of his "nefesh," offering his innermost, his very being, passionately and unreservedly before God. Man's penetration into the mysteries and depths of his own heart and mind is in itself a powerful and resourceful healing force, by which man offering himself, finds himself. Tefila is an offer to God which opens in man many of his locked wellsprings of emotion, perception, awareness and determination. Whereas prayer is basically entreatment, indicating man's precarious situation, tefila is basically entrustment, revealing man's positive confiding in and gratitude to his Creator.*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

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... "TEFILA" (prayer) is taught in the verse, "To serve Him with the wholeness of your heart and being." (Deut. 11-13). More than supplication to, adoration of, or confession before God, the act of tefila, a reflexive verb, involves man's self-expression and self-examination. Tefila is not exactly "prayer." "Prayer" suggests imploring God; "tefila," exploring oneself. Man's penetration into the mysteries and depths of his own heart and mind is in itself a powerful and resourceful act, by which man offering himself, finds himself. Tefila is an offer to God which opens in man many of his locked wellsprings of emotion, perception, awareness and determination. The term "prayer" basically means entreatment, indicating man's precarious situation; "Tefila," on the other hand, is basically entrustment, expressing man's positive confidence in and gratitude to his Creator. Uttered in speech, tefila is essentially "Worship of the Heart." "The Merciful One," say the rabbis, "looks for the heart" -- the purity and integrity of one's intention.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“NOT ON BREAD ALONE:” The unusual life style of the Israelites in the Sinai Wilderness teaches a lesson for generations: “He let you suffer, hunger, and be fed with manna which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to make you understand that not on bread alone does man live; rather on all that is ordained by the Lord does man live.” (Deut. 8:3) Man is not confined to any fixed form of self-provision; he is charged with dynamic adaptability to new life conditions and different means of survival. Paganism imbued man with a sense of ultimate dependence on his immediate and customary sources of livelihood. Contrarily, Torah teaches that all nature’s bounty, bread or any other sustenance, is ordained by the Lord. Born in His image, man is called upon to tend and utilize nature’s resources with responsibility and mastery.

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"NOT ON BREAD ALONE": The unusual life style of the Israelites in the Sinai Wilderness teaches a lesson for generations: "He let you suffer, hunger, and be fed with manna which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to make you understand that not on bread alone does man live; rather on all that is ordained by the Lord does man live" (Deut. 8:3). Man is not confined to any fixed form of self-provision; he is charged with dynamic adaptability to new life conditions and different means of survival. Paganism imbued man with a sense of ultimate dependency on his immediate and customary sources of livelihood. Contrarily, Torah teaches that all nature's bounty, bread or any other sustenance, is ordained by the Lord. Born in His image, man is called upon to tend and utilize nature's resources with responsibility and mastery.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF "BERACHA" (blessing God)? A "beracha" normally starts with the phrase "baruch ata Hashem." This is commonly translated "Blessed are You" (referring to God), which is inaccurate. We certainly do not "bless" God in the ordinary sense of "wishing" or "granting" Him anything. Our God is above all this ("le'eila mikol hirchata"); and who are we to presume to give blessings to Him? But the true meaning of "barucha ata" is: "You (God) are the source of all blessings." A "beracha" to God is not contributive but attributive: We express our recognition that all the marvels and benefits of life stem from God. To Him belongs the world in its entirety; and to us He gave it to cherish and enjoy its beauty and bounty with responsibility and gratitude. The "beracha" over food (Deut. 8:10) is said not to repay God for His goodness, but to evoke in man the awareness of God, thus enhancing his capacity to enjoy God's goodness. A "beracha" bestows no blessings upon God, but it endows man with the divine gift of appreciation and gratification.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE IDEA OF ISRAEL as the "Chosen People" represents a belief in a universal God. Only the One God who is Creator of the whole universe and Master of all mankind has both the option and the power to elect one of his many nations to be his special treasure. A local-national "god" does not "choose" his people since his destiny is totally dependent on and confined to them. Thus the idea of Israel's divine election, far from being an expression of a particularistic and parochial outlook, is a profound manifestation of universal monotheism. This idea does not convey any notion of racial superiority or religious exclusivity; on the contrary, by conferring special responsibility upon the chosen people, it paves the way for genuine tolerance. All other nations do not have to adopt Judaism in order to be "saved." Judaism is for Jews; all others may find their way to God through their own respective religions and traditions. As long as they have decency and morality (Code of Noah), no matter what their creed is, they are wholly fulfilled.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / AUGUST 2, 1996

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BIRKAT HA-MAZON (blessing God after meals) – is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): “When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.” The rabbinic formula of *Birkhat Ha-Mazon* consists of four parts: the first part, originated in the days of Moses, acknowledges God as the One who sustains all creatures. The second part, from the days of Joshua’s conquest, is a thanksgiving for the divine gift of the holy Torah and the Holy Land. The third part,

originated after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion. The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar-Kokhva’s revolt (c. 135 C.E.), is an expression of gratitude for all the good things in life.

Even (and especially) after a catastrophe, our sages aimed to imbue a spirit of joy and gratitude. When a Jew enjoys his meal he is reminded by the content of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* of his national heritage and destiny.

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

BIRKAT HA-MAZON, BLESSING GOD AFTER MEALS (grace) — is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): “When you eat and are satisfied, bless *Hashem*, your God, for the good land God has given you.” The rabbinic formula of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* consists of four parts: The first part, which originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope. It acknowledges God as the One who sustains all creatures. The second part, from the days of Joshua’s conquest of the land, is a thanksgiving for the divine gift of the holy Torah and the holy land. The third part,

originated after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion. The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar-Kokhva’s revolt (c. 135 CE), is a concluding expression of gratitude for all the good things in life. Even (and especially) after a catastrophe, our Sages aimed to imbue a spirit of joy and gratitude.

When we Jews enjoy our meals we are reminded by the content of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* of our national heritage and destiny. While celebrating life, a Jew celebrates his or her Jewishness.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BIRKAT HA-MAZON - RECITAL OF BLESSINGS TO GOD AFTER MEALS (so-called "grace") - is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): "When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you." The rabbinic formula of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* consists of four parts: The first, originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope. It acknowledges God as the one who sustains all creatures. The second, from the days of Joshua's conquest of the land, is a thanksgiving for the Divine gift of the holy Torah and the holy land. The third, originated after Kings David and Solomon, made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion. The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar Kochba's revolt (c. 135 C.E.), is an expression of gratitude for all the good things in life. Even, and especially, after a catastrophe, our sages aimed to instill a spirit of joy and gratitude. By the content of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, a Jew is reminded, after enjoying his meal, of his national heritage and destiny.

THE GREAT, MIGHTY, AND AWESOME": This triadic formula of Divine adoration, fixed in Jewish liturgy, has its origin in Moses' address to the people. Moses describes God as great (*gadol*; superior), mighty (*gibbor*, powerful) and awesome (*nora*, revered), yet just and compassionate (Deut. 10:17). The prophets after Moses, however, were less lavish in praising God. Jeremiah, at the eve of the first destruction, omitted from his prayer the third title "awesome" (*nora*): Strangers terrorize "God's palace" (the land), where is God's awesomeness? (Jer. 32:17). Daniel, in his prayer in Babylonian exile, omitted the second title, "mighty" (*gibbor*): Strangers oppress "God's children" (the people), where is God's might? (Dan. 9:4).

Only after Zion's restoration was the Mosaic formula of Divine glory fully restored into liturgy by Ezra and Nehemia (Neh. 9:32). Jewish heroic survival has become an enduring testimony to Divine grandeur, that God is "the great, mighty, and awesome" (Talmud Yoma 69b).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BLESSING GOD AFTER MEALS (*Birkat Hamazon*) is based on Deuteronomy 8:10: "When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you." The rabbinic formula consists of four parts: the first part, originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope; it acknowledges God as sustainer of all creatures; the second, from the days of Joshua's conquest of the land, is a thanksgiving for the divine gift of Torah and the Holy Land; the third, originated after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion; the fourth, added after the fall of Bar Kochba's revolt (about 135 CE), is a concluding expression of gratitude in general for all the good things in life. Even--and especially--after a catastrophe, our Sages aimed to install a spirit of joy and gratitude. When a Jew enjoys his meal he is reminded by the content of *Birkat Hamazon* of his national heritage and destiny while celebrating life.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"TO LOVE THE GER" - the proselyte who joined Judaism - is a special mitzvah (Deuteronomy 10:19): "Show love toward the stranger, for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt." The "stranger" in this verse includes one who has embraced the Jewish people and thus is no longer a stranger. Says Rabbi Ben Lakish (Tanhuma on Genesis 14:1): "More beloved is the proselyte than those hosts of Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, for they accepted the Torah only after they saw the lightning and heard the thunder, but the proselyte accepted it from his inner conviction." Although the general precept of loving one's fellow as oneself (Leviticus 19:18) applies to the proselyte as well, yet "because he adopted the Jewish faith, Torah prescribes more love for him, and adds a special precept in his behalf" (Maimonides in *Sefer Hamitzvot A/107*). By loving the *ger*, Jew by choice, the Jew by birth shows his positive feelings about his own Jewish identity.

Birkat ha-mazon - blessing God after meals - is based on Deuteronomy (8:10): When you eat and are satisfied, bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. The rabbinic formula of this meal blessing consists of four parts. The first, originated in the days of Moses, is universal in scope; it acknowledges God as sustainer of all creatures. The second, from the days of Joshua's conquest of the land, is a thanksgiving for the Divine gift of holy Torah and the Holy Land. The third part, originated after Kings David and Solomon made Jerusalem the capital of the land, is a prayer for the restoration of Zion.

The fourth part, added after the fall of Bar-Kochba's revolt (c. 135 C.E.), is a concluding expression of gratitude for all the good things in life. Even, and especially, after a catastrophe, our sages wished to install a spirit of joy and gratitude. When you enjoy your meal, you are reminded by the content of Birkat Ha-Mazon of your national heritage and destiny. While celebrating life, you celebrate your Jewishness.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

TO LOVE THE GER (proselyte who joined Judaism; so-called "convert") is a special *mitzva* (Dt. 10:19). By embracing the Jewish people, its history and destiny, the *ger* is no more a stranger. We must welcome and embrace him; accept and treat him as one of us. The general rule of loving one's fellow as oneself (Lev. 19:18) includes the proselyte; yet, "because he adopted the Jewish faith, Torah prescribes more love for him, and adds a special precept in his behalf" (Maimonides).

Ben Lakish: "More beloved is the proselyte than those hosts of Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, for the latter accepted the Torah only after they saw the lightning and heard the thunder, but the proselyte accepted it from his inner conviction" (*Tan. Gen. 14:1*). By loving the *ger*, Jew-by-choice, the Jew-by-birth shows his appreciation of his own Jewishness; in a way, "choosing" it anew.

Friday, August 6, 1993

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“LOVE THE *GER!*” Embrace the *ger* with loving-kindness (Dt. 10:19). The term *ger* in this phrase refers to a proselyte to Judaism (commonly, but inaccurately called “convert”). The *ger* is one who has embraced the Jewish people and faith and is no more a stranger, but a part of the people. Torah teaches that we welcome and befriend the one who joins us as one of us.

To become a Jew by choice, today as ever, is most heroic and admirable. Even a Jew by birth must constantly reaffirm his or her Jewishness by choosing to live as a Jew. Thus, a Jew by birth becomes a Jew by choice. By loving the *ger*, by treating the Jew “by choice” with respect, the one who is a Jew “by birth” shows positive feelings about his or her own self. More than an act of kindness, loving the *ger* is an expression of joy and pride in one’s own Jewishness. Loving the *ger* is loving oneself.

Friday, August 10, 1990

THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“TO LOVE THE *GER*” – the proselyte who joined Judaism – is a special *mitzva* (Deuteronomy 10:19): “Show love toward the stranger, for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt.” The “stranger” in this verse includes one who has embraced the Jewish people and thus is a stranger no more. Torah instructs that we welcome and befriend him, and accept him as one of us. Although the general precept of loving one’s fellow as oneself (Leviticus 19:18) applies to the proselyte as well, yet “because he adopted the Jewish faith, Torah prescribes more love for him, and adds a special precept in his behalf” (Maimonides in *Sefer Hamitzvot* A/107). By loving the *ger*, Jew by choice, the Jew by birth shows his positive feelings about his own Jewishness. It is an expression of one’s contentment and pride in oneself – loving one’s own Jewish identity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TO LOVE THE GER, the proselyte who joined Judaism, is a special precept (Deut. 10:19): "Show love toward the stranger, for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt." The stranger mentioned in this verse is one who has embraced the Jewish people and is no more a stranger. We are instructed by Torah to welcome and befriend him and accept him as one of us. Although the general precept of loving one's fellow as oneself (Leviticus 19:18) applies to the proselyte as well, yet—so explains Maimonides (Sefer Hamitzvot A/107)—"because he adopted the Jewish faith, Torah prescribed more love for him, and added a special precept in his behalf." Rabbi Ben Lakish (*Tanhuma* on Gen. 14:1) says: "More beloved is the proselyte than those hosts of Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, for they accepted the Torah only after they saw the lightning and heard the thunder, but the proselyte accepted it from his inner conviction."