

Blessings for our Food

Jewish Traditions of Praise, Thanksgiving and Song

**Grace After Meals
Kiddush for Shabbat and Festivals
Zemirot and Selected Songs**

featuring

**Complete Hebrew text
Full transliteration
Contemporary English translation
Instructions and commentary
Egalitarian and inclusive language
Singlish™ (singable English) renderings—an SPS exclusive!**

**by
Irrev. Dr. Joe Lewis**

Introduction

Grace after Meals—for many of us, it’s a memory of all the barmitzvahs and weddings we’ve ever attended.

We collect a wide variety of booklets, and pull them out when we have guests. But those books are often close packed with poorly printed, tiny Hebrew letters. The instructions, often as not, are all in Hebrew, perhaps in Rashi script; and for most of us, that renders them as curious as they are impractical.

This book is designed to be practical.

A practical book

When your guests have different levels of Hebrew literacy, this is the book for you. They can join in with the Hebrew, or the transliteration, or they can sing along in Singlish—a rhyming English translation that fits the popular tune.

Good examples of Singlish are the beginning and ending songs of Bircat Hamazon, fairly close translations in rhyme, which will fit the popular tune used for the Hebrew.

The Singlish parts are in bold type.

Translation

If you’re like me, you prefer a translation which lets you follow the original word for word. So when the translation takes poetic license, this book often provides a literal translation too. However, I confess that the English or Singlish rendering sometimes embellishes the Hebrew for the sake of modern idiom and rhyme.

What’s included

In addition to Grace after Meals, you have the complete Friday night rituals for the home, as well as kiddush for festivals, and

havdalah. No more hunting around in the siddur for the text of kiddush on Shavuot!

But wait, there’s more! You also get a selection of favorite Hebrew songs, chasidic nigunim, and zemirot, with completely new verse and prose translations. The choice of songs is simply a matter of personal taste—in this case, my taste.

Less sexist

The translation does not assume that all children are sons, or that all parents are fathers, or that God is male. Don’t most of us think that God transcends human ideas of male and female? Hebrew makes everything—trees, tires and treats—either masculine or feminine; English has a third option, the neuter “it.” In Hebrew, referring to God as “he” does not mean the same as it does in English; in fact, it could be misleading.

As far as possible, the translation avoids masculine pronouns to refer to God. The result will no doubt go too far for some and not far enough for others, leaving many to take offense, but perhaps it will prod us to ponder questions of sexism in religion, in family, and in authority.

Instead of a masculine pronoun, the translation sometimes inserts “God,” and in such cases the word is in italics. God is never translated “Lord,” even though that word is far easier to rhyme than “God.” To convey God’s mastery, terms like “Sovereign,” “Ruler,” and sometimes even “Boss” are used.

Does this sound too colloquial? Perhaps, but it seems right for our society. Today, few people live where a king or queen can upset their lives. The figure who has great and

Contents

Preface to the Third Edition	ix	For All This	28
Introduction	xi	3. Have Mercy	29
A practical book	xi	Shabbat	30
Translation	xi	Shabbat	30
What's included	xi	For Festivals	31
Less sexist	xi	Rebuild Jerusalem	32
The Matriarchs	xii	Bonei Yerushalayim	32
Transliteration and typography	xii	4. The Source of Goodness	33
Not authoritative	xii	Hatov Vehemetiv	33
Parting thoughts	xii	The Merciful One	34
Contents	xiii	Harachaman	34
Friday Evening	1	A Selection From Psalms	39
Light The Candles	1	At a Wedding Feast	40
Shalom Aleichem	2	The Seven Wedding Blessings	41
Bless The Children	3	At a Circumcision Feast	44
Eshet Chayil	4	Circumcision Poem	46
Eshet Chayil Alternatives	7	In a House of Mourning	49
Kiddush for Friday Night	8	End of Third Berachah, House of Mourning	50
Havdalah	10	Fourth Berachah in a House of Mourning	51
Eliyahu Hanavi	12	Shorter Grace	52
Shavu'a Tov	12	Meals Without Bread	54
Hamavdil	12	Blessings Before Food	54
Festival Evening	13	Al Hamichyah	55
Light The Candles	13	Borei Nefashot	58
Add on Friday Night	13	Selected Songs	59
Kiddush for Festival Evening	14	Ba'olam Habah	59
Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah	16	Rachel Amda	59
Add on Saturday Night	17	Mah Tovu	59
Concluding the Festival Kiddush	18	Etz Chayim	60
Kiddush Before Lunch	19	Oseh Shalom	60
Shabbat Morning	19	Hineh Mah Tov	60
Festival Mornings	20	David Melech Yisra'el	61
For Shabbat and Festivals	20	Od Avinu Chai	61
Washing Hands	21	Am Yisra'el Chai	61
Blessing for Bread	21	Lo Yisa Goy	61
Grace After Meals	22	Tse'na	61
Psalm 126	22	Leshanah Haba'ah	61
Invitation to Say Grace	23	Yevarech'cha	62
1. God the Provider	24	Ufaratzta	62
2. For The Land	25	Eretz Zavav Chalav	62
On Chanukah and Purim	26		

Im Tirtzu	62	Kol Dodi	74
Adon Olam	63	Mi Ha'ish	74
Hashivenu	64	Tzam'ah Nafshi	74
Esah Einai	64	Ke'ayal Ta'arog	75
Sisu et Yerushalayim	64	Or Zaru'a	75
Shalom Rav	65	Yismechu Hashamayim	75
Od Yishama	65	Chasidic Songs	76
Al Naharot Bavel	65	Yam Bam Bam	76
Mipi El	66	La La La	76
Lechu Neran'na	67	Zemirot for Friday Night	77
Hatikvah	68	Yom Zeh LeYisra'el	77
Lecha Dodi	68	Mah Yedidut Menuchatech	79
Shabbat Shalom	68	Yah Ribon	83
Mah Yafeh Hayom	68	Menuchah Vesimchah	86
Hevenu Shalom Aleichem	68	Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i	88
Siman Tov	68	Tzamah Nafshi	90
Hachamah Merosh	69	Tsur Mishelo	93
David, King of Israel	69	Zemirot for Shabbat Morning	96
David Melech Yisra'el	69	Yom Shabbaton	96
Ush'avtem Mayim	69	Ki Eshmera Shabbat	99
Halelu	69	Yom Zeh Mechubad	102
Hoshi'ah Et Amecha	70	Dror Yikrah	105
Eleh Chamdah Libi	70	Baruch El Elyon	107
Artza Alinu	70	Shimru Shabtotai	111
Dodi Li	70	El Hahoda'ot	114
Yesusum	70	Samchenu	114
Ki Hem Chayeinu	71	Zemirot for Se'udah Shlishit	115
Vayiven Uziyahu	71	Shehashalom Shelo	115
Al Sh'loshah Devarim	71	Yedid Nefesh	115
Mizmor LeDavid	72		

Grace After Meals

בְּרַבַּת הַמְזוֹן

Bircat Hamazon

.....Sing this psalm on Shabbat, festivals and other festive occasions.....

Psalm 126

A song of going up:

When God returns the Jews,

Takes us back to Zion,

We'll marvel at the news.

שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת

בְּשׁוּב יי

אֶת-שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן

הַיֵּינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים

Shir hama'a lot:

Beshuv Adonai

et shivat Tziyon

hayinu kecholmim.

Our talk will all be laughter,

Words can't tell our mirth;

No tongue can speak our joy,

No language upon earth.

אָז ימָלֵא

שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ

וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה

Az yimaleh

sechok pinu

ulshonenu rina.

Among the other folk they'll say,

"What God has done

for them is great."

God's done an awful lot for us;

Filled with joy, we celebrate.

אָז יאֲמֵרוּ בְּגוֹיִם

הַגְּדִיל יי

לְעֲשׂוֹת עִם-אֱלֹהִים

הַגְּדִיל יי לְעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ

הַיֵּינוּ שִׂמְחִים

Az yomru vagoyim,

"Higdil Adonai

la'asot im eileh."

Higdil Adonai la'asot imanu;

hayinu semechim.

Take us back, God,

Back to our old land

Like streams returning

To the arid sand.

שׁוּבָה יי אֶת-שְׁבִיתֵינוּ

כְּאֲפִיקִים בְּנֶגֶב

Shuva Adonai et shevitenu

ka'afikim banegev.

In mourning though they sow their seed,

In happiness they'll reap their yield.

הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדַמְעָה

בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ

Hazorim bedima

berina yiktzoru.

To sow the seed, bowed with grief

The plowman plods his weary way;

His heart will surely feel relief

Bringing in the sheaves on harvest day.

הַלֹּחֵף יִלֶּךְ וּבָכָה

נִשָּׂא מִשְׁךְ הַזֶּרַע

בֹּא-יָבֵא בְרִנָּה

נִשָּׂא אֲלֻמֹּתָיו

Haloch yelech uvacho

no'se meshech hazara,

bo yavo verina

no'se alumotav.

..... Some add these lines from psalms 145:21, 115:18, 118:1, and 106:2.....

In praise of God my mouth will speak,	תְּהִלַּת יְיָ יִדְבַּר פִּי	Tehillat Adonia yedaber pi
And every living thing will bless	וַיְבָרֵךְ כָּל בָּשָׂר	vivarech kol basar
God's holy name for evermore.	שֵׁם קֹדְשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד	shem kodsho le'olam va'ed.
And as for us, we shall bless God	וְאֲנַחְנוּ נִבְרָךְ יְהוָה	Va'anachnu nevarech Yah
From now for ever.	מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם	me'atah ve'ad olam,
Halleluyah!	הַלְלוּיָהּ	halleluyah!
Thank our God, for God is good,	הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב	Hodu lAdonai ki tov
God's kindness forever stays.	כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ	ki le'olam chasdo.
Who can tell God's mighty deeds,	מִי יַמַּלֵּל גְּבוּרוֹת יְיָ	Mi yemalel gevurot Adonai,
Or set to words all of God's praise?	יִשְׁמִיעַ כָּל תְּהִלָּתוֹ	yashmi'a kol tehilato?

Invitation to Say Grace

זִמּוּן Zimun

*When three or more adults have eaten together, one invites the others to join in prayer.
(At a wedding, see page 40; at a circumcision, page 44; in a house of mourning, page 49.)*

..... *The leader begins*

Friends, let's give thanks!	חַבְרַי נִבְרָךְ	Chaverai, nevarech!
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..... *Friends respond, and the leader repeats*

May God's name be blessed now and forever.	יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבֹרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם	Yehi shem Adonai mevorach me'ata ve'ad olam.
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..... *The leader continues (add "Eloheinu" if 10 or more Jewish adults are at the table)*

With the approval of my friends, let's bless our God who provides our food. ¹	בְּרִשׁוֹת חַבְרַי נִבְרָךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁאֲכַלְנוּ מִשְׁלוֹ	Bir'shut chaverai, nevarech Eloheinu she'achalnu mishelo.
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..... *Friends respond, and the leader repeats (add "Eloheinu" when 10 Jewish adults gather)*

Bless our God who provides our food, and by whose goodness we live.	בָּרוּךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁאֲכַלְנוּ מִשְׁלוֹ וּבְטוֹבוֹ חַיֵּינוּ	Baruch Eloheinu she'achalnu mishelo uv'tuvo chayinu.
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..... *All together*

Blessed is God, blessed is God's name!	בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּבְרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ	Baruch hu uvaruch shemo!
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¹ "Who provides our food" is literally, "we have eaten what is his."

At a Circumcision Feast

זימון Zimun

..... *At a circumcision, the Invitation to Say Grace includes extra poetry*

The leader takes a cup of wine and invites the company to prayer:

Friends, let's give thanks! **חַבְרֵי נְבֻרָךְ** Chaverai, nevarech!

..... *Friends respond, and the leader repeats*

May God's name be blessed **יְהִי שֵׁם יי מְבֻרָךְ** Yehi shem Adonai mevorach
now and forever. **מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם** me'ata ve'ad olam.

..... *The leader responds, and friends repeat*

Let us give thanks to your name **נוֹדֵה לְשִׁמְחָה** Nodeh leshimchah
among my faithful companions: **בְּתוֹךְ אֲמוּנָי** betoch emunai,
You are blessed by God!¹ **בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לִי** beruchim atem lAdonai.

..... *The leader continues, invoking the approval of God, Torah and religious experts*

With the approval of God, **בְּרִשׁוֹת אֵל** Birshut El
revered and awesome, **אָיוֹם וְנוֹרָה** ayom venorah,
shelter in times of trouble, **מִשְׁגֵּב לְעֵתוֹת בְּצָרָה** misgav le'itot betzarah,
God clothed² in power, **אֵל נְאֻזָר בְּגִבּוֹרָה** El ne'ezar bigvurah,
high and mighty God... **אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם יי** adir bamarom Adonai...

..... *All repeat "Nodeh leshimchah," and the leader continues*

With the approval of holy Torah— **בְּרִשׁוֹת הַתּוֹרָה הַקְּדוּשָׁה** Birshut haTorah hkdoshah—
it's pure and clearly explained³— **טְהוֹרָה הִיא וְגַם פְּרוּשָׁה** tehorah hi vegam perushah—
commanded us as an inheritance **צִוָּה לָנוּ מוֹרָשָׁה** tziva lanu morashah
by Moses, God's servant... **מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד יי** Moshe eved Adonai...

¹ This allows more extensive interpretation, for example: "Let us *together* give thanks to your (i.e., God's) name (or reputation), in the middle of my faithful ones (i.e., in this company of people who share my beliefs)—you (i.e., the faithful ones) are blessed for God."

² The root **אזר** is usually translated "girt" or "girded"—I think it refers to the last step in getting dressed, wrapping a belt or "girdle" around your robe to fasten it.

³ **פרש** is the root of the word for interpretation or explanation of the Torah. The poem suggests that the meaning of the Torah is perfectly clear, but not everyone would agree!

Zemirot for Shabbat Morning

The Seventh Day

Keep in mind the seventh day;
The thought is like a breath of air!
Noah's dove found rest today;
Weary, we rest from worldly care.
Noah's dove found rest today;
Weary, we rest from worldly care.¹

For trusty folk
this day alone
They guard with watchful care,
for love;
It's told in Moses'
slabs of stone
Carved by the untiring
force above.²

Noah's dove ...

יום שַׁבָּתוֹן Yom Shabbaton

יום שַׁבָּתוֹן אֵין לִשְׁכּוֹחַ
זְכֵרוּ כֶּרֶךְ הַנִּיחֹחַ
יוֹנָה מְצָאָה בּוֹ מְנוּחַ
וְשָׁם יְנוּחוּ יְגִיעֵי כַח
יוֹנָה מְצָאָה בּוֹ מְנוּחַ
וְשָׁם יְנוּחוּ יְגִיעֵי כַח
Yom shabbaton ein lishko'ach
zichro kere'ach hanicho'ach.
Yonah matz'ah vo mano'ach
vesham yanuchu yegi'ei cho'ach.
Yonah matz'ah vo mano'ach
vesham yanuchu yegi'ei cho'ach.

הַיּוֹם נִכְבָּד
לְבָנֵי אֱמוּנִים
זְהִירִים לְשִׁמְרוֹ
אָבוֹת וּבָנִים
חָקוּק בִּשְׁנֵי
לְחוֹת אֲבָנִים
מֵרֶב אוֹנִים
וְאִמִּיץ כַּח
Hayom nichbad
livney emunim
zehirim leshomro
avot uvanim,
chakuk bishney
luchot avanim
merov onim
ve'amitz ko'ach.

... יוֹנָה Yonah ...

¹ “The day of rest is not to be forgotten; remembering it is like the sweet smell of *sacrifices* (so Shabbat observance perhaps replaces our sacrificial obligations). On this day the dove *which Noah sent out from the Ark* found rest, and there shall the tired find rest.”

² “This day is honored for the children of the faithful *who are* careful to observe—*both* parents and children—*its rules*, carved in the two tablets of stone by the manifold power and *the One who has* mighty power.”