

JewishTimes

VAYERAH – NOV. 11, 2011



*Tending to Man
Don't Look Back*

Vayerah

Relationship to Wisdom

Talking After Hamotzi



Book Reviews: www.Mesora.org/ReligionofReason

Rabbi Reuven Mann — Rabbi of Young Israel of Phoenix

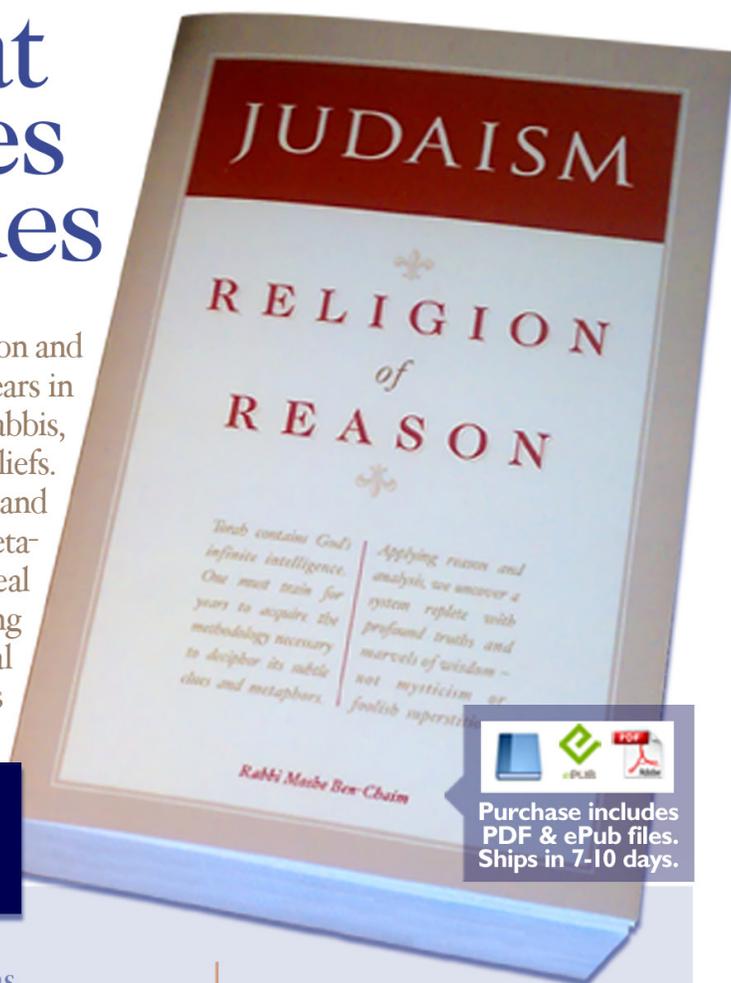
Rabbi Steven Weil — Exec. Vice Pres. The Orthodox Union

A book that finally takes on the issues

by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Jews have succumbed to mystical religion and pop-kabbala; a thoughtless life. Ten years in the making, the author cites the Rabbis, unveiling the fallacy of widespread beliefs. He focuses on Torah's brilliance and method of decryption; unraveling metaphors and interpreting texts to reveal hidden gems. Readers will enjoy a long overdue, rational exposé of cultural beliefs, and a unique look at Torah's deep insights.

Free Preview



Purchase includes PDF & ePub files. Ships in 7-10 days.

Partial chapter listing:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| What is God? | Afflictions |
| Rabbis' blessings | Ayin harah – “Evil eye” |
| Can God do Anything? | The age of the universe |
| Superstition | God isn't everywhere |
| Astrology | How God teaches man |
| Praying to the dead | The meaning of life |
| Reincarnation | Does idolatry work? |
| Bashert | Angels |
| Why the good suffer | The secret of the Ark |
| Is God running my life? | Shivim Panim l'Torah |
| Segulas & amulets | 9/11 |
| Shadim – “demons” | Method in learning |
| Reward and punishment | King Solomon's wisdom |



**10 years in the making.
417 pages.**



TENDING TO MAN

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Whether we understand the story of the three men visiting Abraham as literal or as a vision (Rambam), we are intrigued by Abraham's zeal and honor in his treatment of these men; three complete strangers.

Although in pain from circumcision, he waits in the "heat of the day" to find wayfarers to serve. Upon seeing the three men, He runs to them, bows to them, addresses the leader as "master" (Rambam) and refers to himself as a servant. He runs to attend to them, prepares a luxurious meal sparing no expense, and waits upon them as they eat.

(Abraham's perfection displayed in this account is no less compromised if this was a vision.)

This is the same Abraham who courageously waged battle against four mighty kings: he was no meek individual. What was Abraham's intent with his high-level treatment of these men? Is this categorized as kindness? Certainly it is, but perhaps there was a greater objective.

God appeared to Abraham in the "Plains of Mamre". Mamre was one of Abraham's allies. Daas Zikanim teaches that God appeared here, precisely to pay honor

to Mamre, since he gave Abraham good advice. In other words, His appearance at this location was to honor Mamre. Why? Abraham asked Mamre, “Shall I perform circumcision publicly or privately?” Mamre said publicly. “How shall I get my entire household to agree to circumcision?” Mamre said that if Abraham and Ishmael would perform it first, it would be easier to convince his household.

Abraham was concerned to reach others, and not simply with his teaching. He understood human nature and therefore he acted in a manner that forged strong bonds of identification and genuine friendships. He did this, as he understood that man is impressed with those who show respect and care for them. This was part of Mamre’s advice: act, and others will follow.

I believe this is why Abraham tended to these men in such a manner. To eventually attract them to the Creator, Abraham understood that others will be more acceptable of changing their philosophy, if their teacher (Abraham) is a true friend and respects them. This instills in others a deep sense of appreciation for Abraham. The three men will become convinced that Abraham does not simply wish to oppose them or their philosophies, but he cares about them, as he attended to them with such dignity and concern for all aspects.

Imagine a man running towards you, not simply walking. This shows his excitement at your presence. He bows to you, making you feel important. He calls you “master”, offering you elevated dignity. He calls himself “servant”, displaying no challenge to your ego. He prepares a great meal for you, sparing no expense. Money is what most people value, and when others spend it on you, you feel honored and indebted. He waits upon you as you eat, to be available, should you need anything, and to determine your satisfaction with the feast. This person is at your disposal.

This story of Abraham’s level of care for man, is connected with God’s appearance – His promise of a child and news of Sodom. As God says later, He will not keep hidden from Abraham the matter of Sodom since Abraham teaches others God’s path, of righteousness and justice. As a teacher of God’s way and one concerned for humanity expressed to these three men, Abraham must know more about God’s methods if he is to accurately share truths. Thus, the story of Abraham’s attending these men, his receipt of a child and news of Sodom are interrelated. Its is due to Abraham’s desire to share God’s ways with others, that he is blessed with others(children) and also taught of God’s considerations regarding Providence, and Reward and Punishment (Sodom). ■



DON'T LOOK BACK

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week’s Parsha, Vayera, depicts G-d’s judgement of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and illustrates the principle that the “Lord is Righteous in all His Ways.” Hashem acceded to all of Avraham’s requests and agreed to spare the place if ten righteous people could be found. However, that was not the case and Sodom was doomed to destruction. Hashem’s compassion prevailed even in executing the punishment. He sent messengers to rescue Avraham’s nephew Lot and his family. The verse says, “When G-d destroyed the cities of the plain He remembered Abraham and sent forth Lot from amidst the upheaval...” Some take this to mean that Lot was spared not because of personal merit but only because of his relationship to Avraham. This idea may be troubling as it suggests that even in matters of Divine Judgement who you know can be as vital as who you are.

There is, however, another way of understanding the salvation of Lot. The Torah describes in great detail the extent to which he went in serving his guests and shielding them from the evil townspeople. Lot had acquired great virtues due to his association with Abraham. He deserves credit for joining him on his journey to Canaan and preserving the secret of Sarah during their stay in Egypt. True, a dispute broke out between his and Abraham’s shepherds which prompted Abraham to request a formal “separation.” However, Lot was a generous and compassionate person, who resided in Sodom but did not adopt its hateful philosophy. He was saved from the destruction because he preserved his righteousness in the midst of a wicked society.

The fate of Lot’s wife is puzzling. The angels had warned Lot and his family not to look back. However, “his wife peered behind him and she became a pillar of salt.” At first glance the meaning of this development is difficult to comprehend. We are working with the assump-

tion that Lot and his party were righteous people who resisted the evil of Sodom. Why does the act of “peering behind” warrant destruction?

The Rabbis say that when serving her guests she withheld the salt and therefore was turned into a pillar of salt. This is difficult as it seems to contradict the text which says that she was punished for looking back. Moreover, the judgement seems unduly harsh. She welcomed guests to her house and served them food. What is so egregious about the omission of salt? A great Torah scholar offered an intriguing explanation. There was, he said a difference between Lot and his wife. He was completely unaffected by the wickedness of Sodom and practiced hospitality with a full heart. The same was not true of his wife. Withholding the salt indicated that she was in a state of conflict. She performed the act of giving but did so begrudgingly. The explanation of the Rabbis now corresponds to the text. The messengers were aware of her ambivalence and exhorted her not to look back, which meant that she should sever her identification with the wicked people and disassociate from them emotionally as well as physically. Looking back showed that she retained her connection to the corrupt society of Sodom. Lot was attracted to Sodom because its lush pastures were ideal for his vast flocks. He failed to recognize the spiritual danger of exposing his family to an evil cultural environment. For this he paid a heavy price. The Torah exhorts us to choose our neighbors and friends carefully and distance ourselves from morally harmful influences. Above all, we should seek to establish relationships with wise and righteous people to learn from their wisdom and be inspired by their good deeds. ■

VAYERAH

Rabbi Bernie Fox

Hashem’s Agents and their Various Missions

And he lifted his eyes and he saw that three men were standing before him. And he saw and he ran from the opening of his tent to greet them. And he bowed towards the ground. (Beresheit 18:2)

Each malach has a single task

Hashem sends three messengers to Avraham. Rashi refers to these messengers as malachim – angels. He explains that an individual malach – angel – can only have a single mission. Each of the malachim that visited with Avraham had a unique assignment. The angel Michael came with the tidings that Sarah will have a son – Yitzchak. Raphael came to heal Avraham and aid his

recovery from his circumcision. Gavriel was assigned the task of destroying Sedom.

After Michael foretold the birth of Yitzchak, he left Avraham and the others. His job was done. The remaining two messengers proceeded to Sedom. Gavriel would now destroy Sedom. Raphael would rescue Lote.

Raphael’s two tasks express a single theme

Rashi acknowledges that Raphael’s two responsibilities present a problem. An individual angel can only be assigned a single mission. Raphael seems to have had two tasks. His first assignment was to heal Avraham. Having completed that assignment, he then executed a second responsibility. He saved Lote.

Rashi responds that the assignment of two tasks to Raphael does not violate the principle that only a single task may be assigned to an individual angel. Both of Raphael’s tasks involved salvation. Because of this common feature, a single angel could perform both tasks.

Rashi’s comments present two problems. First, he never seems to answer his question. He concludes that one angel did perform two tasks. Rashi argues that because these two tasks were related, the question is somehow answered. However, the relationship seems rather artificial. Rashi describes both of Raphael’s missions as acts of salvation. The rescue of Lote was a true act of salvation. However, the healing of Avraham was an act of salvation in only a figurative sense. Avraham was saved from additional physical pain.

Second, why does Rashi insist that the dual responsibility fell to Raphael? There is another candidate for two tasks. Michael foretold Yitzchak’s birth. Why could Michael not be assigned the task of saving Lote? It seems that these two responsibilities could also be characterized under the general heading of salvation. We know that Avraham was deeply concerned with having children. Michael relieved Avraham of this anxiety. This is also a form of salvation.

An alternative version of the angels’ missions

Rashi’s comments are based upon the Midrash Rabba (50:2). However, this same incident is discussed in the Talmud. In the Talmud’s discussion, Raphael is assigned only the single task of healing Avraham. Indeed, it is Michael who has two tasks. He foretells the birth of Yitzchak and he saved Lote. In other words, the very alternative that the Midrash ignores is accepted by the Talmud. Both sources agree that a single angel can have but one assignment. Yet, each insists on its own version of how the assignments were distributed. The table below summarizes the dispute between the Midrash and the Talmud:

Assignment	Angel	
	Midrash/Rashi	Talmud
Foretelling Yitzchak's birth	Michael	Michael
Healing Avraham	Raphael	Raphael
Destruction of Sedom	Gavriel	Gavriel
Saving of Lote	Raphael	Michael

Rashi's understanding of the Torah's account of the angels

In order to answer these questions, we must understand Rashi's comments at a deeper level. We need to explain the Rashi's basic principle: an individual angel can have only a single responsibility.

It seems that Rashi maintains that each angel or messenger represents a different theme within Divine providence. Each expresses a unique objective. The various themes are identified by associating each with a different messenger. In other words, the incidents described in the opening of the parasha – the healing of Avraham, the birth of Yitzchak – foretold in the opening passages, the destruction of Sedom, and the rescue of Lote are all expressions of Divine providence. According to Rashi, through its discussion of these events in relation to the angels, the Torah is revealing the considerations or factors that underlay this series of providential events. The Torah is explaining why each of these events occurred.

This understanding of Rashi's principle suggests an approach to answering our questions. Apparently, Rashi maintains that the healing of Avraham and the saving of Lote are manifestations of a single theme or consideration within providence. In order to understand the relationship between these two tasks, we must identify the themes represented by the angels.

One theme is easy to identify. Providence is sometimes an expression of Divine justice. This theme is represented by Gavriel – the malach that destroyed Sedom. The other two themes are more difficult to differentiate. The remaining two angels – Michael and Raphael – seem to have had similar objectives. They are expressions of Hashem's kindness to Avraham. Raphael healed Avraham. Michael foretold Yitzchak's birth. What are the different themes these malachim represent?

Rashi explains earlier that the world was created with a specific objective. Hashem created a world that would embody and give expression to the Torah. Avraham was chosen to be the progenitor of the nation that would receive the Torah. He served as the instrument for the fulfillment of the Creator's plan. Granting a child to Avraham, was an expression of the Divine plan to create a sacred nation.

We can now identify the theme represented by Michael – the angel that foretold Yitzchak's birth. Michael was an expression of the Divine design to create of world embodying Torah.

The theme represented by Raphael – the angel that healed Avraham – can now be distinguished. This malach represents the providence that Hashem grants the righteous. The healing of Avraham was not an expression of Divine justice. It was not part of Hashem's design for His world. This healing was simply a kindness performed for the righteous.

It is now clear that Raphael, who healed Avraham, was the appropriate angel to save Lote. Lote's salvation was also an act of kindness performed on behalf of Avraham. It is appropriate that the healing angel should perform this task. He represents the theme of Hashem's providence over the righteous.

In other words, Rashi maintains that these three angels represent three themes in providence. They can be summarized as follows:

- Hashem treats humanity with justice (Gavriel).
- Hashem has a plan and design for humanity (Michael).
- Hashem's providence protects and sustains his righteous (Raphael).

These themes are all expressions of Hashem's relationship with humanity. He judges; He has a plan and design for humankind; His providence envelopes His righteous.

The Talmud's understanding of the melachim's missions

However, as noted, the Talmud disagrees with Rashi and the Midrash's assignment of two tasks to Raphael. According to the Talmud, it was Michael who performed two assignments. He foretold Yitzchak's birth and he rescued Lote. What shared characteristic underlies the assignment of these very different tasks to Michael?

Apparently, the Talmud is suggesting an alternative interpretation of Michael's and Raphael's missions. In this interpretation, the rescue of Lote is more akin to Michael's assignment than it is to Raphael's. What is this interpretation?

And Hashem said to Avraham: Why does Sarah laugh saying "Will I truly give birth and I am aged"? Is anything too great for Hashem. At the appointed time I will return to you and Sarah will have a son. (Beresheit 18:13-14)

The significance and meaning of the miracle of Yitzchak's birth

As the Torah explains, Sarah was barren for most of her life. In extreme old age, her youth returned; she achieved fertility, and give birth to Yitzchak. It seems that for some reason, it was not Hashem's will for Sarah to conceive earlier. What does this reveal? Sarah was barren. Conception would have required a miraculous intervention even at an earlier age. However, a two-fold miracle took place when Sarah conceived Yitzchak in her old age. First, she achieved fertility. Second, she did this during the time in her life in which this should have been biologically impossible. In other words, it was Hashem's design that Yitzchak's birth should be a clear and evident miracle. Why was this miraculous birth necessary? How would have Hashem's plan been compromised were Yitzchak born early in Sarah's life – before it became apparent she was barren?

Apparently, it was essential that Yitzchak's birth be understood as an act of providence resulting from Avraham's righteousness. In other word's Yitzchak's birth testified to the relationship between Hashem and Avraham. When Micahel told Avraham and Sarah that in a year Yitzchak would be born, he was not merely revealing that they would experience the joy of having a son. He was communicating to them that Hashem would demonstrate through this birth His special relationship with Avraham.

However, one approaching event threatened to contradict and undermine this demonstration. Sedom was to be destroyed. Avraham's nephew Lote – whom Avraham had previously rescued – lived in Sedom. Lote's death among the people of Sedom would suggest that Avraham was not completely protected by Hashem's providence or that this providence has limits. Therefore, in order for Yitzchak's birth to communicate an unequivocal and undeniable message, Lote had to be rescued. As Michael was the messenger who foretold Yitzchak's birth, the task of saving Lote was assigned to him.

The Midrash cited by Rashi and the Talmud have different perspectives of the missions of Michael and Raphael. Raphael symbolizes Hashem's special relationship with Avraham. This relationship is expressed through Avraham's rapid recovery from milah and the rescue of his nephew. Michael symbolizes the Divine plan for humanity. Yitzchak's birth was a crucial element in the unfolding of this design.

The Talmud regards the missions of Michael and Raphael as more closely related. Both symbolize Hashem's relationship with Avraham. However, Raphael represents the personal and private element of that relationship. Mi-

chael symbolizes the demonstration of that relationship to humanity through overt miracles and wonders. Yitzchak's birth was an example of the wonders that result from the providence of the omnipotent Creator. The rescue of Lote was a necessary element of Michael's mission. Without this rescue, the message communicated by Yitzchak's birth would be compromised and undermined. ■



OUR RELATIONSHIP TO WISDOM

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Jerusalem Talmud Berachos (last page):

“R. Shimon b. Lakish said: I found in the Megillas Chassidim this maxim: ‘If you abandon Me for one day, I will leave you for two days.’ This is like two individuals who having journeyed; one from Tiberias and the other from Sephoris, meet at an inn; then they continue on the road. Before they will travel a mile in their respective directions, they are two miles apart. Again, if a woman waits for a one she loves, she will wait as long as he keeps her in his thoughts. As soon as she hears he no longer thinks about her, she hastens to espouse another.”



This Talmudic portion describes 2 types of departures from Torah engagement. The 2 departures are from corresponding engagements with Torah: 1) casual and 2) dedicated.

The first type of engagement is casual. There's no previous relationship. Two men were from distant cities, unknown to each other, they met momentarily without establishing a relationship, and then continued on their way. When departed from each other, neither one has a thought of the other. This analogy to wisdom will play out as follows: man is involved in his worldly pursuits, he momentarily encounters wisdom, and then resumes his business activities. Wisdom readily vacates his thoughts. As his energies are wrapped up in the business world, it will take great energy for him to abandon that love, and return to Torah. This is expressed as "leaving wisdom for one day, it leaves you for two days". Meaning, greater energies are required to reenter the world of wisdom.

But when man is "engaged" in Torah wisdom like a bride, it matters none that he might be preoccupied for hours or days at business or other pursuits. Since he is attached to wisdom, she (Torah) awaits his return. This teaches that the value we place on wisdom causes it to remain on our minds, regardless of the necessary activities in which we must engage for our needs. This is akin to a man in love with a woman; his thoughts never leave her, no matter how long distant from her. We they reunite, it is as if he never left; they quickly resume their relationship. Therefore, a break in our studies will not necessarily affect our attachment to wisdom or the ease by which we reenter study after such a break.

We learn that a tremendous attachment to wisdom is available to all people, akin to romance, as King Solomon describes in Song of Songs (Shir HaShirim). We also come to appreciate the Rabbis' insight into human nature. They understood the fine details of our inner workings. In this example, they share a specific insight into the relationship between our values and actions. They demonstrate that our inner values determine our abilities, more than our mechanical activities. Although at times, we might require a few days of non-stop labor to feed our families, if we value wisdom, that very value enables us to reengage in thought as soon as the work is complete. ■

TALKING AFTER HAMOTZI

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

We are all aware that speaking between the recitation of a bracha and the eating of food is problematic. In fact, whereas many prohibitions are not enforced on children before a certain age, in most households, even the youngest children can be heard joining in on the collective shushing of anyone who breaks the silence, especially when it comes to reciting hamotzi at the shabbos table. Ironically, talking after a bracha may not be the grave error we believe it to be, depending, of course, on the content (no, football scores don't make the cut).

The Talmud offers the following (Berachos 40a):

"Rab said: [If the host says to his guests,] Take, the benediction has been said, take, the benediction has been said, he [the host] need not say the benediction [again]. If he said [between the benediction and the eating], Bring salt, bring relish, he must say the benediction [again]. R. Johanan, however, said that even if he said, Bring salt, bring relish, the benediction need not be repeated. If he said, Mix fodder for the oxen, mix fodder for the oxen, he must repeat the blessing; R. Shesheth, however, said that even if he said, Mix fodder for the oxen, he need not repeat; for Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: A man is forbidden to eat before he gives food to his beast, since it says. And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and then, thou shalt eat and be satisfied."

We can clearly see from this that some form of talking is permitted between the recitation of hamotzi and the actual consumption of bread. Rashi explains that even though talking is considered a hefsek between the recitation of the bracha and the action, such as talking between placing the tefillin of the yad and tefillin of the rosh, in this case since the sicha is relevant to the bracha, it is not considered a hefsek.

But in order to determine the permissibility of this action, we should first get a basic understanding of the hefsek. Clearly, the Talmud has an assumption that any talking whatsoever between the bracha and the achila is problematic. The chiddush is that sometimes it is not, and it is dependent upon whether it is tzorech bracha. It is quite clear that the halachic (as opposed to the philosophical) concept of reciting a bracha is a revelation of one's thoughts, a gilui daas. Enunciating the bracha creates the need for a tziruf, or connection, between his daas and the bread he is to eat. This being the case, there could be two ways to view dibbur after the bracha is recited. One pos-

sibility is that any talking done after the bracha is viewed as a separate dibbur altogether. In other words, the new dibbur itself is viewed as discrete in relation to the initial bracha. No matter what the content of the dibbur may be, the fact that it is another dibbur breaks the tziruf. Yet there is another way one can view dibbur after the bracha. Rather than dibbur itself creating the break, the tziruf can exist as long as there is a thematic tie between the bracha and that which he is speaking about. In other words, there is a natural thematic relationship between the bracha and that which is tzorech bracha. The dibbur functions as an extension of the dibbur of the bracha, rather than taking on its own identity. As long as the dibbur has this feature, it is viewed as an extension of the daas of the mevarech, and there is no break in the tziruf.

The Talmud must now qualify what fits under the category of tzorech bracha. One common idea that ties the three examples together is that tzorech bracha refers to that which helps bring about the implementation of the achila. For example, feeding the animals before one eats is part of the overall performance of eating bread after the bracha is recited. The same can be said for bringing salt or for instructing that the bread be passed to the other participants of the meal. (Each one of these issues requires its own sevara, but these will not be included due to space considerations)

This helps clarify the basic concept of tzorech bracha, but there is an issue raised that further refines this idea. The Bais Yosef (OC 167) writes that according to Rashi (and others), tzorech bracha refers to those matters relevant to the eating of bread, the topic of the specific bracha. The examples of the Talmud, then, are to be strictly adhered to. Asking for salt is ok, but asking to bring the chulent to the table would be considered an interruption. However, the Rambam seems to maintain otherwise. He seems to indicate (Hilchos Brachos 1:7) that any dibbur related to the overall seudah is permitted. So, asking to bring the kugel (not to be too stereotypical) is permitted and would not be considered a hefsek. How do we understand this debate?

One possible approach lies in the unique concept of bread being the key element in creating seudah. Both opinions agree that one is koveah seudah with bread. The question is whether the bracha plays a role in its creation, or does it emerge through eating the bread. According to Rashi, it is only once the bread is consumed that the

phenomenon of seudah exists. Therefore, one may only speak about matters directly related to the specific bracha and food, like any other birchas nehenin. Yet according to the Rambam, it could be that the bracha is actually the haschallas seudah. Imbued in the very bracha itself is the concept of keviyas seudah im lechem. In other words, the bracha of hamotzi is really a bracha on seudah, and not just the bread itself. Therefore, there is a natural tziruf between any dibbur related to the meal and the bracha.

There are some other issues that are taken up by the poskim. One interesting one deals with at what point when eating is a person allowed to speak. In general, consumption is viewed in terms of swallowing. The Magen Avraham (OC 167:16) maintains that one should therefore not speak while he is still chewing, or prior to swallowing. However, if one did speak while chewing, he need not recite the bracha again. However, the Elyah Rabbah (as cited by the Shaar HaTziyon 167:30) seems to maintain that one should recite the bracha again. The Mishneh Berura (ibid 35) leaves the issue in doubt, unsure whether or not one needs to repeat the bracha. The Aruch Hashulchan (ibid 13) indicates that one should not repeat the bracha.

Another issue is taken up by R Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe OC 2:49) regarding reciting the bracha in one language, and then translating it into another prior to eating the bread. If someone recited the bracha in English, and then translated into Hebrew, the second recitation would be considered not just a hefsek, but a bracha levatala. The rationale for this is that a bracha can be recited in any language (See Rambam Hilchos Brachos 1:6), so a translation would be a repetition. However, if someone first recited the bracha in Hebrew, and then translated it into English prior to eating the bread, he would not be reciting a bracha levatala; but it is still considered a hefsek. The reason why, according to R Moshe, is that reciting the bracha in English does not involve enunciating the name of God. If one needs to translate the bracha, he should recite the bracha first, eat a little, and then translate. Those relying on his bracha to eat their own bread are permitted to wait until the completion of the translated bracha.

So, the next time the mevarech instructs those at his table to eat their bread before he has eaten his own, just relax. No need to be concerned with this “interruption”, as it is just a continuation of the bracha. ■