Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 49:

1. **The mannaand the first blessing.** Devarim 8:10, “*ve’achalta vesavata uveirachta*,” is our source for *bircat hamazon*. Let’s look at this verse in context. Starting with verse 2, Moses tells the people to remember their journey through the desert. G-d sent them on this journey and gave them difficulties in order to test them, to see if they would keep His mitzvot. He afflicted them, made them hungry, and gave them the manna, which had never been seen before, to teach them that people don’t live on bread alone but on the word of G-d. G-d would now be bringing them to a good land, a land of streams and springs coming out of the valleys and the mountains, a land of wheat and barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and date honey, a fertile land where they wouldn’t lack for food or resources. “And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your G-d...” Based on these verses, we can understand the mannain two different ways. One is that G-d afflicted the people with hunger and then gave them mannaas a solution. The other is that the mannaitself was an affliction, in a way. Yes, the people were able to eat, but the mannadid not satisfy them. Why not? Perhaps because they could not save the mannafrom one day to the next, so they always had to have faith that more would fall the next day. Having food in your pantry brings a sense of stability and security, and the people in the desert never had that. Nor did they get to feel the satisfaction that comes from earning and making your own food. In addition, they missed the taste of real food. The mannawas a miracle, and we needed it during those 40 years. But it was also an affliction, and G-d loves us too much to let us suffer this affliction forever. When the people entered the land of Israel there was no more manna, because there comes a point where we need to provide for ourselves and not be fed by miracles. Just like parents can’t protect their children from everything, because children need to learn how to deal with hardships in life, G-d did not want us to rely on His miraculous food forever. The mannawasn’t the ultimate goal; the goal was to settle the land and find a place to build a home for G-d. But Moses, who instituted the first blessing of *bircat hamazon*, wasn’t able to see that ultimate goal fulfilled. Settling the land had to wait for Joshua, and the Temple had to wait for King David and King Solomon. So the blessing that Moses composed was just about getting nourishment from food, however it comes - whether it is easy and miraculous, or harder but ultimately more satisfying. Most of this blessing focuses on the Divine source of all sustenance, since Moses experienced the manna, but the version composed by Moses also included a mention of the land and a place for the future Temple.
2. **The second blessing: important points.** Joshua composed the second blessing of *bircat hamazon* when the nation entered the land. “We thank You, our G-d, on the good land that You caused our forebears to inherit, a good a spacious land; and on Your having taken us out of the house of Egypt, the house of slavery; and on the covenant of our flesh that You’ve made and the Torah that You’ve taught us…” We don’t know which of these words were actually written by Joshua and which were added later by the rabbis. The main theme of the blessing is gratitude for the land. The Talmud points out some important features of this blessing: It must begin and end with gratitude; it must mention the covenant of circumcision and the Torah, our main merits for inheriting the land; and it must conclude with one thing but open with more than one thing. In addition, it is important that we not conclude the blessing by saying that G-d gives land to all the nations. G-d entered into a special relationship with us when He gave us the land. We want to emphasize that relationship and remember how G-d took us out of Egypt and tested us and ultimately gave us the land. He may have given other lands to other nations, but giving us the land of Israel represents something completely different.
3. **The third blessing and the kingship of David.** King David and King Solomon instituted the third blessing of *bircat hamazon*, thanking G-d for giving them Jerusalem and the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple, the wording of this blessing was changed. We now use it to ask G-d to return us to Jerusalem. The blessing that we say today references the Kingdom of David, asks G-d to make it so that we don’t need to rely on human beings but can rely only on G-d’s hand and so that we are not shamed or humiliated, and ends with a prayer that Jerusalem be rebuilt soon. We end it with the word *amen*, so as to distinguish the first three blessings from the fourth. The gemara says that if you do not mention the kingship of the house of David in this blessing, you haven’t fulfilled your obligation and you must say *bircat hamazon* again. The mention of the kingship of David was probably added later and not written by King David himself, but it does not matter who composed these words. All of the text of *bircat hamazon*, even that written by Moses, is rabbinic. When it comes to their liturgical compositions, Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon all have the status of regular rabbis. We have a Biblical obligation to say *bircat hamazon*, and we fulfill the obligation by reciting the words exactly as the rabbis instituted them. The rabbis have declared that mentioning the kingship of the house of David is especially important, and so we cannot fufill the obligation without saying those specific words.
4. **We do not bundle mitzvot.** How do we conclude the blessing on the rebuilding of Jerusalem? Rabbi Yose says “*moshia yisrael*” - G-d Who saves Israel. But this is the blessing on Jerusalem; shouldn’t we mention rebuilding Jerusalem in the conclusion? He clarifies that you can end the blessing either with “*moshia yisrael*” or with rebuilding Jerusalem. Rabba bar Rav Huna was in the home of the Exilarch, and he began the third blessing with one statement and concluded with two. But Rav Chisda says we don’t conclude a blessing with two things, because *ein osin mitzvot chavilot chavilot* - we do not bundle mitzvot. Doing multiple mitzvot at the same time makes it seem like the mitzvot are a burden to you and you’re just trying to get them out of the way. It’s disrespectful. Rashi says that though the brachot are not individual mitzvot, doubling them is still similar to bundling mitzvot and should not be done. Even Torah study should not be “bundled.” There is a gemara elsewhere that says it’s better to study fewer things and take time to review them than to study more. Studying too much and reviewing too little gives you information overload, and you’ll end up not understanding anything that you’ve learned. Before closing this book and opening the next one, it’s important to pause and make sure you’ve fully processed what you just read. For the same reason, someone who is new to mitzvot should not try to take on everything at once. It’s better to take it slow and take the time to learn about each mitzvah, and to learn what is most important. When you take the time to learn about a specific mitzvah in depth, it can greatly enhance your performance of that mitzvah. We want each prayer and each blessing to focus on one specific theme rather than lumping in multiple ideas all together, so that we do not become overwhelmed and we can properly focus on and experience each prayer and each blessing. Many people make commitments to halachic observance but struggle to have *kavanah* and a personal relationship with G-d. Studying a section of Talmud in depth and trying to find its relevance to serving G-d in a very specific way will help us grow in our *kavanah* much more than studying a bundle of sections would. Even those who don’t study chassidus or mussar can immerse themselves deeply in Torah that shines a spotlight on a single mitzvah.
5. **Circumcision in the second blessing.** The second blessing of *bircat hamazon* includes not just our gratitude for the land but our gratitude for the merits that allowed us to inherit it: the covenant of circumcision, the Torah, and mitzvot. Circumcision is mentioned first, because our covenant with G-d is mentioned 13 times in connection with circumcision and four times in connection with the Torah. When G-d commanded Abraham to circumcise himself, He specifically said that this was how Abraham would merit the land of Israel. These concepts are integral to the blessing on the land. Just as one cannot fulfill his obligation in *bircat hamazon* without mentioning the kingship of the house of David in the third blessing, one cannot fulfill his obligation without mentioning circumcision and the Torah in the second blessing. Does this requirement extend to women, who are not obligated in circumcision? The major authorities, other than the Rama, say that it does, because we are all one nation and it does not matter that women are not personally obligated in circumcision. The Alter Rebbe in Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim, Siman 187, halacha 7) gives a deeper reason. It’s not just that we are all one nation; it’s that men and women are meant to be a team. “Male and female He created them.” A man without a wife isn’t truly a whole man. Men and women complete each other, and therefore they can do mitzvot for each other. The conclusion of mishnayos says, “The righteous will inherit 310 worlds.” Why 310? Rav Mordechai Tendler brings a source that says that each person has a partner, and 310 times 2 equals 620 – the number of mitzvot (613 Biblical and 7 rabbinic). A man and a woman partnered together enable each other to do all of the mitzvot and share in the reward. That is why a woman can include the covenant of the flesh in her *bircat hamazon* even though it isn’t marked upon her own flesh.
6. **Three mentions of *malchut* in the fourth blessing.** Rabba bar Bar Chana says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: the fourth blessing must have a mention of *malchut*, G-d’s kingship. This teaches us that every blessing must mention G-d’s kingship. Rabbi Yochanan says in the name of Rabbi Zeira that in this particular blessing, one mention of *malchut* is not enough. There must be a second mention, to make up for the lack of *malchut* in the previous blessing. But following that logic, we should really have three mentions of *malchut* in the fourth blessing, because it is not mentioned in the second blessing either. Why is there no *malchut* in the second blessing? It is not needed because this blessing is a continuation of the first and is therefore covered by the mention of *malchut* in the first blessing. The same is technically true of the third blessing, as it immediately follows the second, but the third blessing contains a mention of the kingship of the house of David. We don’t want to talk about David’s kingship but not G-d’s. So then shouldn’t we add a mention of *malchut* into the third blessing? No, it’s better to move the *malchut* to the fourth blessing. There are two ways to understand this. One is that David’s kingship pales in comparison to G-d’s, so if we mentioned *malchut* in the third blessing it would overshadow the mention of David’s kingship and we would lose the value of that mention. The other is that having both G-d’s kingship and David’s kingship in the same blessing would in a sense be comparing them, but of course they are incomparable. So we cannot put them together, but we also cannot just leave out *malchut*. Therefore we add an extra mention of *malchut* to the fourth blessing, which is not considered a continuation of the first three. The gemara rules that the fourth blessing should have three mentions, because once we’re adding one for the third blessing we might as well also add one for the second.
7. ***Yaaleh v’yavo* and *retzeh*.** On Rosh Chodesh and holidays, we add *yaaleh v’yavo* to our Shemonah Esrei and bentsching. What if you forget? Rav Nachman says in the name of Shmuel: if you forget *yaaleh v’yavo* in Shemonah Esrei on Rosh Chodesh, you must repeat the Shemonah Esrei, but if you forget it in bentsching, you do not need to repeat the bentsching. Rab Idi bar Avin asks why the law would be different for Shemonah Esrei and *bircat hamazon*. The answer is that davening is required every day, so when the day is Rosh Chodesh there is a specific obligation to daven that day. If you miss *yaaleh v’yavo*, you haven’t davened properly and you need to do it again. But bentching is not required every day. Though we are forbidden to fast on Rosh Chodesh, there is no specific obligation to eat bread. Since you are not bentsching *because* it’s Rosh Chodesh, you would not need to repeat the bentsching if you left out the Rosh Chodesh addition. Does that mean that on Yom Tov, when we are required to eat bread and bentsch, that we must repeat the bentsching if we forget *yaaleh v’yavo*? What if we forget *retzeh* on Shabbos? In fact, on those days we would need to repeat the bentsching if we forget the special additions, because it is the day itself that requires the bentsching. But if you have a fourth meal on Shabbos, which is not required, and forget *retzeh*, you would not need to repeat bentsching. Since there is an opinion that bread is not required even for the third meal, and when it comes to doubts regarding brachot we are lenient, many poskim say that you do not need to repeat bentsching if you forget *retzeh* after *seudah shelisheet*. If you start your meal towards the end of Shabbos or Yom Tov and finish after the day is over, do you include *retzeh* or *yaaleh v’yavo* in bentsching? The Rosh says no, but today we follow the Teshuva Ashkenazit, who says yes. Rabbi Soloveitchik explains this debate further. According to the Rosh, there are two elements involved in the requirement to say the additions: the meal element, which requires bentsching, and the day element, which requires a specific addition based on the day. The first element by itself does not require the addition; only the meal and the day combined require the addition. So if you have a meal on Shabbos or Yom and bentsch on that day, you say *retzeh* or *yaaleh v’yavo*. If one of those elements is missing, you do not. The Teshuva Ashkenazit, on the other hand, holds that any time you have a meal on a day that requires bentsching with a special addition, you must say the addition. What about Rosh Chodesh? Since the day itself doesn’t even require a meal, if you’re not bentsching until after the day is over why would you need *yaaleh v’yavo*? Because even though the day itself doesn’t require the bentsching, the meal does. You may not have to eat a meal on Rosh Chodesh, but when you do it is a Rosh Chodesh meal. So even if Rosh Chodesh is technically over, you should still say *yaaleh v’yavo*.
8. **Yom Tov meals.** Do we actually have an obligation to eat a meal with bread on Yom Tov? This gemara implies that we do, citing this obligation as the reason that we repeat bentsching if we forget *yaaleh v’yavo*. But Tosfot notes a gemara in Sukkah that says that all Sukkot meals are optional except for the meal on the first night. So are Sukkot meals obligated or not? Yes, they are. The gemara in Sukkah is not saying that a meal is required only on the first night of Sukkot, but that a meal *in the sukkah* is required only on the first night of Sukkot. But aren’t all of our Sukkot meals supposed to be eaten in the Sukkah? In general, yes, but not if it rains. If it rains on Sukkot, you do not need to eat in the sukkah - except for the first night. The meals themselves are required for the whole Yom Tov.
9. **The requirement to drink.** Rav Meir says that you must bentsch after eating a *kezayit*, the volume of an olive. Rabbi Yehuda says only the volume of an egg requires bentsching. But in another place, we see an argument that has these two rabbis on the opposite sides. Is this a mistake? Is it really Rav Meir who says the volume of an egg and Rabbi Yehuda who says the volume of an olive? Abaye says the opinions listed here are correct, because the subject of the debate is different. Here, the rabbis are arguing about the words “*ve’achalta vesavata*.” Rav Meir interprets *ve’achalta* as eating, which requires the volume of an olive, and *vesavata* as drinking, which is also necessary for bentsching to be obligated. Rabbi Yehuda interprets *ve’achalta vesavata* as eating enough to be satisfied, which requires the volume of an egg. Following Rav Meir, the Shulchan Aruch says that preferably both food and drink should be part of a meal that you will bentsch on, especially for the person who will be leading the *zimun*. But most people today probably understand this as a *chumra*. I’ve never seen anyone be strict about it.
10. **Changing the words of the *zimun*.** The mishna says that if there are three people in the *zimun*, the leader should start with “*nevarech*” (let us bless). But if there are three people in addition to the leader, he says “*borchu*” (bless). If there are ten people, the word “Elokeinu” is added. There are other possible additions if the *zimun* has 100 people or 1,000, but some say that we shouldn’t change the words, just like we don’t change the words of davening in a larger minyan. Shmuel says we learn from this that a person shouldn’t exclude himself from the group. How do we learn that from this mishna, which says that when there are four people the leader should command the group to bless G-d rather than saying “let us bless”? Changing the wording is actually not a requirement; the mishna is saying that the leader is permitted to change the words. Tosfot explains that it might seem like *borchu* is better, because it’s good to command people to bless G-d, but in fact the best thing is to be part of the group and to say “let us bless” no matter how big the group is. This teaches us the importance of unity. If you don’t have unity with other people, G-d will see all of your deficiencies and judge you harshly. But if you come together with others, G-d will see how other people fill in your own gaps and He will judge all of you more favorably.