



27 August 2016 • 23 Av 5776  
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Shabbat ends in London at 8.48pm  
 Rosh Chodesh Elul is next Shabbat and Sunday

**Solutions in  
 the Sidrah**

**The Success of the Great British Bake Off**

by Rabbi Yoni Birnbaum, Hadley Wood Jewish Community

One of the greatest successes of British television programming in recent years is the Great British Bake Off. In 2014, the final programme of the series was the third most popular programme on television, beaten only by two World Cup football matches. In 2015, more than 15 million people watched the final of the series, making it by far the most popular programme of the year, in viewing terms. However, social commentators have wondered why an essentially ordinary village baking contest filmed in a tent in the countryside has become such a huge success.



This week's sidrah contains the famous injunction, "You shall eat, you shall be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem your G-d..." (Devarim 8:10). From this verse we learn the positive commandment to say Grace after Meals (*Birkat HaMazon*), colloquially known as 'bensching'. Eating is the most basic and fundamental of human needs. Aside from the physical requirement of sustenance, it also fulfils a critical social function. Often, it is around ordinary, mundane acts of eating and drinking that vital social bonds are formed and life decisions are taken. The mitzvah of bensching takes

an activity that forms a central part of everyday life and elevates it to a moment of spiritual connection, and a chance to express gratitude to G-d for life's gifts.

Reflecting on the success of the Great British Bake Off, Charlotte Higgins, chief culture writer for the Guardian newspaper, remarked that: "Bake Off is rapturous, it is agonising, it

is hilarious. And yet, how minuscule and how utterly ridiculous, after all. This is an economy of minor anxieties and insignificant dangers: the emotional range of a comfortable life, fretted by quotidian storms – a parking ticket, a stressful day at work, a

forgotten lunch date. Bake Off validates the small quiet dramas of the trifling everyday...."

Perhaps the secret to Bake Off's success is the way in which it takes that most ordinary of human activities, preparing food, and elevates it to a moment of high, albeit imaginary, drama. People can relate best to an experience that lies at the heart of their everyday existence. This concept lies at the heart of bensching as well. The Torah's command to say Grace after Meals essentially 'validates' the most 'everyday' of life's tasks, that of consuming food, and spiritually elevates it beyond recognition.