



5776/2015-2016: HILCHOT BRACHOT

**Note: All פסקי הלכה taught in this course follow the rulings stipulated in ספר ותן ברכה by Rabbi Yisroel Pinchos Bodner (Feldheim Publishers, 1989).*

WEEK #1, LESSON #3: HEFSEKIM - INTERRUPTIONS WHILE MAKING A BRACHA

- I. A Hefsek is an interruption or break that can affect the validity of a Bracha. (3 minutes)
 - A. We will be discussing the following examples of Hefsek: (1 minute)
 1. Speaking
 2. Pausing
 3. Gesturing
 4. Changing location
 - B. Within each example, two occurrences of Hefsek are possible and will be discussed in turn: (2 minutes)
 1. An interruption during the recitation of the Bracha
 2. An interruption between the recitation of the Bracha and eating the food

- II. The Hefsek of SPEAKING (18 minutes)
 - A. Speaking during the recitation of a Bracha: you may not speak (even one word!) before you have concluded the Bracha. (4 minutes)
 1. If you did speak in middle of a Bracha Rishona on food or drink the Bracha is invalid and a new one would be required. (The Halachot are somewhat different with regard to longer Brachot Acharanot - we hope to cover these laws at a later point).
 2. You should also not communicate using sounds while in middle of making a Bracha, like saying "shh" to instruct someone to quiet down. However, if you did utter simple sounds while reciting a Bracha, the Bracha would be valid Bdieved.
 - B. Speaking between the recitation of the Bracha and eating the food: after you've made a Bracha you are required to eat or drink at least a small amount immediately. You may not speak (even one word!) until some of the food is SWALLOWED. (14 minutes)
 1. If someone asks you a question or your phone rings before you've taken that first bite or sip you need to eat or drink **and swallow** before answering.
 2. Answering "Amen" to someone else's Bracha counts as speaking so you'd need to swallow before responding to the Bracha. (An exception would be Hamotzi on Shabbat since the person is making the Bracha in place of you so you can and should say Amen even before eating Challah). The same is true for responding to Kaddish or Kedusha in Shul. (Probably not the best idea to be eating in Shul in middle of Davening anyway...)
 3. If you did speak before taking the first bite or sip, the Bracha is invalid even Bdieved and a new one would be required.

- a) An exception: it is permitted Bdieved to speak after concluding the Bracha but before eating if you are speaking about things related to the meal.
 - (1) Example: asking for the salt after Birchat Hamotzi and before eating Challah on Shabbat would not count as an interruption since it is needed for the meal and the Bracha would therefore be valid Bdieved. It is, however, preferable to eat the Challah without salt rather than speak after the Bracha was made.
 - (2) Example: asking for sugar for coffee if it is difficult for you to drink it without.
 - (3) Example: If the Hamotzi on Challah was already made for the Shabbat table while you are still washing your hands, you may answer Amen and recite the Al Netilat Yadayim before you eat the Challah since it is required for the eating of the Challah. No one else at the table, however, would be permitted to answer Amen to your Bracha before swallowing some Challah.
- b) You should be careful not to communicate through sounds before eating or swallowing some food, but if you did the Bracha would be valid Bdieved. For example, saying "mmm" before the first bite or while chewing to convey that the food looks or is tasty.
- 4. If you spoke actual words while chewing but before swallowing, the Bracha would also be valid Bdieved, as long as you had started to legitimately taste the food.

III. The Hefsek of PAUSING (7 minutes)

- A. Pausing during the recitation of a Bracha: you should not pause while reciting a Bracha and should say the entire thing at once. (2 minutes)
 - 1. The Bracha would be valid Bdieved if you did pause while saying it
 - 2. It's a good idea to verify the correct Bracha beforehand to avoid an unnecessary pause.
 - 3. Pausing to have more כוונה or to breathe would not be considered an interruption.
- B. Pausing between the recitation of the Bracha and eating the food: once you've completed your Bracha, you really need to eat or drink without delay. (5 minutes)
 - 1. Although this is disputed by some Halachic authorities, the Bracha would be valid Bdieved if you paused for even several seconds before eating and no new Bracha would be required.
 - 2. Practical applications - you should make sure to do the following prior to making a Bracha to avoid an unnecessary pause:
 - a) Open packages of food (e.g. bags of chips, package of cookies, can of soda)
 - b) Shell or peel fruits, vegetables, nuts or eggs
 - c) Wash and inspect for insects those fruits or vegetables that require it
 - d) Make sure a small portion of very hot food is cool enough to eat right away

IV. The Hefsek of GESTURING (motioning, snapping fingers, etc.) (3 minutes)

- A. Gesturing during the recitation of a Bracha: you should not motion or gesture at all while reciting a Bracha. (1.5 minutes)
 - 1. The Bracha would be valid Bdieved if you did gesture while saying it.
- B. Gesturing between recitation of the Bracha and eating the food: you should not motion, gesture or engage in any other form of non-verbal communication until after you've swallowed some food. (1.5 minutes)
 - 1. The Bracha would be valid Bdieved if you did gesture before taking a first bite or before swallowing some food.

- V. The Hefsek of CHANGING LOCATION (6 minutes)
- A. Changing location during the recitation of a Bracha: you may recite a Bracha while walking, riding or traveling from one location to another (although it is preferable to stay in one place if possible as this will enable greater concentration). (1 minute)
 - B. Changing location between the recitation of the Bracha and eating the food: you must take the first bite or sip in the same location where the Bracha was made. If you moved to a different location between the Bracha and the initial eating the Bracha would be invalid and a new one would be required. (4 minutes)
 - 1. Example: if you made a Bracha in your house and walked outside to eat, the Bracha would be invalid.
 - 2. Traveling in a car or airplane would not count as changing location because you are within the same place throughout and any Brachot made would be valid.
 - C. The laws of when changing location in the midst of a meal would necessitate the recitation of a new Bracha are complex and will be discussed more extensively in a subsequent lesson. (1 minute)