



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 #1: INTRODUCTION TO HILCHOT BRACHOT

I. Why Make a Bracha? (11 minutes)

- A. Play the introductory video from the TorahLive website on the importance of saying Brachot, particularly today when we are so disconnected from the world of agriculture. Once you've logged in and selected "Blessings" from the list of courses, it's the second video under the blue "Course" tab, entitled "Introduction." The video runs 6 minutes, 30 seconds. Alternatively, you can play their slides and do the speaking yourself using their speaking notes if you wish. (7 minutes)
 - 1. To access the slides and videos click on the orange "Teacher Materials" tab and select "Classroom Presentation." Click past the first slide with the flying Hebrew letters to access the main menu and then select "Introduction."
 - 2. To access the same graphics with the speaking notes select "Instructors Guide" (also under the orange Teacher Materials tab) and download the pdf file. Scroll down to page 18 where the introduction appears.
- B. When we recite Brachot, we are acknowledging Hashem as the Creator and Sustainer of the world, expressing gratitude for all that He consistently provides us with, and bringing additional blessing into the world in the form of rain, crops, etc (Brachot 35b). Reciting Brachot trains us in expressing gratitude to our fellow man and in all areas of our life. Just as we would never take a bag of chips from a grocery store without paying for it first no matter how hungry or rushed we may be, so too we should never eat from Hashem's world without a few seconds of acknowledgment. (It's a lot quicker to say a Bracha than it is to pay for a snack in a grocery store). (4 minutes)

II. How to Recite a Bracha (25 minutes)

- A. It is crucial to recite Brachot slowly and with the proper כוונה, concentration. This begins by understanding the meaning of the words so familiar to us. Write the meaning of each phrase on the white board or Smart Board as you explain it: (20 minutes)
 - 1. ברוך אתה - commonly misunderstood to mean "Blessed are You." G-d, the Creator of the world, does not need us to bless Him. The Rishonim (ex. רבני בחיי) explain that the meaning of the phrase is actually *source*, as in בריכת מים, a spring or pool of water. אתה ברוך - You, Hashem, are the ultimate Source (of everything)...
 - 2. יהי-ו-יה - this 4 letter name of Hashem is a contraction of the words יהיה ויהיה. He was, is and always will be - i.e. He is beyond time. It is pronounced *Ado-nay*, He is the Master of all...
 - 3. השגחה פרטית - our G-d who is mighty, all powerful and watches over us with אלקינו.

4. מלך העולם - King of the entire world. This phrase acknowledges that not only did a He create what we are about to eat, but He oversaw its allocation and distribution, allowing for it to end up in my vicinity... Hashem figuratively stamps each orange with the address of the person for whom it is intended. TorahLive created a spectacular 38 second clip to illustrate this concept. It's very fast so you may want to play it at least twice so the students can appreciate all of the detail. It's in the Classroom Presentation. From the Main Menu, select "Making a Blessing" and then "Meaning of the Words." From there select "King of the World" and play the video.
 - a) המוציא לחם מן הארץ - who brings forth bread from the ground. The concept of agriculture is truly remarkable if you stop to think about it. We are so used to the natural way that things grow that we don't see miracles in the fact that a tiny seed is buried inside dark earth, allowed to decompose and yet ultimately brings forth new life. What seems to be the death of the seed is just its beginning. The word המוציא is written in present tense as Hashem is continually providing and ensuring that bread comes forth from the earth.
 - b) בורא מיני מזונות - note that the word בורא is in present tense. He created and *continues to create* species of nourishment. Food may taste great but ultimately its purpose is to nourish us and keep us alive. The world's skinniest woman, Lizzie Velasquez, has an extremely rare medical condition that prevents her from ever gaining weight. She is 23 years old and weighs 58 pounds (Google her if you want to be terrified). Her condition has mystified the world's biggest medical experts. She is simply *unable to be nourished by the food she eats*. Thankfully, for everyone else, the food we eat nourishes our bodies and keeps us healthy.
 - c) בורא פרי הגפן, העץ, האדמה - again, בורא in present tense. He created and *continues to create* the fruits of the vine, tree and earth. Hashem did not just create the world and leave it. He is continually involved with maintaining the world and providing us with the fruits and vegetables we enjoy so much.
 - d) שהכל נהיה בדברו - that everything came to be through His word. The Gemara references בראשית פרק א' which relates how Hashem spoke 10 times and created the entire world as we know it (Megillah 21b). When we recite this Bracha we are acknowledging Hashem as the בורא עולם, one of the 13 Principles of Faith that we are obligated to believe, as per the Rambam.
 - B. You should refrain from engaging in any other activity while reciting a ברכה. This will facilitate greater concentration. It is best to avoid gesturing, using any sort of device, cleaning up, etc. You may walk, although it is praiseworthy to stand still. (1 minute)
 - C. You should recite the ברכה out loud - both to help with concentration, as well as to avoid the possibility of forgetting whether or not a Bracha was recited. (1 minute)
 - D. You should hold the food to be eaten in your dominant hand, the right for most people. If you're left handed, use your left hand. (3 minutes)
 1. If you weren't holding the food but it was in front of you when you made the Bracha, the Bracha is valid. (Don't say a Bracha in a restaurant until the food comes!)
 - a) Exception: a water fountain. You can make the Bracha before pressing the button even though the water is not "in front of you" since you know it will certainly be there when you've concluded your Bracha. (You should, however, check to make sure the water fountain works before beginning the Bracha)!
- III. Hands-On Activity: Distribute a small snack (cookie, pretzel, piece of fruit, candy - provided by IHOP) to each student. Have the class spend a moment studying the phrases on the

board and committing them to memory. Then tell each student to make the Bracha the way it is meant to be recited, full of meaning and understanding, and to then eat the food. Ask them how they feel afterwards. Don't push this on any students who are uncomfortable with this for any reason. (3 minutes)