

## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS!

### "בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֲגִין"

The Jewish people have always taken the idea of “counting your blessings” quite literally.

In fact, Chazal say that one should make at least 100 blessings each day! These 100 blessings can be comprised of a number of different types: prayer, gratitude, mitzvohs, etc.... The type of blessing we’ll be focusing on in this session is the blessing recited over physical-pleasures: “בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֲגִין”. (Food and drinks are the most typical type of such a blessing, but it also includes blessings made over fragrances).

In this session we’ll explore some of the following concepts:

- *Where does the whole institution of בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֲגִין come from?*
- *Are these blessings Biblical or Rabbinic in their origin?*
- *Are there situations in which one is exempt from make a blessing?*
- *If one is in doubt as to whether or not he’s already made a blessing, what should he do?*
- *Does one make a blessing over food which is forbidden?*
- *Do you have to make a blessing on a nice, cold drink of water while in the swimming pool?*

**Note:** In this session, when we use the generic term ‘blessing’, we’re referring to בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֲגִין

## 1 – PRIMARY SOURCES: MISHNA & GEMARA

### Source 1. Mishna, Brachos 35a

<p>How does one make a blessing on fruits?  <u>Fruits of the tree</u> – “Who creates fruits of the tree”, except for wine, where the blessing is “Who creates the fruit of the grapevine”.  <u>Fruits of the ground</u> – “Who creates fruit of the ground”, except for bread, where the blessing is “the One who extracts bread from the ground”.  <u>Vegetables</u> – “Who creates fruit of the ground”</p>	<p>כיצד מברכין על הפרות?  על פרות האילן הוא אומר בורא פרי העץ, חוץ  מן היין שעל היין הוא אומר בורא פרי  הגפן.  ועל פרות הארץ הוא אומר פרי האדמה, חוץ מן  הפת שעל הפת הוא אומר המוציא לחם מן הארץ.  ועל הירקות הוא אומר בורא פרי האדמה</p>
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The Mishna lists a variety of blessings one is required to make before consuming an array of different foods. The Gemara immediately seeks to understand: what is the source of ברכת הנהנין to begin with?? After an exhaustive, but inevitably futile search, to find a scriptural-source for ברכת הנהנין, the Gemara eventually reveals the source:

### Source 2. Gemara, Brachos 35a

<p>What is the source (of the Mishna, that there is a concept of ‘blessings’ on food)?...It’s logical: it’s forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without making a blessing.</p>	<p>מנא הני מילי? סברא הוא: אסור לו  לאדם שיהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה</p>
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The source for ברכת הנהנין is **pure-logic**: one may not partake of the physical pleasures of this world without making a blessing. But what is in fact the logic? Why not!? Why, indeed, is it *forbidden*??

*What do you think??*

## 2 – RASHI’S EXPLANATION

Rashi, in classic form, explains the reasoning behind the Gemara, in a few short words:

### Source 3. Rashi, 35a

<p>“It’s logical...” – Since one is deriving benefit, he’s required to express his gratitude to He who created them (the food etc...)</p>	<p>אלא סברא הוא - דכינן דנהנה צריך להודות  למי שבראם</p>
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Rashi explains that the whole source of ברכת הנהנין is **gratitude**: the ‘Laws of Gratitude’ dictate that one may not partake of a gift of this world – i.e. food! – without giving thanks to the One who’s given him this pleasure, and acknowledging the source of blessing!

In other words, at the *root* of ברכת הנהנין is the requirement of gratitude. The reason why it’s *forbidden* (“אסור לו לאדם...”), is that Chazal forbade one from partaking in a physical-pleasure until they’ve fulfilled their logic-based obligation of ‘saying thank-you’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This will be elaborated in greater detail below, in a piece by R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l

There is, however, a very different approach to understanding the Gemara's phrase "*It's logical: one may not enjoy....*" This approach is offered by the Ritva, and will present us with a number of significant practical differences in contrast to the approach of Rashi.

### 3 – RITVA'S EXPLANATION

Some background information is required to understand the Ritva's approach to the Gemara's logic. Let's see the continuation of the Gemara:

#### **Source 4. Gemara, Brachos 35a-b**

<p>The Rabbi's taught (in a Baraisa): It's forbidden for a person to benefit from this world without making a blessing, and anyone who does so, it's considered as if he transgressed <i>me'ilah</i> (a prohibition of profaning holy-objects allocated exclusively for Temple-use). How should he remedy the situation? Go to a sage. "Go to a sage", what's the sage going to do for him, he already transgressed?! Rather, Rava explained: he should have gone to a sage in the first place to teach him the laws of blessings, so that he shouldn't come to <i>me'ilah</i>!</p>	<p>תנו רבנן: אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה, וכל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה מעל. מאי תקנתיה? ילף אצל חכם. ילף אצל חכם, מאי עביד ליה, הא עביד ליה איסורא?! אלא אמר רבא ילף אצל חכם מעיקרא וילמדנו ברכות כדי שלא יבא לידי מעילה</p>
<p>R' Levi contrasted (two contradictory verses in Psalms): One verse says "<i>To G-d is the earth...</i>", and the second says "<i>The heavens are heavens to G-d, but the earth has been given to man</i>"?! It's not a contradiction: here is referring to before one makes a blessing, and here is referring to after one makes a blessing.</p>	<p>רבי לוי רמי פתיב "לה' הארץ ומלואה" (תהלים קטו) וכתיב "השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם"? לא קשיא פאן קודם ברכה פאן לאחר ברכה</p>
<p>R' Chanina, the son of Papa, said: anyone who benefits from this world without saying a blessing is as if he's stolen from G-d and the Jewish people, as it says in the verse "<i>One who steals from his father and mother and says 'I've done no wrong', is a friend to a destructive man.</i>" (Mishlei 28) "<i>Father</i>" is a reference to G-d, as it says...</p>	<p>אמר ר' חנינא בר פפא כל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה פאלו גוזל להקב"ה וננסת ישראל שנא' (משלי כח) "גוזל אביו ואמו ואמר אין פשע חביר הוא לאיש משחית" ואין אביו אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא שנא'...</p>

The Gemara presents an astounding idea: partaking in the pleasures of this world, without making a blessing, is tantamount to **theft**!

With this idea introduced, the Ritva explains simply:

#### **Source 5. Ritva, 35a**

<p>"<b>It's logical</b>" – The explanation is the following: since the verse says "<i>The earth belongs to G-d</i>", therefore, how could one take from that which is not his, without first receiving permission?!?</p>	<p><b>אלא סברא... פרוש משום דכתיב ליי' הארץ ומלואה כדלקמן והיארך יטול אדם מה שאינו שלו ולא יטול ממנו רשות?!?</b></p>
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Since everything in the world ‘belongs to G-d’, so to speak, one may not partake of its pleasures without asking for permission! ***The blessing is the way by which one gains permission to partake in the physical-pleasure.***

In other words, according to the Ritva, at the root of בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֵגִין is the prohibition of theft. This is the underlying ‘logic’ of the Gemara.

This is in contrast to Rashi, who holds, that, at the root of בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהֵגִין is the concept of gratitude, whereas the prohibition is simply an outgrowth of this essentially positive requirement.

### Summarizing the 2-Approaches

We can summarize the different approaches of Rashi and the Ritva in the following manner:

- ➔ Rashi holds that, fundamentally, there is a ***positive obligation*** (of gratitude) incumbent on a person to make a blessing, *which thereby* causes the prohibition, should he choose not to do so.
- ➔ The Ritva holds that, fundamentally, there is a ***negative prohibition*** (of theft), *which can be removed* by making a blessing.

### 4 – PRACTICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RASHI & RITVA

Let’s explore some of the differences which would seem to arise between these 2 approaches:

- 1) One, who, for a legitimate reason, finds himself in a situation where he cannot make a blessing, is he allowed to eat?
  - a. According to ***Rashi***, perhaps he’s allowed: it doesn’t indicate a lack of gratitude, since he’s in a circumstance which is beyond his control.
  - b. According to the ***Ritva***, theft is theft! (Excluding a life-threatening situation, of course).
- 2) One who’s in doubt as to whether or not he’s made a blessing on his food, should he be required to make a blessing before continuing to eat?
  - a. According to ***Rashi***, the requirement of a blessing is simply a Rabbinical-based mitzvah, designed as a safe-guard to encourage the underlying gratitude. There’s a general rule by blessings which states “ספק ברכות להקל” – *when in doubt, don’t make a blessing*<sup>2</sup>, which would seemingly apply in this context.
  - b. According to the ***Ritva***, to continue eating would be a question of theft, which, seemingly would not be justified, and one would be required to make another blessing to ensure that he has ‘permission’ to partake.

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<sup>2</sup> There’s a Biblical-prohibition of not reciting G-d’s name in vain. Saying a blessing which is not required is a violation of this. Saying a blessing which may or may not be required, then, may also be a violation of this, and, therefore, as a general rule, one should not recite a ‘doubtful blessing’ (ספק ברכה). This is the underlying reasoning for “ספק ברכות להקל”.

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l, one of the greatest sages & leading halachic-authorities of recent generations, raises these issues in his halachic response "Minchas Shlomo". There, he maintains the position of Rashi, and strongly challenges the opinion of another one of the great, earlier commentators, the Maharsha, who maintains the position of the Ritva:

### Source 6. Minchas Shlomo, Kama #18:9

It's well known the opinion of the Maharsha (Peshachim 102a): the concept of "*when one is in doubt with a blessing: refrain*" only applies to blessings one makes on mitzvohs, where the blessing is not essentially-connected to the mitzvah. However, regarding blessings over physical pleasures, where there is a prohibition of eating without a blessing, it's understood that one would need to make another blessing, for if he would not, he would be prohibited from partaking in the food...

We see from this, that the Maharsha maintains that the essential obligation of a blessing is because of the logic "it's forbidden for one to enjoy a physical pleasure of this world..." which is to say that doing so would be tantamount to theft. According to this reasoning, the main point of the blessing is to permit one to enjoy the food.

However, in practical halacha, we simply do not hold like this, as is stated explicitly in the Shulchan Aruch (OC 167:9) "*If one is in doubt as to whether or not he's made a blessing he need not go back (and make another blessing)*" It appears to me that we can give a strong support for this ruling, and in fact prove that which is stated in the Shulchan Aruch (in contrast to the Maharsha):

It says in the Gemara, Brachos 20a: "A *baal ker* (a man who's had a seminal emission, who's prohibited from saying Shema and blessings until he's immersed in a mikvah) makes a blessing after eating bread, but not before". The reason, for the difference, is that the blessing beforehand is only rabbinic, and, therefore, the Rabbi's did not require him to make a blessing. Now, it goes without saying: he's surely allowed to eat and drink at his leisure, and we'll not say that he's transgressing the prohibition of "theft" and "It's forbidden to derive pleasure..."!?! Shall we insist that he refrains from eating until he goes to the mikvah!??

We find a similar proof in regards to an *onen* (someone who's lost a close relative, who has yet to be buried), who

הנה ידוע ידוע ומפרסם דעת המהרש"א  
בפסחים בפסחים ק"ב ע"א דלא אמרינן  
ספק ברכות לקולא אלא ברכות המצוות  
דהברכות אין מעפכות משא"כ בברכת  
הנהגין דאסור לאכל בלא ברכה שפיר  
צריך לחזור ולברך משום דאם לא כן יהיה  
אסור לו להנות מספק בלא ברכה

וחזינו מהקא דס"ל ששקרא חיוב הברכה  
הוא משום דסברא הוא שאסור להנות מן  
העולם הנה בלא ברכה ופאמרם דחשיב  
כאלו גזל או מעל ונמצא דלדידהו עקר  
חובת הברכה הוא כדי להתיר את ההנאה

אולם להלכה לא קיימא לן הכי וכמבואר  
בשלחן ערוך או"ח ס' קסז ס"ט "אם הוא  
מספק אם ברך המוציא אם לאו אינו חוזר  
ומברך" ונראה לעניות דעתי לתן טעם נכון  
ולהוכיח שכן הוא

דהרי תנן בברכות כ. בעל קרי מברך על  
המזון לאחריו ואינו מברך לפניו והיינו  
משום דכינן דברכה שלפניו לאו דאורייתא  
היא לכן לא אצרכוהו רבנן, ופשוט הוא  
דבכי האי גוונא מתר לו לאכל ולשתות  
כמה שירצה ולא אמרינן דעבר על אסור  
גזל של נהנה מן העולם הנה בלא ברכה  
וואסר באכילה ושתיה עד שישטבל,

ומצינו נמי גבי אונן דפטור מפל המצוות  
דאינו מברך כלל לא ברכת מוציא ולא  
ברכת המזון ואפלו הכי כתבו האחרונים

is exempt from all the mitzvoh's; he doesn't make any blessings whatsoever, neither before nor after food. And, even still, the later-authorities all agree that the *onen* may **not** transgress any prohibitions, even those of Rabbinic status. But, according to the Maharsha, who holds that the essence of *בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין* is to remove the negative prohibition of benefitting from this world without permission (i.e. theft), this ruling is very difficult: why should an *onen* be allowed to eat without making a blessing!? He's only exempt from positive mitzvohs, not to transgress negative prohibitions!?!

Rather, we can decisively deduce that the essential obligation of *בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין* is that the Sages obligated a person to give thanks and praises to ה', before eating or drinking. This obligation is simply a matter of proper conduct, similar to that which we find by other blessings one makes before performing a mitzvah. The difference is, only, that regarding mitzvohs the Sages did not make the blessing so 'strong' to the point that it would be forbidden to do the mitzvah without making a blessing, and, therefore, one is allowed to put on his *tallis* or *tfillin* in the middle of davening, and to make the blessing afterwards. By *בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין*, on the other hand, the Sages made the obligation of the blessing extra 'strong', by stating that "*one who eats without making a blessing is as if he stole...*," meaning to say, that the reason that it's as if he stole is only because he was obligated to make a blessing, but not to 'permit' the food.

According to this reasoning, it's well understood why a *baal keri* and an *onen*, who are exempt from making blessings, are allowed to eat and drink: the prohibition of eating without a blessing is not intrinsically prohibited, but, rather, stems only from the positive obligation imposed by the Sages to make a blessing. Therefore, one who is exempt, does not in any way transgress any prohibition. This is similar to the prohibition of eating or drinking before Kiddush or Havdalah: the function of the act of Kiddush or Havdalah is not to allow one to eat, but, rather, since he has a positive mitzvah (Kiddush or Havdalah), therefore the sages prohibited him from eating or drinking until he's absolved this obligation. Here too, regarding *בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין*.

שְׁחִיב על כל פְּנִים כוּלָּהוּ לַאוּוִין דַּאורִייתַא וְדַרְבְּנֵי הַאֲוִנֵי שְׁפִיר מְזַהֵר עֲלֵיהֶם דְּרַק מִן הַמְצֻוֹת הוּא דְּפִטוּר אֲבָל אֵינֵי רִשְׁאֵי כָּלֵל לַעֲבוּר עַל אִיסוּרִין, וְכִינֵן שְׁפֵן קִשָּׁה לְדַעַת הַמַּהֲרַש"א שְׁעֵקֶר חַיִּיב הַבְּרַכָּה הוּא לְהַתִּיר אֶת הָאֲסוּר לְהַגִּיב מִן הָעוֹה"ז בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה אִם כֵּן גַּם אֲוִנֵי אֲמַאי אֲוִכָּל בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה וְתִפּוּק לֵיהּ דְּפִטוּר רַק מִן הַמְצֻוֹת אֲבָל לֹא לַעֲבוּר עַל הָאִיסוּרִין וְיִמָּה טַעַם רִשְׁאֵי לְאַכֵּל כַּמָּה שְׁיִרְצָה בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה!?!

אֵלֶּא וְדַאי דְּעִיקֵר חַיִּיב בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין הוּא מְשׁוּם דְּחַיִּיבוּ חֲכָמִים לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לֵה' קֹדֶם שֶׁהוּא אֲכָל וְשׁוֹתָהּ וְחַיִּיב זֶה סְבָרָא הוּא מְשׁוּם מַדַּת דְּרַךְ אֶרֶץ וְכַדְמַצִּינֵן שְׁחִיבוּ לְבָרַךְ בְּבְרַכַת הַמְצֻוֹת, אֵלֶּא הַהֲבָדֵל הוּא רַק בְּזֶה דְּאִילוּ גַבִּי מְצֻוֹת לֹא אֲלִמּוּהוּ רַבְּנֵי לְחַיִּיב עַד כְּדֵי כֹּף שְׁיִהֵא אֲסוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת מְצוּהָ בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה וְשְׁפִיר מְתָר לְהַגִּיב טְלִית וְתַפְלִין בְּאֲמַצְעַת הַתְּפִלָּה וּלְבָרַךְ אַחֵר כֹּף מַה שְׁאִין כֵּן גַבִּי בְּרַכַת הַנְּהֲגִין אֲלִמּוּהוּ רַבְּנֵי לְחַיִּיב הַבְּרַכָּה וְאֶמְרוּ דְּכָל זְמַן שְׁלֹא בְּרַךְ הוּי כְּאֵלוּ מַעַל אוּ גִזַּל, וְנִמְצָא לְפִי"ז דְּטַעַמָּא דְּחַשִּׁיב גִּזַּל הוּא רַק מְשׁוּם דְּמַחֲוִיב לְבָרַךְ אֲבָל לֹא שֶׁהַבְּרַכָּה בְּאֵה לְהַתִּיר אֶת הָאֲכִילָה

וּמְשׁוּם הִכֵּי בַעַל קָרִי וְאֲוִנֵי כִּינֵן דְּלֹא מְחַיִּיבֵי בְּבְרַכָּה שְׁפִיר מְתָר לֵהֶם לְאַכֵּל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה כִּינֵן שְׁעֵקֶר אֲסוּר הַנְּאָה בְּלֹא בְּרַכָּה אֵינְנֵי כָּלֵל אֲסוּר עֲצָמֵי אֵלֶּא מְסַמְעָה רַק מִמָּה שְׁחִיבוּהוּ חֲכָמִים בְּבְרַכָּה וּלְכֵן כָּל שֶׁהוּא פְּטוּר מִן הַבְּרַכָּה אֵינֵי עוֹבֵר כָּלֵל בְּשׁוּם אֲסוּר וְהָרִי זֶה דּוּמָה לֵהּ דְּאֲסוּר לְאַכֵּל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת קֹדֶם הַתְּפִלָּה אוּ קֹדֶם קִדּוּשׁ וְהַבְּדִלָּה דַּאִין הַקִּדּוּשׁ בָּא לְהַתִּיר אֶת הָאֲכִילָה אֵלֶּא אֲדַרְבֵּה הוּא דְּכִינֵן דְּרַמְיָא עֲלֵיהּ מְצֻוֹת קִדּוּשׁ וְהַבְּדִלָּה לְכֵן אֲסוּרוּ חֲכָמִים לְאַכֵּל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת קֹדֶם שְׁיִקְדַּשׁ אוּ יְבַדִּיל וְכִמּוֹ כֵּן הִקְא

## 5 – ANOTHER DIFFERENCE: THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Let's explore another potential difference between the approaches of Rashi and the Ritva:

- 3) Is one required to make a blessing on food which is forbidden (for some other reason)?
- According to the Ritva, one recites a blessing in order to remove the problem of theft. Even if the food is prohibited for some other reason, this seemingly would not absolve him of the *additional* problem of theft!
  - According to Rashi, the blessing is a positive requirement to encourage gratitude. This aura of gratitude and thanksgiving to ה' would seemingly not apply in a scenario where one is consuming something which he has been commanded *not* to consume!

According to another one of the great later-halachic authorities, the Piskei Teshuva, this issue is indeed a matter of debate amongst some of the medieval heavy-hitters: the Rambam and Raavad

### **Rambam, Hilchos Brachos 1:19, and the commentary of the Raavad**

**Rambam:** Anyone who eats something which is forbidden, either intentionally or by mistake, does not make a blessing, neither before or afterwards. How so? (for example) He ate *tevel* (produce which has not been tithed), even if it's only prohibited Rabbinically, or he ate masek of some type (also, a produce which has not been tithed properly), in all these cases he does not make a blessing.

**Raavad:** (the Rambam) has made a big mistake!! Why should he not make a blessing, both before and afterwards, since, even still, he's still benefitting from the food!?!)

**רמב"ם:** כל האכל דבר האסור בין בזדון בין בשגגה אינו מברך עליו לא בתחילה ולא בסוף כיצד הרי שאכל טבל ואפלו טבל דדבריהם או שאכל מעשר ראשון שלא נטלו כל תרומותיו או מעשר שני והקדש שלא נפדו כהלכתן אינו מברך.

**השגת הראב"ד:** טעה בזה טעות גדולה...ברכה תחילה וסוף למה לא יברכו הואיל ונהנו?

The Piskei Teshuva<sup>3</sup> explains the root of their disagreement along the lines of reasoning we've developed thus far:

Is the obligation of ברכת הנהנין fundamentally an obligation which rests on the person because of gratitude (חובת גברא), or, is it fundamentally an obligation which rests on the object – the food (חובת הפצא), because of theft?

- The **Rambam** holds that, fundamentally the obligation rests on the individual, because of gratitude. It follows, then, that in this context, where the food is intrinsically forbidden to be eaten, we can easily understand that the Sages would not have instituted a blessing. (This reasoning is congruent with that of Rashi)
- The **Raavad**, however, holds that, fundamentally, the obligation of making a blessing rests intrinsically in the food: there's an intrinsic problem of theft, which is removed by the blessing. Transgressing one prohibition (of eating food which is prohibited), does not absolve one from the other prohibition of theft! (This reasoning is congruent with the Ritva)

<sup>3</sup> (פיעטרקאווסקי) ח"א סי' ל"ח ד"ה שו"ר

**SESSION SUMMARY:**

- 1) Primary Sources: Mishna & Gemara**
- 2) Rashi's Explanation**
- 3) Ritva's Explanation**
- 4) Practical Differences between Rashi & Ritvah**
  - a. (R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach)**
- 5) Another Practical Difference: "Forbidden Fruit"**
  - a. Rambam & Raavad (Piskei Teshuva)**