



## Hilkhot Berakhot LAWS CONCERNING BLESSINGS

### Chapter 1:1-5 & 11: 2-3

1 It is an affirmative precept of the Torah to say grace after a meal, as it is said, “And you shall eat and be satisfied and shall bless the Lord your God” (Deut. 8:10). The Torah only imposes the obligation on a person when he is satisfied; for it is said, ‘When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless etc.’ According to the ordinances of the sages, however, even if one has eaten only as much food as the size of an olive, he recites grace after the meal.

2 It is also an ordinance of the sages that before one partakes of any food, a blessing is first recited and then one eats. And however little one intends to eat or drink, the blessing is first recited and then the refreshment is taken. So too, one who wishes to smell a fragrant odor first recites the blessing and then enjoys the fragrance. Whoever partakes of any enjoyment without reciting a blessing commits a trespass. It is also an ordinance of the sages that a blessing is to be recited after eating or drinking, provided that the quantity drunk is at least a quarter of a *log* (equal to the volume of an egg and a half), and the food eaten is at least as much as an olive in size. A cook who is tasting food does not need to recite a blessing before or after doing so, provided that the quantity tasted is less than a quarter of a *log*.

3 And just as blessings are recited when partaking of material enjoyments, so when one is about to fulfill any precept, a blessing is said, and then the precept is performed. The sages have, moreover, instituted several blessings of praise and thanksgiving and petition, in order that when not partaking of material enjoyments or engaged in the fulfillment of religious duties we should constantly have God in mind. All blessings, accordingly, fall into three kinds: blessings recited when fulfilling religious duties, and blessings of thanksgiving, which have the character of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication, and the purpose of which is that we should always have the Creator in mind and revere Him.

4 The forms of all the blessings were established by Ezra and his court. It is not proper to vary them. Whoever deviates from the form which the sages have given to the blessings is in error. Any blessing in which the name of God and His sovereignty are not mentioned is not regarded as a blessing, unless it follows immediately another blessing.

5 All blessings may be recited in any language, provided that the form instituted by the sages is followed. And even if the form has been changed, the duty of reciting the blessing is fulfilled if the name of God and His sovereignty as well as the subject matter of the blessing are mentioned, even though in a foreign tongue.



## Chapter 11

2 there are some affirmative precepts in regard to which there is an obligation sedulously to strive to fulfill them; as, for example, to put on phylacteries, dwell in a booth on the Feast of Tabernacles, take in the hand a palm branch together with the other plants on that feast, hear the sound of the ram's horn on the New Year. These are termed obligatory because there is an unconditional obligation to fulfill them. Again, there are religious duties which are not obligatory but are in a sense permissive: for example, to affix a *mezuzah* to the doors of a house or build a parapet on the roof; since there is no obligation to live in dwelling that requires a *mezuzah* to be affixed to it. One may, if one chooses, live all one's lifetime in a tent or on a ship. Similarly there is no obligation to build a house in order to erect a parapet round the roof. Every duty to God, whether permissive or obligatory, requires a blessing to be said before its fulfillment.

3 So too, all religious duties ordained by the scribes, whether these are according to their dicta, obligatory; (for example, to read the Scroll of Esther on the Feast of Purim, to kindle light on the Eve of the Sabbath and during the Feast of Hanukkah); or whether these duties are optional,--for example, to make an Eruv\* or to wash the hands+--all require, before they are performed, the recital of a blessing, containing the formula "Who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us (to perform that particular duty)." Where in the Torah did God so command us? In the text (Deut. 17:11), ". . .and according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do." Hence, the meaning and purport of the benedictory formula is as follows, "Who has sanctified us with Your commandments among which You have commanded us to give heed to those spiritual leaders who ordained that we should kindle the Hanukkah light or read the Scroll of Esther." This applies to all the other duties ordained by the scribes.

