



Likkutei Sichos

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Learning Grace

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We have put in a lot of effort to ensure the translation is accurate and easy to understand. However, it's important to note that there is always a chance of unintentional errors in any translation.

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1.

A POSITIVE MITZVAH TO BLESS AFTER EATING FOOD

At the beginning of *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, the Alter Rebbe writes, “It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to bless after eating food, as it says:¹ ‘You shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless – **אֱלֹהֵינוּ** – G-d.”

These words, which the Alter Rebbe quotes in his own *Shulchan Aruch*,² are taken from Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*, specifically at the beginning of the “Laws of Blessings.” However, there are several differences between the wording used in these works of the Alter Rebbe and the wording of Rambam. Likewise, there are differences in the wording between the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch* and *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*:

a) In Rambam’s text and *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, it says, “It is a positive mitzvah... to bless after eating food.” In the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Alter Rebbe adds the words, “(It is a positive mitzvah... to bless) – **אֱלֹהֵינוּ** – **G-d**, etcetera.”

b) From the verse, Rambam also quotes the phrase, “(you shall bless G-d) **your L-rd**,” while the Alter Rebbe, in his *Shulchan Aruch*, hints at the continuation of the verse through the word “etcetera.” In contrast, in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, the Alter Rebbe only says, “You shall bless G-d” (without the word “etcetera”).

The intentional precision of this difference is further emphasized: In the continuation of this paragraph – both in the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Seder Birkas HaNehenin* – where the Alter Rebbe states,³ “All who derive benefit from this world without a blessing is as if they have enjoyed objects consecrated to Heaven, as it says,⁴ “The earth and all it contains is Hashem’s.” In **this** halachah, the same distinction exists oppositely: In the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Alter Rebbe

¹ *Devarim* 8:10.

² “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 167, par. 1.

³ Based on *Berachos* 35a.

⁴ *Tehillim* 24:1.

does not add the word “etcetera” after quoting from the verse, but specifically in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, he *does* add the word “etcetera”!

Although these changes may seem minor at first glance, we understand how precise the wording of Rambam and the Alter Rebbe is, especially in our case when the Alter Rebbe **changes** the wording he quotes from Rambam. Similarly, the Alter Rebbe changes his **own** wording in the *Shulchan Aruch*. **These** changes certainly are significant.

2.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF QUOTING THE WORDS “TO BLESS G-D”?

Regarding the first difference between the wording of the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe in the *Shulchan Aruch*, we can explain it as follows:

The Rambam only says “to bless” without the addition of “G-d” because in the heading⁵ of the “Laws of Blessings,” he states, “There is one positive mitzvah, and it is to bless the **great and holy Name** after eating.” Therefore, in the actual law, the Rambam does not need to repeat and say “to bless **G-d**,” especially since it is the first paragraph in the “Laws of Blessings” that appears immediately after this heading.

However, in the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, where there is no such heading, the Alter Rebbe states in the actual law that the positive mitzvah is “to bless **G-d**.”

Still, we need to understand: Why do the Rambam (in the heading) and the Alter Rebbe need to mention “to bless **G-d**,” in general, when it is **explicitly** stated in the quoted verse, “you shall bless **G-d**”?

⁵ The headings were also written by the Rambam. (See the photograph of Rambam’s manuscript of the beginning of “*Hilchos She’eilah uFikadon*” included in the Schulzinger ed. of *Mishneh Torah* from 5707.)

And on the other hand, if there is indeed a need to emphasize this, it is difficult, as mentioned in Section 1: Why does the Alter Rebbe **omit** it in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*?

3.

SEDER BIRKAS HANEHENIN - PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS

To understand this, we need to explain the difference between the purpose of the compilation of (the Rambam and) the *Shulchan Aruch*, and the purpose of writing *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*:

Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch* were composed as collections of halachic rulings. The difference between them lies solely in the fact that the Rambam is a “compendium of the **entire** Oral Torah,”⁶ including laws that are not practiced in our time, while the *Shulchan Aruch* focuses only on the laws applicable in our current era. The commonality between them, however, is that each work is a compilation of laws.

On the other hand, the Alter Rebbe specifically included *Seder Birkas HaNehenin* in the *Siddur*⁷ and the halachos written in the *Siddur*. These are directly related to practical guidance in daily life, as evidenced by the laws of morning hand-washing, the laws of *tzitzis*, and similar topics, which the Alter Rebbe included in the *Siddur*.

In other words, the halachos in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin* were written (not in an academic style to facilitate **knowledge** of the halachos, but) as **practical instructions for actual application**.

⁶ Rambam’s preface to *Mishneh Torah*.

⁷ p. 323 in the Shklov ed. of 5563.

4.

“ YOU SHALL BLESS הַשׁם G-D” – הַשׁם TO INCLUDE THE HOST

One of the differences that emerges from this {difference in the intended use of these halachic works} is in the wording — of the Alter Rebbe in *Shulchan Aruch* and *Seder Birkas HaNehenin* (and in the halachos incorporated in the *Siddur*, in general):

In *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, the instructions are focused primarily on practical behavior, and the precision in wording is intended mainly to clarify how to act **in the here and now**. However, the precision of wording does not necessarily emphasize what can be learned from it regarding **other** conduct or a **different** halachic ruling.

On the other hand, in *Shulchan Aruch*, which is a collection of all the halachic directives, the wording needs to be precise in a way that forestalls any conclusions being drawn that are not aligned with *Shulchan Aruch* (in whatever context).

On this basis, we can understand why in *Shulchan Aruch*, the Alter Rebbe deliberately adds the phrase “(to bless) G-d,” whereas, in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, he omits this phrase:

As a general rule,⁸ the word הַשׁם in the **Written Torah** (but not in the Oral Torah)⁹ serves as an amplification.¹⁰ For example, as this rule is applied to the verse,¹¹ “You shall fear הַשׁם G-d, your L-rd,” from the word הַשׁם we derive¹² that Scripture means for us also to fear Torah scholars. Similarly, in our verse, “You

⁸ “It is stated throughout the entire Talmud that הַשׁם... serves as an amplification” (*Rosh* on *Bechoros*, ch. 1, par. 5). See *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, entry “*Esin v’Gamin*,” and the sources cited there.

⁹ On the contrary, it is implied in several places of the Talmud, etc., that הַשׁם adds precision and negates an amplification even if the addition were to be subordinate to the secondary. This is not the place for further discussion of this matter.

¹⁰ {Grammatically, in Hebrew, הַשׁם serves as a marker for a direct object. The English language, however, has no equivalent marker. Strictly speaking, then, such a marker is linguistically redundant; therefore, it is expounded as alluding to an amplification in the verse.}

¹¹ *Devarim* 10:20.

¹² *Pesachim* 22b, and sources noted there.

shall eat... and you shall bless הַשֵּׁם G-d, your L-rd,” the word הַשֵּׁם is an amplification, as *Rishonim*¹³ expound:¹⁴ “You shall bless הַשֵּׁם — to include blessing the host.” Therefore, halachah mandates: “A guest¹⁵ leads the recitation of *Grace After Meals* so that he will {also} bless his host.”

Therefore, the Alter Rebbe needs to be precise in his *Shulchan Aruch* and say, “The positive mitzvah from the Torah is to bless הַשֵּׁם **G-d**” — to prevent a person from mistakenly thinking that “the positive mitzvah **from the Torah**” also includes the guest blessing the **host**, which is expounded from the word הַשֵּׁם, as explained above.

In contrast, regarding *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, when it is essential (only) to explain clearly what to do at the moment, there is no need to add “to bless G-d,” for in the **Siddur** it is written: “And you shall bless G-d, your L-rd.” Additionally, it is self-evident that *Grace After Meals* is directed to Hashem. (Moreover, in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, immediately afterward, the verse, “And you shall bless **G-d**,” is quoted).

Furthermore, we should note that in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, the following halachah is not mentioned: “The guest blesses so that he will bless the host.” Therefore, in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, there is no need to prevent a person from making this error nor to emphasize that the positive mitzvah from the Torah does not include the blessing for the host. However, this is not the case in (the *Mishneh Torah* and) the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, where this halachah is mentioned for the guest to bless the host.

¹³ {Lit., “the early ones,” the *Rishonim* are the Torah sages who lived approx. 1000 - 1600 C.E.}

¹⁴ *Sefer Mitzvos Gadol*, “Positive Mitzvah 27,” quoting the Jerusalem Talmud; *Sefer Hamanhig*, “*Hilchos Seudah*,” sec. 15 (quoted by *Avudraham*, “*Dinei Birkas Hamazon*”), citing the *Tosefta*, et al (see the citations in *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, entry “*Oreach*,” fn. 72).

¹⁵ *Berachos* 46a; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Brachos*,” ch. 7, par. 2; *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch* (and Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*), “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 201, par. 1 (par. 4).

5.

DIFFERENT GOALS FOR GIVING THE REASONS FOR HALACHOS IN *SHULCHAN ARUCH* AND *SIDDUR*

Another distinction between the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* and *Seder Birkat HaNehenin* that emerges from the aforementioned difference (discussed in Section 3) pertains to the **reasons** for the halachos:

The novelty of the Alter Rebbe in his *Shulchan Aruch* (as opposed to the *Shulchan Aruch* of the “*Beis Yosef*”) lies in the fact that the Alter Rebbe brings “*milsa b'taama*” — “the halachos with their reasons.”¹⁶ In contrast, the halachos in the *Siddur* are practical rulings regarding **action alone**, even though the *Siddur*, in some places,¹⁷ mentions briefly the reasons for the halachah. The distinction between the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* and his *Siddur* is as follows:

The Alter Rebbe included the reasons for the halachos in his *Shulchan Aruch* so that it would not resemble what is called “*mavlai olam*”¹⁸ — potentially harmful oversimplification. Meaning, the Alter Rebbe included the reasons to **promote knowledge of the Torah**,¹⁹ which entails knowing “the halachos with their reasons”²⁰ (in brief).

In contrast, concerning the *Siddur* (and likewise, *Seder Birkat HaNehenin*), its purpose is to provide **practical** guidelines for conduct. The reasons for the halachos mentioned are (not to **know the reasons** themselves, but rather) to clarify practical conduct, to carry it with greater appreciation, with more mindfulness, vitality, and the like,²¹ as is seen in several places, where the reason for the halachah is (briefly) mentioned.

¹⁶ Preface {to Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*} by the Learned Sons of the Author.

¹⁷ Alter Rebbe's *Siddur*, beg. of “Laws Regarding Rising in the Morning”; and many other places.

¹⁸ *Sotah* 22a.

¹⁹ As inferred from the *Preface* {to Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*} mentioned in fn. 16.

²⁰ Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 3, at the beginning; similarly, *ibid.*, ch. 2, at the beginning.

²¹ Although the rationale for why we need to understand the reasons for the mitzvos is also because “if one does not know the reasons for the halachos, he do not thoroughly comprehend the halachos themselves well” (*Hilchos Talmud Torah*, beg. of ch. 2) — it is understood that there is a significant distinction between comprehending the halachos “thoroughly” and clarification for practical conduct and intent, obtained through a concise reason.

6.

THE DIFFERENCE IN HOW THE VERSE IS QUOTED DEPENDS ON ITS PURPOSE

On this basis, we can also understand the second difference between the wording of the *Shulchan Aruch* and the wording of *Seder Birkat HaNehenin* (as discussed in Section 1):

In his *Shulchan Aruch*, where the Alter Rebbe cites the reasons for the halachos for the purpose of *knowing* the halachos, as mentioned above, he also cites (in several places) the verses from which the halachos are derived. Similarly, in our case, the Alter Rebbe quotes the source for the Torah mitzvah to bless after eating a meal {that includes bread}:²² “You shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless G-d.”

Therefore, afterward, the Alter Rebbe adds, “etcetera,” because not just the words, “and you shall bless G-d,” are relevant in understanding that *Grace After Meals* is biblically mandated, but the **continuation** of the verse is also relevant. As the Alter Rebbe notes in his *Shulchan Aruch*,²³ from the words, “for the good land,” in the verse, we learn that **biblically**, the blessing after a meal must include a blessing for “the Land of Israel and for the Temple (Yerushalayim).”

[On the other hand, in Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*,²⁴ when the **exposition** of this halachah is **not** being presented, only the words “and you shall bless G-d, your L-rd” are quoted without the addition of “etcetera,” because **this** halachah that it is a positive mitzvah to bless after eating a meal is connected only to the words, “and you shall bless G-d, your L-rd.”²⁵]

However, in the *Siddur*, and *Seder Birkat HaNehenin*, since the reasons are mentioned only to clarify practical conduct, there is no need to quote verses.

²² Aside from the fact the verse also serves a **reason** for the halachah, as explained later in the text.

²³ End of sec. 168, par 8; sec. 187, at the beg, based on *Brachos* 48b.

²⁴ “*Hilchos Brachos*,” beg. of ch. 2.

²⁵ Some additional study is required to explain why Rambam also quotes the words “your L-rd.” (Perhaps, because this serves to conclude the subject.) It would be advisable to check manuscripts, etc.

Nevertheless, in our case, the Alter Rebbe brings the verse because it expresses the parameters of the halachah, which is derived from its reason, aiming to enhance our understanding, mindfulness, and pleasure in this practice.

The purpose and essence of reciting *Grace After Meals* is that “you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless G-d”: When a person is satisfied, he should bless and thank Hashem.

This serves as a preface to the continuation of the paragraph regarding all blessings for enjoyment — “Anyone who benefits from this world {without blessing Hashem}... is as if they enjoyed objects consecrated to Heaven.” Since a person will enjoy something that belongs to Hashem, he should bless Him for it, **analogous** to *Grace After Meals*, where satisfaction necessitates a blessing.

Therefore, the Alter Rebbe omits “etcetera” because the essence of *Grace After Meals* is not related to the continuation of the verse, not even to the words “your L-rd.” **On the contrary**, not only is there no necessity for the words “your L-rd” to convey the purpose of the blessing, but these words are used to teach about a different type of blessing, a type of blessing that is the **opposite** of *Grace After Meals* and (blessings for **enjoyment**).²⁶

In *Tosefta*,²⁷ it says that from the word “{your} L-rd,” similar in meaning to “{your} Judge,” we learn that “just as one blesses for the good, so too, one should bless for the bad,” and this applies “no matter how He judges you, whether with kindness or with retribution.” The underlying rationale is the **opposite** of why we recite the blessing of *Grace After Meals* and other blessings for enjoyment. All these blessings are recited to express physical **satiation and pleasure**. (And the comparison made between “blessings for the bad” and “blessing for the good” is only that they both need to be “accepted joyfully.”)²⁸

²⁶ {Such as the blessings before partaking of food or smelling good fragrance.}

²⁷ *Berachos* 6:3; *Berachos* 48b.

²⁸ *Berachos* 60b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Brachos*,” ch. 10, par. 3; *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 222, par. 3; *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, ch 12, halachah 10.

7.

“THE EARTH AND ALL IT CONTAINS IS HASHEM’S”

According to the aforementioned general distinction between the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch* and *Seder Birkat HaNehenin*, we can also explain the difference between them in the continuation of this paragraph with the citation of the verse, “The earth and all that it contains is Hashem’s” (as discussed earlier in Section 1):

As explained above in Section 4, preventing a mistake from arising in a **different context** is a bona fide concern in *Shulchan Aruch* but not (so much of) a concern in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*. Nonetheless, the matter is reversed when it comes to preventing a misunderstanding concerning the halachah and practice **presently under discussion**:

In *Seder Birkat HaNehenin*, which encompasses **practical** instructions, additional clarifications are provided, even for seemingly apparent matters, to ascertain that the practical guidance is carried out appropriately. In contrast, the wording of the *Shulchan Aruch* is concise, and nothing self-evident is included.

Accordingly, in *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, after the Alter Rebbe cites the verse, “The earth and all it contains is Hashem’s,” he adds, “etcetera”: With the addition of this word, he further clarifies the halachah that “**all** who derive benefit from this world... is as if they enjoyed objects consecrated to Heaven” (since **everything** belongs to Hashem), which refers to taking pleasure from **anything** in this world since the **entirety** of This World belongs to Hashem. This idea is **spelled out** and declared in the continuation of the verse, “...the *teivel* {world} and its inhabitants”:

With the clause, “the **earth** and all it contains,” Scripture alludes to the Land of Israel.²⁹ The verse's continuation adds that the “*teivel*” — the **whole world** — “is Hashem’s.” Moreover, “its **inhabitants**,” too, are **Hashem’s**.

²⁹ See Rashi on the verse (based on the exposition in *Midrash Tehillim* on the beginning of the verse).

Consequently, “**all** who derive benefit from this world,” even when the food belongs to someone else, even to a gentile, it is as if the person “enjoyed **objects consecrated to Heaven.**” For this reason, before partaking of any pleasure, a blessing must be recited.

— From a talk delivered on the 24th of Teves and *Motzaei Shabbos parshas Va’era*, 579