

KRIAT SHEMA 1:07

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

7. The first B'rakha before [K'riat Sh'ma], both during the day and at night, opens with "Barukh" and concludes with "Barukh". The rest of [K'riat Sh'ma's] B'rakhot conclude - each one of them - with "Barukh" but have no introductory "Barukh".

These B'rakhot, along with all of the B'rakhot which are arrayed in the mouths of all Yisra'el were established by Ezra and his court and no one is allowed to diminish from, or add to them.

In a place [i.e. blessing] which they ordained a conclusion-formula with "Barukh", he is not allowed not to conclude [thus]. And in a place which they ordained no conclusion-formula, he is not allowed to conclude [with "Barukh"]. In a place which they ordained no introductory-formula with "Barukh", he is not allowed to introduce [with "Barukh"]. And in a place where they ordained an introductory-formula, he is not allowed not to recite the introductory-formula. The general rule in this matter is that anyone who alters the "Matbea" (form) which the Sages imprinted on B'rakhot is mistaken and must go back and recite the blessing in its [proper] form.

Anyone who does not say "Emet veYatziv" (true and stable) in the morning and "Emet ve'Emunah" (true and faithful) in the evening has not fulfilled his obligation.

Q1: What is the significance of "introductory" and "conclusion" formulae in B'rakhot?

Q2: Following the previous question, why do some B'rakhot have introductory formulae and others don't?

Q3: Why does Rambam need to identify the author(s) of all of these B'rakhot?

Q4: At the end of the third paragraph, Rambam clearly states that any deviation from the "Matbea" of the Sages renders the B'rakha invalid - why then does he have to explicate the rules of "introduction" and "conclusion" beforehand - if any deviation is an error, that would certainly include introduction and conclusion.

Q5: A general question: why are B'rakhot only valid if said according to the imprint of the Sages? Why can't we "compose" or change B'rakhot according to our own needs and perspectives? Or can't we?

KS ([Kira Sirote](#)): It's only the Matbea that we can't change. The words in between evolved (witness the difference between Ashkenaz and Sefard), so I assume they can be changed. In order to explain

the difference, Rambam had to define what a Matbea is.

Q6: Why does Rambam "tack on" the rule about "Emet veYatziv" and "Emet ve'Emunah" at the end of this Halakhah?

KS: Brakhot that don't start with Barukh usually follow another B'rakha. Emet veYatziv doesn't follow a Bracha, but is integrally tied to the last paragraph of Sh'ma. In one sense, that is part of its Matbea.

Q7: Which particular obligation does one fulfill by saying "Emet veYatziv" and "Emet ve'Emunah"?

Q8: How do we fulfill this obligation? Is reciting these two words enough, or is Rambam alluding to the entire paragraph which follows these words?

Birkot K'riat Sh'ma(2) Yitzchak Etshalom

I

The Gemara (B'rakhot 40b) cites a dispute between Rav and R. Yohanan: "Rav said: Any B'rakha which does not include a mention of 'Shem' (God's Name) is not a B'rakha; R. Yohanan said: Any B'rakha which does not include 'Malkhut' (God's Kingdom) is not a B'rakha".

Even without examining the nature of their dispute, one thing is clear - B'rakhot have some basic requirements (Shem or Shem and Malkhut) - and B'rakhot have some "open" areas, which are neither prescribed nor proscribed. If this were not the case, Rav and R. Yohanan would not dispute about one particular component of B'rakhot, since all B'rakhot would be fixed.

It may be that their disagreement is textually-based; the first "B'rakha" form which we find in the Torah is in Beresheet (Genesis) 9:26, where Noach, in assigning the premier position in the family to his son Shem, blessed him as follows: "Barukh YHVH Elohei Shem"; we next find it five chapters later at 14:20 when Malki-Zedeq blesses Avram and his God - "uVarukh El Elyon"; it reverts to the more familiar wording in Beresheet 24:27, when Eliezer thanks God for helping him find a wife for Avraham's son - "Barukh YHVH Elohei Adoni Avraham". This format is also followed by Yitro (Moshe's father-in-law) in Shemot (Exodus) 18:10 when he reacts to the news of all the miracles associated with the Exodus - "Barukh YHVH". What all four of these examples have in common is the word "Barukh", immediately followed by God's Name, as the standard "opening" for a B'rakha. (interesting that all four people who recited this format in the Torah are non-Jews!). Rav, quite reasonably, notes this and requires a mention of God's Name in a B'rakha. R. Yohanan, in addition to this requirement, considers a mention of God's kingdom to be necessary. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Berakhot 9:1) provides a textual reason: "I will glorify you, my God the King" (Tehillim (Psalms) 145:1) - so that any mention of God in the form of praise, must be accompanied by a mention of His kingdom.

In any case, there seems to be a "bottom-line" framework to B'rakhot in general and to specific B'rakhot, both by category and individually.

II

Rambam (MT B'rakhot 1:5) says: "The formulation of all the B'rakhot was established by Ezra and his court and it is inappropriate to change them - not to add to them nor to diminish from them. Anyone who changes from the "Matbea" which the sages imprinted on B'rakhot is mistaken. And any B'rakha which has no mention of "Shem" and "Malkhut" is not a B'rakha..."

Rambam here defines two levels of adherence to B'rakha formula - and there is an unsaid third:

The first requirement - not mentioned in this paragraph of Rambam's - is clearly that of general content and theme. Any B'rakha must include (at least) the event/sight/act etc. which is generating the B'rakha. For instance, if someone is about to eat, s/he is about to take pleasure from God's creation. S/he must bless God, by mentioning God's Name in a context of praise and associate that with the type of food about to be enjoyed.

The second requirement is "Shem" and "Malkhut" (the Halakha follows R. Yohanan). Note that Rambam (directly quoting the Gemara) says that any B'rakha lacking these two components "is not a B'rakha"; i.e. "Shem" and "Malkhut" are components sine qua non of a B'rakha.

The third requirement is to follow Ezra's formulation ("Nusach"/"Matbea"). Here, Rambam uses a different phrasing - anyone who changes, adds to or diminishes from this formulation - is mistaken. He then follows that by stating that in such a circumstance, another B'rakha is required. This split formulation implies that not following the Matbea does not render the B'rakha inherently invalid, rather is "mistaken" for not doing it the right way (there may be some polemic history here) - and it is the Rabbis, who formulated and legislated these B'rakhot, who also invalidated a B'rakha which doesn't fit the basic framework known as Matbea.

III

As mentioned above, one of the basic desiderata of B'rakhot is a "Petiha" (introductory formula). A Petiha consists of the six familiar words with which most B'rakhot begin: "Barukh Atah YHVH, Eloheinu Melekh ha'Olam" - (You are blessed, YHVH, our God, King of the World). However, the Tosefta (cited in BT Berakhot 46a and MT Berakhot 11:1) exempts some B'rakhot from a Petiha - generally speaking, if there is a B'rakha which, by definition, can only be recited within a series of B'rakhot - and it is not the first in that series - it does not need a Petiha. For example, of the 19 B'rakhot recited in the weekday Tefilla, only the first has a proper Petiha. The rest of the B'rakhot, which can never be said independently or in any other context, all "rely" on the Petiha of the first B'rakha. (The Halakhic term for these B'rakhot is "B'rakha haS'mukha l'Haverta" - a B'rakha which is juxtaposed to its fellow B'rakha).

In addition to a Petiha, many B'rakhot also demand a "Hatima" (signature/conclusion). This Hatima,

with which we conclude "long" B'rakhot (i.e. B'rakhot which have a lot of text and/or mention several themes within the text), consists of "Barukh atah YHVH,

".

Rambam (following the Mishna Berakhot 1:4) rules that the enactment of Ezra and his court regarding the "long/short" nature of each B'rakha is part of the "Matbea" and must not be changed.

(now, to the questions:)

Q1: What is the significance of "introductory" and "conclusion" formulae in B'rakhot?

A: Petiha (Introduction): to properly set the frame of reference - God, who is King, is being blessed for event X, Mitzva Y or pleasure Z. Hatima (Conclusion): In case the B'rakha has thematically encompassed more than one idea and has involved a significant "liturgical" distance from the Introduction, a conclusion is necessary in order to "realign" the B'rakha with its main intent and goal - praising God for a specific event, Mitzva or pleasure.

Q2: Following the previous question, why do some B'rakhot have introductory formulae and others don't?

A: If a B'rakha is part of a series of B'rakhot - and necessarily so - then it doesn't need a "Petiha" - as it "relies" on the Petiha of the first one in the series.

Q3: Why does Rambam need to identify the author(s) of all of these B'rakhot?

A: See the answer to Q5 below.

Q4: At the end of the third paragraph, Rambam clearly states that any deviation from the "Matbea" of the Sages renders the B'rakha invalid - why then does he have to explicate the rules of "introduction" and "conclusion" beforehand - if any deviation is an error, that would certainly include introduction and conclusion. **A:** Not every deviation invalidates the B'rakha; Rambam is presenting the basics of Matbea': Besides Shem and Malkhut - and the basic thematic content - the Petiha and Hatima must follow the standard form; deviation here does invalidate the B'rakha, unlike other stylistic variations which are acceptable.

Q5: A general question: why are B'rakhot only valid if said according to the imprint of the Sages? Why can't we "compose" or change B'rakhot according to our own needs and perspectives? Or can't we?

A: Several answers here, some of which apply equally to the general issues of "formulaic prayer" (Matbea Tefilla) (1) When we pray or recite B'rakhot, we are not only involving ourselves in a personal encounter with God, but through that encounter, we are attaching ourselves to ancestors and descendants, other Jews in our community and Jews in far-off places. The "commonality" of B'rakhot

is not only convenient, allowing one Jew to recite a B'rakha on behalf of (and in the presence of) another; it also forms a sort of religious lingua franca (or lingua judaica)

(2) B'rakhot (and Tefillot) are not only expressions from the heart - they are also instructive; the directive to praise and thank God at certain occasions teaches us much about sensitivity, appreciation for God's creation and heightens our awareness of God. The set formula may be as much instructive and directive as it is expressive (and the strength of that expression may be intensified as the "message" of B'rakhot is internalized).

(3) (this is somewhat associated with the first answer) generally, just as we are hesitant to describe God in terms other than those canonized in the T'nakh, similarly we try to use as much Biblical language and style in praising God - as if to rely on the tried, true and divine. We see that the basic "Barukh YHVH..." formula goes back to Beresheet; in the book of Tehillim, we see a more developed B'rakha form (106:48, end of Ch. 72) and the most developed form is from 2nd Temple times - Divrei haYamim and Ezra. Therefore, we are not only associating ourselves with our own historic past, but we are tying ourselves into the T'nakh-mode of praise by using these formulas. This is likely the reason that Rambam mentions that Ezra and his court were the authors of the B'rakhot - to give them the authority of quasi-canon.

Q6: Why does Rambam "tack on" the rule about "Emet veYatziv" and "Emet ve'Emunah" at the end of this Halakhah?

A: Rambam is teaching (following the Gemara in Berakhot, 12a) that the obligation of the B'rakha after K'riat Sh'ma is not the same in the day and at night; we might have thought that as long as it has God's Name (which is unnecessary, because it is integrally part of a series) and mentions the Exodus, that is sufficient. Based on the verse in Tehillim (92:3) - "To tell of Your kindness in the morning and Your faith at night", the Gemara "splits" the nature of the Exodus-mentioning, such that the focus at night must be "Emunah" and the morning-theme must be "Emet/Hessed". Rambam already taught us about the general obligation to remember the Exodus (1:3) and about the general themes of the before-Sh'ma B'rakhot (1:6) - now that he has established some of the necessary framework of B'rakhot, he is clarifying which parts of the post-K'riat Sh'ma B'rakha are non-negotiable.

Q7: Which particular obligation does one fulfill by saying "Emet veYatziv" and "Emet ve'Emunah"?

A: Either "remembering/mentioning the Exodus" or else the general obligation of Birkot K'riat Sh'ma.

Q8: How do we fulfill this obligation? Is reciting these two words enough, or is Rambam alluding to the entire paragraph which follows these words?

A: It is likely that "Emet veYatziv" refers to those two words - and to the entire flow of the ensuing B'rakha - i.e. specific details about the Exodus, all in the past, all very firm and clear. "Emet ve'Emunah" introduces a B'rakha which is somewhat future-oriented and general salvation-from-exile - and more "faith" directed than "historic-details" directed.

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