

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 35:

- 1. The source for making brachot on food.** How do we know that one needs to make a bracha before eating food? A *beraita* says: The verse says, “it should be sanctified *hilulim* to Hashem.” We learn from here, from the double language of *hilulim*, that there needs to be praise before and after eating. Based on this, Rabbi Akiva says that it is prohibited to taste food before making a bracha. But can the word *hilulim* be used for this teaching, or is it really there to teach us something else? The verse in question is talking about produce in the fourth year. For the first three years after a person plants an orchard, the fruits are called *orla* and cannot be eaten. In the fourth year, called *reva'i*, the produce is brought to Jerusalem and eaten there. But does this law of *reva'i* apply to all fruits or just to grapes? The three years of *orla* apply to all fruits, but the fourth year is a question that is debated. According to some opinions, the word *hilulim* in this verse comes to teach us two things: that the fruit can be redeemed for money which is then spent on food in Jerusalem, and that this law only applies to the type of produce that we sing songs over - grapes. Rashi says that in the Temple, the Levites did not sing songs except over wine when it was poured on the Altar. Tosfot says there were no songs on the other things the Altar “ate” (ie consumed), like water that was poured or blood that was thrown/sprinkled, but they did sing at other times, such as during Hallel when the Pesach offering was brought, even though nothing was on the Altar at that moment. Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeni says in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: How do we know that in the Temple the Levites would offer songs with instruments over wine? Because the verse says, “wine makes man and G-d happy.” The gemara clarifies: how does wine make G-d happy? He is happy when we sing His praises. When we pour the wine and praise G-d, it makes Him happy.
- 2. Reva'i - what does it apply to?** Is the law about the fourth year meant to be *neta reva'i* - for all fruits - or *kerem reva'i* - just for grapes? As mentioned, it is a debate. So in Israel we accept the stricter opinion and require all fruits in the fourth year to be redeemed. Tosfot says that outside of Israel, the law of the fourth year applies only to grapes. One should take a coin to represent the value of the grapes in the vineyard and throw the coin into a river, and in this way the grapes are redeemed. This is allowed because when there is a lenient opinion that is not followed in Israel, we can follow that lenient opinion outside of Israel. The Rambam says that the fourth year does not apply at all outside of Israel. A third opinion says that the fourth year applies to all fruits even outside of Israel – everything needs to be redeemed before it can be used.
- 3. Making music in vineyards.** Some commentaries say that when people would go into their vineyards to bring the fourth-year grapes up to Jerusalem or to transfer the sanctity of the grapes into coins that would be brought to Jerusalem, they would bring instruments and make music. This is what is meant by *hilulim*, songs. Transferring the sanctity of the grapes into coins was a mitzvah, and people would make music and sing while doing that mitzvah. Playing instruments in vineyards is actually not uncommon, and it's possible that music makes the grapes grow better. G-d likes when we make music over mitzvot, because we are supposed to serve Him with joy. Without joy, mitzvot become routine until eventually we lose interest. In the past the Jewish people have been punished for failing to serve G-d with joy. This is the reason the rabbis instituted kiddush over wine: as we have already seen, wine makes men happy, and happiness is essential to the experience of Shabbos. If we lose that happiness, we will ultimately lose our connection with G-d. The joy of song over wine has become a staple of many of our holy times and mitzvot. While in the wrong context wine leads to bad behavior and in a neutral context it is a pleasure that can become problematic, in a holy setting the intoxication becomes subservient to the sacred. Like song that amplifies emotions, wine in a holy setting enhances the

moment and imbues it with meaning, transferring the otherworldly holiness into our feelings and physical sensations.

4. **The real source for making brachot.** Rabbi Akiva attempts to use the word *hilulim* in the verse about the fourth year as a source for the requirement to make a bracha before eating, but as we have seen it's not an especially good source. So how do we really know that we need to make blessings over food? Simply put, it's logical. We know that there is a Biblical requirement to make a bracha when one has eaten enough to be satiated. If a bracha is required when we're satisfied and no longer thinking about how much we need the food, then surely a bracha would be required when we're hungry. Because this mitzvah is based on logic, it does not need a specific Torah source to be considered a Biblical law. Tosfot argues that this isn't a real a fortiori (*kal vachomer*) inference with the power of Biblical law; rather it's a rabbinic law. Most commentators agree.
5. **The *kal vachomer* isn't enough.** The gemara suggested that the requirement to make a bracha before eating is logical because of a *kal vachomer* - we are required to make a blessing after eating, so of course we'd be required to make one before eating. But does this *kal vachomer* really hold up? A person is more likely to rebel against G-d when he is satisfied than when he is hungry, so it makes sense that a bracha would be required only at the moment when he is in danger of forgetting about G-d. On top of that, the requirement to make a bracha after being satisfied does not even apply to all kinds of food, so why would we assume a bracha would be required before all kinds of food? The logic is far from foolproof. Perhaps a more logical reason for the requirement is that we cannot benefit from this world without first thanking G-d. The gemara compares it to stealing, just like it would be theft to take something that belonged to the Temple for personal use. Rashi explains that when we don't make a blessing, we are stealing that which is G-d's – the chance to bless Him. Other commentators say that it is as if we are stealing the food. After all, we have a verse (Psalms 24:1) that says, "to the Lord is the earth and its fullness." Since everything belongs to Him, we cannot use anything without first acknowledging and thanking Him. However, there is another verse (Psalms 1:15) that says, "Heaven is G-d's but Earth He gave to humanity." So which is it - does the world belong to G-d or has He given it to us? Perhaps before we make a bracha the world belongs to G-d, but when we make the bracha He gives it to us.  
With all of these logical assumptions about the necessity of brachot, do they have the status of a Biblical commandment? Probably not. Most opinions consider the brachot before food rabbinic, though there are those that see them as Biblical because of the comparison to theft. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov says that consumption always has an element of taking the permitted from the forbidden. There is a tension involved in taking something from the world. Maybe because everything that I take is something that someone else can't have, or because people were harmed in the production of the thing that I'm taking. It's a little bit like theft, but it's not really theft. When we make a bracha on our food, we are acknowledging this forbidden element, saying that we realize there is something imperfect about this food we're eating. Through this acknowledgment, we take what is forbidden and make it permitted.
6. **Torah im derech erez.** On the one hand, we have a verse that says, "You may gather in your grain" (Deuteronomy 11:14). On the other hand, we have a verse that says, "This Torah shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall learn it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). Are we supposed to work the fields, or should we be spending all of our time studying Torah? Rabbi Yishmael says we should do both. Study, but also spend time working the field. There is a need for both, and we must find a good balance. Where does this discussion fit into the flow of the gemara? We've just resolved the apparent contradiction between two verses in Psalms by suggesting that the world belongs to G-d until we make a bracha, and the act of making the bracha on the food

makes it ours and gives us permission to eat it. The same can be true regarding the apparent contradiction between the need to work and the requirement to always be learning Torah: when we make Torah our priority, we elevate even the mundane aspects of our lives. This gives us permission to spend time making a living rather than learning, because as long as we are prioritizing Torah it is as if we are always learning. In this way, we can have *Torah im derech eretz*.

7. **Relying on community support.** If you're working in a field, how can you also have time to learn and prioritize Torah? Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that when we do G-d's will, other people will do our work for us. But when we don't do G-d's will, we will have to do our own work or even work for others. Abaye says that there were people who tried to balance learning and working, as Rabbi Yishmael suggested, and it worked for them, while others tried only learning, as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai suggested, and it didn't work for them. Maimonides has two teachings on the subject that seem to contradict each other. He says that people who study Torah shouldn't ask for handouts from the community (ie. everyone must work to support themselves), but he also says that it is not only the tribe of Levi that is called upon to serve G-d; anyone may be called upon to serve G-d and will not have to worry about the world (ie. other people will take care of them). Perhaps we can reconcile the two ideas by saying that while the average person shouldn't expect money for studying Torah, an exceptional person who gives his total selfless dedication to serving G-d and studying Torah can accept money. Alternatively, perhaps we can say that a person should not demand support from the community, but if the community volunteers to support a scholar he can accept it.
8. **Generational differences.** The gemara says that later generations are not like the earlier generations and gives two examples of this. The first is that earlier generations made Torah primary and work secondary and they succeeded in both, while later generations made work primary and Torah secondary and succeeded in neither. The second is that earlier generations would bring produce in through the door so that *ma'aser* would be required, while later generations would bring their produce in through the roof or window or some other entrance so that *ma'aser* would not be required. Bringing in produce this way is certainly legal - the later generations weren't doing anything wrong. But they were taking advantage of a loophole so that they wouldn't need to give *ma'aser*. The later generations wanted to make everything easier for themselves.
9. **Wine is special.** For most juices, the bracha we make is *shehakol*. But wine gets its own special bracha: *hagefen*. What is so special about wine? Perhaps that turning grapes into wine is a change for the better, and so the bracha must be upgraded. But turning olives into olive oil is also a change for the better, and does not come with an equivalent bracha upgrade. Mar Zutra explains that there is a satisfaction that comes from drinking wine that does not come through olive oil. Drinking wine can fill you up. So why does wine not get treated like bread? Because nobody drinks wine as a meal.
10. **Wine vs. olive oil.** Olive oil is similar in some ways to wine but doesn't truly match up. Olive oil can be used to improve other foods, but it remains secondary to those other foods. Wine, on the other hand, is satisfying on its own and does not need to be secondary to anything else.