

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 43:

- 1. Etiquette and how it affects halacha.** When a group of people is having a meal together, as long as it meets the cultural definition of a shared meal, one person can make a *hamotzi* on behalf of everyone gathered. Does the same apply to *hagefen*? Rav's opinion is either that reclining - the cultural marker of a group meal - is not necessary to have one person make *hagefen* for others, or that reclining is not sufficient to allow one person to make a *hagefen* for others. The *Tosefta* (a type of *beraita*) describes in detail how group meals worked in Roman and Israeli (Palestinian) culture: When guests started arriving they would be greeted in a large hallway and gather in an antechamber. Some would sit and others would stand, like you'd see at a cocktail hour today. Cups of water would be brought in, and everyone would wash one hand. They would have wine and appetizers, and everyone would make their own brachot. Then they would get up and move into the formal dining room, where they would have couches and little tables and everyone would recline. More water would be brought in, and this time people would wash both hands. This might have been the washing for *hamotzi*, though it doesn't seem that they ate bread right away. Instead, there would be more wine, and this time one person would make a *hagefen* for the group. According to Tosfot, this second *hagefen* was because they changed locations. Then there would be more hors d'oeuvres, and again one person would make a bracha for the group even though they had already made the same bracha earlier. After the third course of hors d'oeuvres, the dining room would be closed and no one else would be allowed to enter. It was the custom in Jerusalem to put a towel or cloth by the door during the first part of a meal. Once the cloth was removed, guests could no longer enter. The person hosting the meal would hire someone to prepare it, like a caterer, and if something went wrong with the food the caterer would be held responsible and would have to compensate the host monetarily. How does all of this fit in with the halacha that we've established? The first part of the meal, when people are gathering but not all of the guests have arrived, is not considered a group meal. They all know that more people will be arriving and that the main part of the meal has not started yet. So at that point, each guest must make his or her own brachot. Once everyone is reclining in the formal dining room and no one else is allowed to enter, the formal group meal has begun. At that point, one person can make a bracha on behalf of the others. This applies to the *hagefen* as well as the *hamotzi*.
- 2. Havdalah.** Tosfot asks, how can we stand for havdalah and have one person make the bracha on behalf of others? We've just seen that one person cannot make a bracha for others unless they are sitting, maybe even reclining, together. One possible answer is that coming together to do a mitzvah accomplishes the same purpose as reclining together, and so even though the group is standing it counts as a group. However, maybe it would be better for everyone to sit for havdalah. While the Shulchan Aruch rules that we stand for havdalah, the Vilna Gaon says that we should follow Tosfot and sit. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein says that there are different ways to understand the Vilna Gaon, and so everyone should just follow their own family custom.
- 3. When do we make a bracha on scent?** In ancient times, at the end of a meal they would light incense sticks. At what point should the bracha on the scent of the incense be made? When the smoke goes up. Rabbi Zeira asks, should we really make the bracha then, even before we've actually smelled the incense? Maybe it's better to wait and make the bracha after enjoying the smell. Rava bar Yirmiya responds that just as you make a bracha on bread before eating it, you make a bracha on scent before smelling it. This answer seems so obvious that it makes us wonder why there would even be a question. Brachot on food always come before the food is eaten, so why would we assume that the bracha on scent is any different? Perhaps because smelling doesn't fill the appetite the way that eating does. When even partaking and enjoying

the scent does not provide any tangible benefit, why should we make a bracha before partaking? In addition, a piece of food can (and should) be held when making a bracha, but since a scent cannot be held, we might think you would need to actually smell it before making the bracha. Therefore the gemara must say that smelling is similar to eating and that we must make a bracha when we intend to smell an enjoyable scent.

4. **What bracha do we make on scent?** For scents that come from trees, we make the bracha, "*Baruch atah Hashem...boreh atzay besamim.*" This refers not to fruits but to leaves, stalks, bark, and their direct derivatives. It even includes roses, which halachically count as trees. On everything that grows but doesn't come from a tree as defined by halacha, like mint, we say, "*Baruch atah Hashem...boreh isvay besamim.*" There are a number of exceptions to this rule. For fruits that smell good, we say, "*Baruch atah Hashem...hanosein rayach tov l'peiros*" - Who gives good smell into His fruit. This bracha is not made when one is eating a fruit but only when one is purely appreciating the smell. For all spices, if you're not sure which one of these brachos to make, you should say, "*Baruch atah Hashem...boreh minay besamim.*" That's the one we all know from havdalah. Since spices are distilled today, maybe we shouldn't be making these brachos at all or we should only be using *boreh minay besamim*. Ashkenazim today always use *boreh minay besamim* for havdalah, but Sephardim use the more specific brachos. There is also one more, for balsam oil, that is not really used today: "*Baruch atah Hashem...boreh shemen arev*" - Who created beautiful scent in oil.
5. **Why do we make a bracha on scent?** Rav says we must make a bracha on everything the soul benefits from. What is something that gives benefit to the soul but not the body? Scent. The word for soul, *neshama*, is related to the word for breath, *neshima*. The verse "every soul shall praise You" can therefore be retranslated as "with every breath I praise You." Everything that we have is from G-d, and we must recognize His hand in everything and acknowledge Him always. Taking something from this world without acknowledging Him with a bracha is like theft, like misappropriating something sacred for personal use. Since smelling isn't tangible it is not misappropriation in this way, but nonetheless it requires an acknowledgement of G-d because we are getting a benefit through scent, which is a part of breathing.
6. **What about the scent of our food?** If we always need to acknowledge G-d when we smell something nice, do we need to make an extra bracha over the smell of the food we're eating? No, because smelling is a part of eating and therefore the concept of *ikar* and *tafel* applies. The smell is *tafel*, secondary, and does not require its own bracha. That is also why we do not make a bracha on the smell of the esrog when we shake the Four Species: we make a bracha on the mitzvah of shaking the lulav and esrog, and that is the *ikar*. The scent is secondary and doesn't require an additional bracha. This also explains why it is permissible to smell the esrog but not the hadasim (myrtle). The esrog is primarily for eating, and its scent is secondary, so even though the esrog is designated for a mitzvah its scent is permissible. But for the hadasim smell is primary, and so it would be inappropriate to get personal benefit from their scent when they are being used for a mitzvah.
7. **The blessing on blossoming trees.** When you go out in springtime and see trees (specifically fruit trees) in blossom, you should make the bracha "*shelo chasar b'olamo klum u'bara bo b'riyot tovot v'ilanot tovim l'hanot bahem b'nay adam*" - He has not left anything lacking in this universe and He has created good creatures and good trees to give humankind pleasure with them. There's a window of opportunity for saying this bracha - if the fruits are already ripe enough to eat, it's too late.
8. **Ishbitz on smell and families without pedigree.** Rav Zutra bar Tuvia says that in the future the children of Israel will smell good, like Lebanon. The Ishbitzer Rebbe says that this is referring to people without *yichus*, those who can't trace their lineage and show important ancestry.

Sometimes we don't trust people who can't prove good backgrounds. We say that in the future, Elijah the Prophet will come and purify those without lineage. What is this really about? We all face difficulties in life, but the way we look at these difficulties affects how burdensome they are. A negative outlook will lead to depression, which will make our struggles that much harder. A positive outlook can turn difficulties into opportunities. We must do *birur*, the process of sifting through and finding the good within the bad, and that is the goal of the Messianic process. People tend to look negatively at those without *yichus*. The focus is on what these people are missing. But in the future those without *yichus* will give off a good smell - the positive will shine through, and it will become clear that they are good and worthy people.

9. **Never embarrass someone in public.** Rav Zutra bar Tuvia says in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that it's better for a person to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to embarrass someone in public. We learn this from Tamar, because when she was brought to her execution, accused of becoming pregnant by another man while she was promised to Shelah, she did not publicly name Yehuda as the father of her baby. Rather, she quietly showed him the collateral he had given her and gave him the opportunity to step forward himself. The *Tosefta* lists four opinions on the reason Yehuda merited kingship, and one of the opinions is that he did step forward here. Is this gemara meant to be taken literally? Does one actually need to die rather than humiliate another person? Most opinions say that it is not meant to be taken literally.
10. **Improper behavior for scholars.** The rabbis urge scholars to behave in a way such that they never raise suspicion. Torah scholars must be above reproach. They should not go out with excessive perfume and should not go out at night, lest people think they are up to no good. They should not go out with patched-up shoes or speak to women in the street (obviously this one doesn't really apply today - one cannot and should not ignore women). They should not gather with ignorant people, be too late to shul, take big steps, or walk in an arrogant way. By "take big steps" the gemara is probably referring to running like a madman, and not walking in an arrogant way does not mean that you can't walk straight. The idea is to walk like a normal person, but with humility. If a scholar does do one of these improper things, he can restore himself by drinking the kiddush wine on Friday night.