



נדרים דף פ"א

English Halacha Topics

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Mayer and Chaya Rivka Fischl

Birchas HaTorah

“Why was the Land of Israel destroyed?” asks the verse in Yirmiyah. “Because they forsook my Torah.” The Gemara says this means they did not make the blessings before learning Torah. Why is that so bad? The Ran explains with a fundamental lesson in the name of Rabbeinu Yona. They didn’t make the blessings before because they didn’t appreciate Torah study enough. That was enough of a misdemeanor to warrant the destruction of Israel!

Some commentators find this interpretation difficult. The Gemara says that not the wise men nor the prophets of the time nor even angels were able to discern this. But why not, if the issue was a lack of birchas haTorah? Couldn’t they realize that people weren’t saying them?

Therefore, the Magen Giborim (O.C. 47:8) adds another layer to the explanation. There’s a halacha that by saying the blessing before Kriyas Shema, Ahava Rabba (or Olam), one can also fulfill the obligation of birchas haTorah. However, this is only if one intends it, or at least doesn’t intend to the contrary.

The Jews at the time of the Destruction didn’t consider Torah study worthy enough to make a blessing on, so they said Ahava Rabba intending only for the Shema they were about to say, and not for Torah study. That did not constitute birchas haTorah. Thus, the fact that they didn’t say the usual birchas haTorah didn’t pose a problem in and of itself – maybe they used Ahava Rabba. The Sages couldn’t know their thoughts when saying it, that it would not apply to later learning. Only Hashem knows one’s thoughts.

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There are many applications of the halacha that Ahava Rabba works as birchas haTorah. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 47:12) cites two opinions if one must make a new blessing if he napped (in a bed) during the day. The general custom is to be lenient, but the Mishnah Berurah (13) points out a way to compromise. The blessing Ahavas Olam in Maariv also constitutes birchas haTorah – so have it in mind when you daven Maariv!

This is quite common on Erev Shavuos (and Pesach), when many people take a nap. In Kovetz Halachos he also advises to have it in mind during Maariv (Hilchos Shavuos 11:11). One should also learn something immediately following Maariv, as the Shulchan Aruch writes.

Another topic of discussion is a Bar Mitzvah boy. When he said birchas haTorah the morning before his 13th birthday, he was still a minor. Does he need to say it again at nightfall when he becomes a halachic adult? It's subject to debate, so Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l would tell boys that when they say Ahavas Olam in Maariv, they should have in mind to fulfill birchas haTorah.

A parallel topic is Birchas Hamazon. If a boy ate and bentched before nightfall and becomes Bar Mitzvah that night, does he need to say it again because now he has a Biblical obligation? The Steipler assumed that he does not (Kehilos Yaakov, Berachos Siman 24). His son Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l said the same thing about birchas haTorah. Although he said it while a minor, it has Biblical validity (Derech Sichah Vol. 1 p. 493).

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