

PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH LEARNING PROJECT

# **Orach Chaim - Volume 1**

## **Shiur 1**

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## The *Birchos Hashachar*: Preface, Introduction, and Overview

*Simon 46*



Even the most familiar *mitzvos* that we perform are replete with intricate *Halachos* (laws) and profound philosophical meaning.

As we begin the study of *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Simon (Chapter) 46* that deals

with the blessings we say each morning, it is important to bear in mind the insight of our sages in instituting the daily order of prayer.

We will learn about the different opinions amongst the *Rishonim* (early commentators to the *Gemora*) pertaining to these blessings, and we will follow through with the development of the *Halacha* and its intricacies as explained by the *Mechaber*, the *Rama* and numerous other commentators to the *Shulchan Aruch*.

As with every area of *Torah* study, this section of *Halachos* has differences of opinions amongst the *Poskim* (deciders of Jewish law), and the *Halachos* are not complete until the subject matter has been treated in full. Generally, the Jews of Sephardic descent, follow the opinion of the *Mechaber*, although as we will see later in this *Simon*, this is not always the case. The Jews of Ashkenazic descent, generally follow the opinion of the *Rama*.

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INTRODUCTION

PART 1

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## Man's Purpose

The Ramban<sup>1</sup> in Parshas Bo writes:

*The primary purpose of creation is that man should have an awareness of Hashem and give thanks to Hashem for creating him. It is for this purpose that we gather in shul, to proclaim our thanks to Hashem for creating us.*

### The Purpose of Prayer

**We must adjust our  
mindset**

Bearing this in mind, we must adjust our mindset upon entering synagogue. We must contemplate that we are entering its confines for a sublime purpose. Accordingly, it is appropriate that just before entering, we should do something to remind ourselves of this, so that our *tefilos* will be properly focused on proclaiming, as the Ramban<sup>2</sup> puts it, “we are your creations!”

### Upon Entering Shul

**The Shulchan Aruch  
Horav**

The **Shulchan Aruch Horav**<sup>3</sup> writes that according to kabala, the verse *V'a'ani Be'rov Chasdecha Oh'rov Bei'se'cha* (As for me, through your abundant kindness I will enter Your House) should be recited just before entering the synagogue. This verse recognizes the kindness of *Hashem* to allow us to even enter the shul to speak His praises. Then, upon entering one should say *Be'beis Elokim Ne'haleich Be'rgesh*, (that in the House of G-d we shall go with great commotion). Presumably, this is to arouse us to approach our *tefilos* with great passion. In addition, one must place an emphasis on the mitzvah of *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha*<sup>4</sup>, (love your fellow as you love yourself). The **Machtzis Hashekel**<sup>5</sup> comments that emphasizing this, enhances our *tefilos* (prayers) to be readily accepted, in the merit of the assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemos 13:11

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Orach Chaim 46:1. See also Sha'arei Teshuva 46:1, Nesiv Chaim, Mishna Berura introduction simon 46

<sup>4</sup> Vayikra 19:18

<sup>5</sup> On Magein Avraham ad loc.

## Additional Benefit

We oftentimes have some degree of difficulty in our relationship with our fellow Jews. We may at times, look around a room full of people and find that we have just a few real friends amongst the group.

### Coming to shul can serve as an invaluable lesson

Coming to shul can serve as an invaluable lesson. We know that in order to daven in shul we must have at least a *minyan* (ten adult Jewish males) present. Without it, we would not be able to recite *Kaddish*, *Borchu*, or *Kedusha* to name just a few. If we analyze this just a little, we would understand that in order to come to shul and sing the praise of *Hashem*, we cannot come alone. We must include our fellow Jews together in one united group. **He desires a unified nation.** Therefore, the importance of loving our fellow Jew cannot be underestimated. *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha*, is the prerequisite for our *tefilos* (prayers) to be accepted. Through the unified effort of *Klal Yisroel* (the Jewish Nation) proclaiming, *Hashem* is our king and we are his servants we will surely merit that *Hashem* will readily accept our *tefilos*.

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## INTRODUCTION

### PART 2

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## A Nation United

The **Likutei Maharich**<sup>6</sup> explains the concept of accepting upon us the *mitsvah* of *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha* before starting the daily prayers, with the following explanation. The **Kabalists** write, that in order for our *tefilos* to soar upward to heaven without hindrance, we require a level of fervent devotion to beseech *Hashem*. If the prayers are not heartfelt, it's like a rocket ship with its payload that cannot lift itself off its launch pad because of lack of fuel.

So, what can we do to help ourselves alleviate this problem? How do we add this fuel to our prayers if our *tefilos* are so lackluster?

The answer is our *tzadikim* (righteous individuals of each generation). They are the ones who feel the pain of the generation. They understand the needs. They are the ones who can *daven* (pray) with great devotion.

We must now ask ourselves, how do we tap into this resource? On the other hand, perhaps we should ask, as the **Chasam Sofer** notes; **may we tap into this resource?** Doesn't this resemble prayer through an intermediary, which the **Rambam** in his commentary to the *Mishna* at the end of tractate *Sanhedrin* strictly forbids?

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<sup>6</sup> Page 25 (number on top of page)

The **Chasam Sofer**<sup>7</sup> answers, that the prohibition only applies to intermediaries like angels. Other humans are not considered a prayer through intermediaries since we are all united as one, and consider ourselves a single entity.

The **Likutei Maharich** elaborates on this theme, quoting from the great *tzaddik* (sage) *Horav Shmuel Shmelke* of *Nicholsberg*. How does one fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha* if someone wantonly attacks him physically? How can one overcome one's natural feeling of enmity towards his attacker?

**Would you get angry with yourself if you hurt yourself?**

The answer to this, lies in the central theme of the *mitzvah* of *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha*. The essence of this *mitzvah* is a realization that each and every Jew is part of a greater entity; a nation united as one.

- Would you get angry with yourself if you hurt yourself by mistake?
- Would you get angry if you did it on purpose?

At best, you would excuse yourself because of insanity! The same holds true for those who live by the tenet of *Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha*. With this we can understand what it means to incorporate the *tzadikim's* prayers to benefit our own. They are not separate entities. They are all part of our very own being. We consider them as our hearts and minds and everyone else, as the balance of a single human being. Together, we function as a nation. Our unified *tefilos* soar to *Hashem* and accomplish their goals. Hence, such prayer is not considered praying through an intermediary. This explains as the *Chasam Sofer's* position.

**However, there remains one prerequisite**

However, there is one condition that must be fulfilled for us to benefit through our unified prayers. When davening (praying) we must at least be aware that we are praying to *Hashem* and we must concentrate on enunciating the words of prayer, properly. Then, we have a “payload”, which together with the *tefilos* of the *tzadikim* of the generation, can be propelled upward to *Shomayim* (high heavens) and produce enormous results.

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<sup>7</sup> Responsa Orach Chaim 166

### Remember!

- It's a privilege to pray to *Hashem* our Creator
- The purpose of gathering in *shul* is to proclaim we are *Hashem's* servants
- Concentrate on the *mitzvah* of loving your fellow Jew when beginning prayers
- Be aware that we are praying to *Hashem*
- Enunciate the words of prayer properly<sup>8</sup>

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OVERVIEW TO  
BROCHOS

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## An Exercise in Appreciation

Imagine praying at the Western Wall every single day of the year. Would there come a point where the initial emotion of awe, fades away? If so, it shows how we take being in *Hashem's* presence, for granted. The same logic applies to the gifts *Hashem* bestows upon us. At what point do we begin for granted, the very food we eat? Do we forget it is *Hashem*, Who in His mercy feeds us? Realizing our weakness in appreciating *Hashem's* kindness, we need to constantly say “please” and “thank you” to *Hashem*, by means of reciting *brochos* (blessings). By doing so, we raise our awareness of *Hashem's* loving-kindness and teach ourselves to appreciate all the gifts that He bestows upon us

## Understanding the Basics

### ***Boruch Atto Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam...***

This is a phrase that we are all familiar with. This is how most of our blessings begin. Unfortunately, we are too familiar with this phrase, and we don't give it much attention. As the *Mesillas Yesbarim* writes in his introduction to his classic *sefer* (book) of *mussar* (ethics), “we oftentimes don't pay enough attention to that which we are most familiar with”.

As we begin this section of *Orach Chaim*, which discusses the many blessings we recite each day, let us first explore the essence of a *brocha*.

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<sup>8</sup> See simon 101 and Mishna Berura s”k 1 for minimum *kavanah*, concentration that is necessary

## Boruch Atto: The praise of Hashem

*Boruch Atto Hashem* is usually translated as: Blessed are you *Hashem*.

*What does this mean? Are we blessing Hashem? Does Hashem require our blessing?*

**A gift of loving  
kindness**

**Rabbeinu Bachaye**<sup>9</sup> discusses this topic in depth. He explains that we are indeed praising *Hashem*, recognizing that He is the source of all blessings. When we praise *Hashem* about this attribute, we are attesting that *Hashem* created the entire universe and that by His will, He continues to maintain it constantly. By recognizing this, we merit that *Hashem* bestows us with loving-kindness. Our sages teach us, *Hashem* desires the prayers of the righteous. When we say a *brocha*, we increase the flow of good fortune unto this world from *Hashem*. In fact, the word ***brocha*** connotes multiplying and increasing. Therefore, a *brocha* is something that is completely for our own benefit and in no way for *Hashem's* benefit. Someone that refrains from saying a blessing is in a sense **stealing** from *Hashem*. Instead of recognizing that *Hashem* is the sole source of all blessing, and the provider of our needs, he is attributing his successes to himself or some other intermediary.

Another aspect is<sup>10</sup> that the primary reason for creation was so that *Hashem* can exercise His kindness towards His creations. When we do something, whether it's a *mitzvah* or partaking in a pleasure, we need to recognize that this is an opportunity given to us by *Hashem* for our own benefit. When reciting a *brocha*, we show a realizing of the purpose of creation – bestowing G-d's world with loving-kindness.

## Another Insight

***Hashem* created this  
world in order to  
bestow us with His  
kindness**

The **Sefer Hachinuch**<sup>11</sup> explains at great length how to understand the concept of *brochos*<sup>12</sup>. He explains that since *Hashem* is the essence and source of all good, it is inherent in this to bestow this goodness unto others. It is for this purpose alone that *Hashem* created the entire universe. Simply put, this world is a setting for the fulfillment of *Hashem's* kindness. For this reason, it is our duty to avail ourselves to be the recipients of

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<sup>9</sup> *Sefer Kad Hakemach*, subtitle: Brocha, Sefer Devarim 8:10

<sup>10</sup> Siddur Otzar Hatefila Hakdama Koleles

<sup>11</sup> Parshas Eikev

<sup>12</sup> He prefaces that he writes this explanation with great trepidation, since there are far deeper esoteric reasons behind the concept of *brocha*

this kindness. This is why our sages arranged the institution of reciting blessings. It is in order for us to recognize *Hashem's* will to be kind and thereby become deserving of His benevolence. By doing this, we are acknowledging the purpose of creation.

### Therefore when we say *Boruch Atto Hashem*:

- We are proclaiming that *Hashem* is *boruch* - the source of all blessing and kindness.
- We give recognition that *Hashem*, in His infinite benevolence created this world and all its pleasures for the benefit of mankind.
- We pray that *Hashem* should exercise His will to continue to bestow us with kindness, which we merit through our recognition of *Hashem*, as the source of all good.

### *Boruch Atto*: Making the Connection

**Rav Chaim Volozhiner** in his classic work **Nefesh Hachaim**<sup>13</sup> addresses the issue of *brochos* as well. He also understands the idea of *boruch attto Hashem*, as meaning that *Hashem* is the source of everything good.

*He asks: How does the recitation of a brocha connect us to the source of good?*

#### **Increasing the Abundance of a Blessing**

He answers, that *Hashem* is infinite and far beyond the grasp of our human intellect. Yet, He reveals Himself to us a little through interacting with us in our daily lives in various ways. This is one reason why a *brocha* consists of two parts:

1. **Boruch attto** – (Blessed are You) speaks directly in second person
2. **Asher kidshanu** (Who sanctifies us), or (for example) **borei pri ha'etz** (Who creates the fruit of trees), speaks in third person

This apparent grammatical contradiction is deliberate, to allude to us that *Hashem* is somewhat revealed, yet greatly hidden from us.

With our recitation of *brochos*, we accomplish that *Hashem* increases the abundant flow of blessing to the spiritual realms above, which in turn trickle down to us, in the world we live in.

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<sup>13</sup> Sha'ar 2, Perek 3,4



**Accordingly, Boruch Atto Hashem means:**

Hashem, the source of all blessing, should increase His blessing upon the spiritual worlds, whereby the abundance of blessing and prosperity will shower down upon us.

This can explain why it is necessary to insert **Melech Ha'olam** (King of the Universe) into each *brocha*. It is because, only through the recitation of *brochos* (blessings) that we develop a relationship and recognition of *Hashem* as the ultimate source of kindness, which in turns allows the flow of good fortune from Hashem to this world.

## Questions on Shiurim:

1. When studying the *Shulchan Aruch*, and there is a difference of opinions between the *Mechaber* and the *Rama*, which opinion should we follow?
2. What can we do to help prepare ourselves for prayer?
3. What are *tefilos* worth if they are not heartfelt?
4. What does it mean to say *Boruch Atta Hashem*? Are we giving *Hashem* our blessings?
5. What is the proper way to gain an understanding of *Hashem*?
6. How is our understanding of *Hashem* reflected in the words of a *brocha*?

## Answers

1. Generally, Sephardim follow the rulings of the Mechaber and Ashkenazim follow the Rama. However, in this simon we will see that Sephardim follow the opinion of the Rama and Ashkenazim at least try to satisfy the opinion of the Mechaber when possible.
2. The Shulchan Aruch Horav outlines three things to concentrate on.
  - *Saying Va'ani Be'rov Chasdecha etc. recognizing the privilege of praying to Hashem*
  - *Saying Be'beis Elokim Ne'haleich Be'rogesh to arouse our spirits*
  - *Emphasizing the mitzvah of **Ve'ohavta Le'reyacha Ko'mocha***
3. They still can be elevated by tzadikim.
4. It's recognizing Hashem as the source of all good, preparing us to be the recipients of this good, and connecting ourselves spiritually to the source of good.
5. We only understand Hashem through His interaction with us in this world. However, we cannot grasp an understanding beyond this, since Hashem is really much hidden from our understanding.
6. This is alluded to in the format of a brocha, which is in the first and in third person grammatical style.