

## BIRCHOT HATORAH

The Sefer HaChinuch and others say that the same pasuk that teaches us that benching after a meal is a Torah Law, also commands us to say b'rachot each morning for the mitzva of learning and teaching Torah and acting upon the Torah teachings.

With that said, here are some points about Birchot HaTorah for your knowledge and consideration.

There is a dispute as to whether LAASOK B'DIVREI TORAH and HAAREV NA are two brachot or is one bracha. The prevailing practice seems to be that the two combine (with a connecting VAV) to form a single 'long' bracha:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה. והערב נא ה' אלהינו את דברי תורתך בפנינו ובפני עמך בית ישראל, ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל כלנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמחה. ברוך אתה ה', המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל.

'Long' does not refer to number of words in the bracha but whether the bracha has one BARUCH ATA either at the beginning or towards the end (short bracha) or BARUCH ATA at beginning and end (long bracha).

Because we consider this as a single bracha, we do not answer AMEIN after LAASOK B'DIVREI TORAH, but only after HAM'LAMEID TORAH L'AMO YISRAEL.

Note that the V'HAAREV NA portion of the bracha asks G-d for His help that our Torah learning should be a sweet and pleasant experience - for us and our children and their children...

A point about the ending of the first bracha.

In the account of Matan Torah in both Yitro and in Va'etchanan, we see that G-d Himself began to teach us Torah directly - this refers to the Tradition that it was G-d who said to us ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA, I am HaShem your G-d who took you out of Egypt, and also LO YIHYEH L'CHA... There shall be no other gods before Me. At that point, the people of Israel approached Moshe Rabeinu and expressed their fear in hearing G-d's voice directly, and asked him (Moshe) to transmit what G-d wants of the people and they (we) would obey. And so it was. Moshe seems to have thought that it was a good idea, and G-d agreed, as well.

As a result, NEVI'IM (prophets) and Kohanim and Leviyim, Sages and Rabbis - throughout the generations became the teachers of Torah and the transmitters of G-d's Word to the People of Israel.

A practical drawback to this system is our teachers - the ones who, in essence, are speaking in G-d's name, are all human beings. Finite and fallible human beings. It is possible that a teacher might not hit it off well with a student, or not do a very good

job at teaching, or turn the student off...

The bracha implies that we still can ask for G-d's help in making our Torah learning a positive, inspiring, enjoyable experience. And the bottom line - literally for this first bracha, as well as figuratively - is that G-d is the M'LAMEID TORAH L'AMO YISRAEL, G-d is the Ultimate Teacher of Torah to His People.

Let's take a look at the second of the Birchot HaTorah.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים,  
וְנָתַן לָנו אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

If the first bracha - LAASOK... is the Birkat HaMitzva for Torah learning, teaching, and observing, then this second bracha expresses our excitement that we have a mitzva to learn and teach, to preserve and to do. It's almost like a daily SHEHECHEYANU. After saying the first bracha which acknowledges G-d as the One who sanctifies us with His mitzvot and commanded us to immerse ourselves in Torah AND asks for His help in making all aspects of a Torah Life sweet to us, then this is the bracha that expresses our joy at being part of the nation that G-d had chosen from among all the other nations and that He gave us His Torah.

But there is more. BACHAR BANU and NATAN LANU are past tense. But notice how the bracha ends, and what that ending adds to all of the above. BARUCH ATA HASHEM (You, G-d) are the Source of all blessing) and You are the NOTEIN HATORAH, the One who gives (present tense) the Torah. Moshe received Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua ... and so on, through the generations, but G-d continues to give us the Torah on an ongoing basis.

Twice in the second passage of Sh'ma, we find the word **v'na-ta-TI**. Accent is on last syllable - if not, meaning changes.

v'na-ta-TI is an example of a word whose accent is pulled in two different directions. **na-TA-ti** means 'I gave', past tense. To change the verb to future, a VAV is prefixed to the word. AND the accent moves to the last syllable: **v'na-ta-TI**. But when a word with the accent on the last syllable is followed by a one-syllable word in the same phrase, the accent goes to

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