**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

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**Shiur #70: *Birkot Ha-Mitzvot* (6)**

**The Laws of *Hefsek* (Interruptions) in *Birkot Ha-Mitzva* (2)**

(This week we finish our study of *birkot ha-mitzvot*. All of the shiurim, in one file, can be found [here](http://etzion.org.il/en/birkot-ha-mitzvot).)

[Last week](http://etzion.org.il/en/%E2%80%8Bshiur-69-birkot-ha-mitzvot-5-laws-hefsek-interruptions-birkot-ha-mitzva), we began our discussion of “interruptions (“*hefsek*”). We learned about the definition and consequences of “interrupting” before performing a mitzva. We noted that the Talmud relates to this question in two contexts, regarding one who speaks between saying a blessing and eating food (*Berakhot* 40a) and one who speaks in between saying the blessing over the *tefillin* and donning the *tefillin* (*Menachot* 35a; see also *Chullin* 86b–87a). The *Rishonim* (see, for example, Rashi and Tosafot, *Menachot* 36a) explain that these two passages relate the same, universal principle: if one speaks between the blessing and its action, one must repeat the blessing. We also noted that the *Posekim* discuss other forms of *hefsek*, such as walking to a different place (see Shulchan Arukh 8:13; Magen Avraham, ibid. 17; Taz, ibid. 11; and Be’ur Ha-Gra, ibid. 25), and even whether a long pause (see Magen Avraham, ibid. 14) would also cause one to repeat the blessing.

We also discussed whether one who interrupts in the middle of the performance of a mitzva would need to repeat the blessing. Generally, speaking during the performance of a mitzva is permitted, such as while wearing *tzitzit* or *tefillin* or while sitting in a *sukka*; even when it is prohibited, such as during the recitation of *Hallel* (see *Berakhot* 14a), the reading of the *Megilla*, or during the blowing of the *shofar*, it is not viewed as a “*hefsek.*” Therefore, a new blessing is not required. We noted that the *Rishonim* discuss whether certain *mitzvot* are exceptions. For example, the *Rishonim* (see Rosh, *Pesachim* 1:6; Shulchan Arukh, OC 432:1; and Taz, ibid.) discuss whether or not one may talk during *bedikat chametz* (search for *chametz*) after one has already said the blessing and started the search.

Finally, we also mentioned that some interruptions might actually serve as the “conclusion” of a mitzva, which would, by definition, require one to say another blessing upon resuming the mitzva. For example, is entering a bathroom or removing one’s *tallit* an interruption?

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This week, we will conclude our study of interruptions in particular and of *birkot ha-mitzvot* in general, as we discuss the role of “*da’at*” in the laws of interruptions.

**Saying One Blessing before Repeating a Mitzva**

Seemingly, one can question whether “*da’at*” (intention) can constitute an interruption in two different scenarios.

It seems that all would agree that if one has in mind to complete a mitzva and then decides to continue it, he must say another blessing. Indeed, the Rashba (*Chullin* 86b, s.v. *modeh*) writes that “a ritual slaughterer… if he turned his intention from slaughtering, he must say another blessing over the *shechita*.”

But what if one intended, when he said the blessing, to perform a certain action, and he then decides to add additional actions? In order to understand this case, we must first analyze a situation in which one performs multiple *mitzvot*.

There are certain *mitzvot* which one can perform multiple times in sequence, such as *shechita* and *mila*. The *Rishonim* discuss whether one can say one blessing before performing the same mitzva numerous times. The debate emerges from different understandings of a passage in the Talmud. The *mishna* (*Chullin* 86b) teaches:

If a person slaughtered a hundred wild animals (*chayot*) in one place, one covering suffices for all; if [he slaughtered] a hundred birds (*ofot*) in one place, one covering suffices for all; if [he slaughtered] a wild animal and a bird in one place, one covering suffices for both. R. Yehuda says: If he slaughtered a wild animal, he should cover up its blood and then slaughter the bird [and cover it up also].

The *mishna* discusses the laws of *kisuy ha-dam*, the covering of the blood required after slaughtering wild animals (*chayot*) or bird (*ofot*). The *mishna* teaches that according to the Rabbis, one covering of the blood suffices for numerous animals and different species, while according to R. Yehuda, each species should have its own *kisuy ha-dam*. The *gemara* adds that despite this ruling, R. Yehuda maintains that with regard to the blessing, he has only to say one blessing.

We will not discuss R. Yehuda’s view in this context, but most *Rishonim* explain that this statement reveals that even according to the Rabbis, the *shochet* says one blessing before slaughtering many animals. However, some *Rishonim* disagree. For example, the Ittur (Sha’ar 3, *Hilkhot Mila*) explains that if one slaughters two animals in one action, he says only one blessing. If, however, one slaughters numerous animals in multiple actions, one must say a blessing before each and every *shechita*. The Ittur believes that a blessing can only be said over one mitzva.

How are we to understand the opinion of most *Rishonim*, who maintain that one may say one blessing before fulfilling a mitzva multiple times? We must look at the laws of interruptions for some guidance.

As we mentioned above, one who has in mind to complete a mitzva must say another blessing if he decides to continue to fulfill the mitzva. The Rosh (*Chullin* 6:6) raises another, less obvious issue:

Is a case in which he only had the intention to slaughter one bird, and after he slaughtered it they brought him another bird, he must say a blessing over the *shechita*, just as a servant must say a blessing over each and every piece of bread.

Why does the Rosh maintain that the *shochet* must say another blessing in this case?

Seemingly, we can offer a number of suggestions, which may help us to understand how one may recite one blessing before fulfilling a mitzva multiple times.

On the one hand, we may understand that he views each and every *shechita* as a separate mitzva, worthy of a blessing. Only when the *shochet* has numerous *shechitot* in mind can the blessing cover each *shechita*. Alternatively, the numerous *shechitot* may be viewed as one unit, upon which one says one blessing. The Rosh may believe that at times, such as when another bird is brought to the *shochet*, it is considered to be a different unit, and the original blessing therefore does not suffice. How should we define a unit? Either the *shochet’s* intention when he said the blessing defines the “unit” of this mitzva or the unit remains undefined, and only after the *shochet* turns his intention away from the slaughtering does he need to say another blessing.

We may find a practical difference between these understandings in the Tur (YD 19), who cites the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* (Semak):

The *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* writes that if when they brought him more animals, he still has other animals before him upon which he already said the blessing, he does not need to say another blessing on the new animals.

The Tur disagrees:

It does not seem reasonable to distinguish. Rather, upon any animal that was not before him when he said the blessing he must say a *berakha*, unless he had in mind [when he said the blessing] for all [animals] which will be brought before him.

It seems that the Semak and the Tur disagree regarding our question. According to the Tur, his attention at the time of the blessing defines the unit upon which the blessing falls, whereas according to the Semak, all animals are part of the “unit,” and a new blessing is only required if the *shochet* turned his attention away from the mitzva.

Interestingly, the definition of a “unit” may differ from mitzva to mitzva. In one place (YD 19:6), the Rema rules that if one brings a *shochet* similar animals to those that he is currently slaughtering, he does not need to say another blessing. But if one brings him different animals, he must say a blessing. Elsewhere, regarding the laws of *brit* *mila* (YD 265:5), he rules that whenever another child is brought to the *mohel* who was not present when he said the blessing, he must say another *berakha*. The *Acharonim* (see Shakh 265:15) note the apparent contradiction.

Apparently, the Rema maintains that one should apply different standards and definition to *shechita* and *mila*. Regarding *shechita*, he views all (similar) animals as one “unit” upon which one may say one blessing. In contrast, the Rema must believe that multiple babies cannot be defined as a “unit,” and therefore only babies present when the blessing is said are covered by the *berakha*.

Similarly, while the Shulchan Arukh (19:6) rules in accordance with the Semak that if additional animals are brought to the *shochet* while he is slaughtering he does not need to say another blessing, elsewhere (OC 8) he rules that if one is brought a second *tallit* that he did not have in mind to wear when he said the blessing, he must say another blessing. Apparently, the Shulchan Arukh views multiple *shechitot* as one unit, while *tzitzit* are viewed as individual *mitzvot*, which one must have in mind when saying the blessing.

Next week, we will begin our study of *Birkot Ha-Shevach*.