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{ TOPIC }

The *Berachah* on Seeing a Rainbow



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► Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary *halacha* with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant *shittos* on each topic, as well as the *psak* of Harav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita on current issues.

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The *Berachah* on Seeing a Rainbow

When one sees a rainbow, one must make a *berachah*. Although this *berachah* is not as common as other *berachos*, such as the ones made on thunder and lightning, it does come up. In this issue we will discuss questions that arise regarding this *berachah*. What conditions must be present in order to make the *berachah* on a rainbow? Can it be made at night? More than once a day? Can one tell his friend if he sees a rainbow? This article will also discuss what the rainbow symbolizes.

Source

Hashem told Noach that He will give him a sign that He will never again destroy the world. This sign was the rainbow.¹

The Gemara² says that when one sees a rainbow, a *berachah* must be made. The *berachah* to be recited is "ברוך א"י ברוך א"י".³ This requirement is also brought in halachah.⁴ This *berachah* does not end with *Baruch Atah*.⁵

There is a difference of opinion whether there is a *vav*

1 Bereishis 9:13. See Bereishis 9:8-12; Mishnah Berurah 4. Refer to Rivevos Ephraim 3:138:2. See Alshich, Bereishis 9:13.

2 Maseches Berachos 59a.

3 For a different *nusach*, see Tosafos, Maseches Berachos, "hilchok"; Hagahos Maimonios, Hilchos Berachos 10:16. Also see Beis Hillel 33:page 91, 36 page 77.

4 Rambam, Hilchos Berachos 10:16, Tur, O.C. 229, Shulchan Aruch 1.

5 Beis Yosef 229, Taz 1, Elya Rabbah 1.

before “*ne’eman*”⁶ in the *berachah* or if it is said without a *vav*.⁷ Most *poskim* say to mention it without a *vav*.⁸

Looking at a Rainbow

Many *mefarshim* ask⁹: If we are required to make a *berachah* when we see a rainbow, how can the Gemara¹⁰ say that the eyes of one who looks at a rainbow weaken, and he does not care for the honor of Hashem?¹¹ The answer is that this is referring to gazing at a rainbow (looking for a long time),¹² which is forbidden, while looking quickly is permitted.¹³

With Hashem’s Name or Not?

Some *poskim* maintain that there are two different kinds of rainbows. One is from the days of creation and the other is a natural occurrence.¹⁴ Based on this, some maintain that one should not recite the *berachah* on a rainbow with Hashem’s name or reference to *malchus*, since we do not know which rainbow is from the days of creation.¹⁵ However,

6 Meiri, *Maseches Berachos* 59a; Rambam, *Hilchos Berachos* 10:16, *Tur* 229, *Kaf Hachaim* 3, *Mishnah Berurah* 3.

7 Rosh, *Maseches Berachos* 9, Rif, *Maseches Berachos*, *Shulchan Aruch* 229:1, *Levush* 1, *Taz* 1, *Gra* 229, *Yosef Ometz* 377, *Ben Ish Chai*, *Eikev* 1:17, *Aruch Hashulchan* 1, *Minhagei Kamarna*, page 25:99, *Yalkut Yosef* 5:page 625. This is the way many *poskim* *pasken* (see *Biur Halachah*, page 177 for a list).

8 Elyah Rabbah 1. For a complete list of names, see *Biur Halachah*, page 177.

9 Beis Yosef 229.

10 *Maseches Chagigah* 16a, *Kiddushin* 40a.

11 *Maseches Kiddushin* 40a. Refer to *Kli Yakar*, *Bereishis* 9:13 in depth. See *Yechezkel* 1:28.

12 *Tur* 229, *Beis Yosef* 229, *Magen Avraham* 2, *Machatzis Hashekel* 2, see *Divrei Chamudos*, *Maseches Berachos* 9:39.

13 *Beis Yosef* 229, *Levush* 1, *Kaf Hachaim* 5, *Mishnah Berurah* 5, *Aruch Hashulchan* 2, *Histaklus B’halachah* 2:footnote 9.

14 *Yaros Devash* 1:12.

15 Refer to *Ben Ish Chai*, *Eikev* 1:17, *Kaf Hachaim* 4.



this is not the overwhelming custom and the *berachah* should be recited with Hashem's name.¹⁶

Telling Friends That There Is a Rainbow

The Gemara¹⁷ says that one should not give someone bad tidings. One who does so is a fool.¹⁸ There are *poskim* who maintain that since the rainbow is a sign that Hashem will not destroy the world, and seeing one is generally not a good sign because it shows that Hashem would want to destroy the world but promised not to, it is preferable that one who sees a rainbow refrain from telling his friend about it.¹⁹ Others disagree and maintain that one can tell his friend about seeing a rainbow.²⁰ One of the reasons is because we are happy and grateful that Hashem gave us this sign that the world won't be destroyed. If we tell people about this they will return from their bad ways.²¹ The majority custom is like the first opinion quoted.

It seems that even according to the stringent opinion above, one is allowed to hint to his friend that there is a rainbow so he can recite a *berachah*. For example, one may ask his friend if he knows the *berachah* to recite upon seeing a rainbow.²²

16 *Teshuvos Harosh* 4:3, *Aderes Tiferes* 4:10, *Kovetz Beis Aharon V'Yisrael* 106:pages 94-96, *Shevet Hakehasi* 4:74.

17 *Maseches Pesachim* 3a. Refer to *Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 402:12.

18 *Mishlei* 10:18.

19 *Chayei Adam* 64:4, *Mishnah Berurah* 1, *Kaf Hachaim* 1, *Bris Kehunah*, kuf:2. Refer to *Rivevos Ephraim* 5:461.

20 *Sefer Chassidim* 807, *Yalkut Yosef* 3:page 626, *Birchos Hashem* 4:4:38, 5:page 276, *Shulchan Aruch Hamekutzar* 1:pages 335-336:footnote 7, *Aderes Tiferes* 4:11, opinion of Harav Ovadia Yosef zt"l quoted in *Yalkut Yosef* 5:page 626.

21 *Bris Kehunah*, kuf:3.

22 *Chashukei Chemed*, *Maseches Berachos*, page 366. Refer to *Peleh Yoetz*, "besurah," page 43. See *Maharsha*, *Maseches Pesachim* 3b.

Seeing a Rainbow within Thirty Days

If one sees an ocean that requires a *berachah*, he only recites this *berachah* once in thirty days. However, this is not the case when seeing a rainbow. If one sees a rainbow twice within thirty days, he recites another *berachah*.²³ While the ocean one sees is the same ocean, the rainbow is a different rainbow.²⁴ This is comparable to the *berachah* one recites on thunder and lighting.²⁵

If one sees a rainbow twice in one day it is uncertain if a *berachah* is recited again.²⁶

How Much of the Rainbow Does One Have to See?

There is a discussion in the *poskim* as to how much of the rainbow one has to see in order to make the *berachah*. Is one obligated to see the entire rainbow or even parts of it?²⁷

Some suggest that even if one sees a bit of the rainbow a *berachah* is recited.²⁸ The reason is that this *berachah* is recited in gratitude to Hashem for remembering the *bris* with Noach not to destroy the world. Even if a bit of the rainbow is seen it warrants a *berachah*.²⁹ This is not the overwhelming custom.³⁰

Rainbow in Water

One who sees a rainbow in water does not recite a

23 Be'er Heitiv 229, Shaarei Teshuvah 1, Mishnah Berurah 2, Kaf Hachaim 2.

24 Ibid. See Machzik Berachah 1.

25 Mishnah Berurah 2.

26 Refer to Chashukei Chemed, Maseches Berachos, pages 367-368. See Zichron Avraham 229:pages 24-25, Shevet Hakehasi 6:136:1.

27 Biur Halachah, "haro'eh."

28 Yalkut Yosef 5:page 625, Birchos Hashem 5:page 275.

29 Birchos Hashem, ibid.

30 Refer to Teshuvos V'hanhagos 3:76:6.

berachah.³¹ The rainbow must be in the sky. One who sees a rainbow at Niagara Falls does not recite a *berachah* on it.³² The rainbow there is constant, and the *berachah* on a rainbow is only recited when it is in the sky and not always around.³³

At Night

One who happens to see a rainbow at night (although this is uncommon) may recite a *berachah* on the rainbow.³⁴

On Shabbos

If one sees a rainbow on Shabbos, he is allowed to say the *berachah*. Although we don't wear *tefillin*, which are an *os* — a sign — on Shabbos, the rainbow is a different type of sign.³⁵

Through a Window

If one sees a rainbow in the sky through a window, a *berachah* may be recited.³⁶

Blind Person, ר"ל

One who is blind does not recite the *berachah* with Hashem's name or reference to *malchus*.³⁷

When Was the Rainbow Created?

There is a discussion in the *Rishonim* if the rainbow was

31 Betzel Hachochmah 2:18:4, Yalkut Yosef 5:page 625. See Yalkut Gershuni, O.C. 229:1, Ruach Chaim 229:2.

32 Rivevos Ephraim 6:103.

33 Rivevos Ephraim 6:103.

34 Maharsham 2:124, Daas Torah 229:1, Piskei Teshuvah, pages 43-44, Mikabtzil (journal) 12:page 55-58 in depth. Refer to Targum Yehonasan, Ben Uziel, Bereishis 9:13, Ruach Chaim 229:2.

35 Shevus Yaakov 3:31.

36 Yalkut Yosef 5:page 625. See Betzel Hachochmah 2:18.

37 Divrei Binyahu 9:62:page 245. See Shevet Hakehasi 6:136:2.

shown during the days of creation or only after the *mabul*. Many say³⁸ that the rainbow was created during the first six days of creation.³⁹ The Mishnah⁴⁰ says that the rainbow was created during *bein hashamashos* of Erev Shabbos. Those who hold it was created later mean that it was really created during the six days of creation but not shown until Noach's time.⁴¹ Some maintain that before the *mabul* the clouds were formed in such a way that rainbows could not appear, and after the *mabul* Hashem changed this.⁴²

The Ramban⁴³ says that the reason why the rainbow is more significant than other signs⁴⁴ is because when a person fights with a bow and arrow, he faces the other person and pulls back the arrow and releases it. The rainbow, however, has the bow bent toward the ground, indicating that Hashem will not attack us.

38 While others argue (see *Ibn Ezra*, *Bereishis* 9:13, *Seforno* 9:13, *Rashi* 9:13).

39 *Ramban*, *Bereishis* 9:12, *Maharsha*, *Maseches Berachos* 59a, *Aruch Hashulchan* 1. Refer to *Seforno*, *Bereishis* 9:13, *Shaarei Aharon* on *Bereishis* 13:9. Others argue (see *Ibn Ezra*, *Bereishis* 9:13, *Kli Yakar*, *Bereishis* 9:13).

40 *Avos* 5:6.

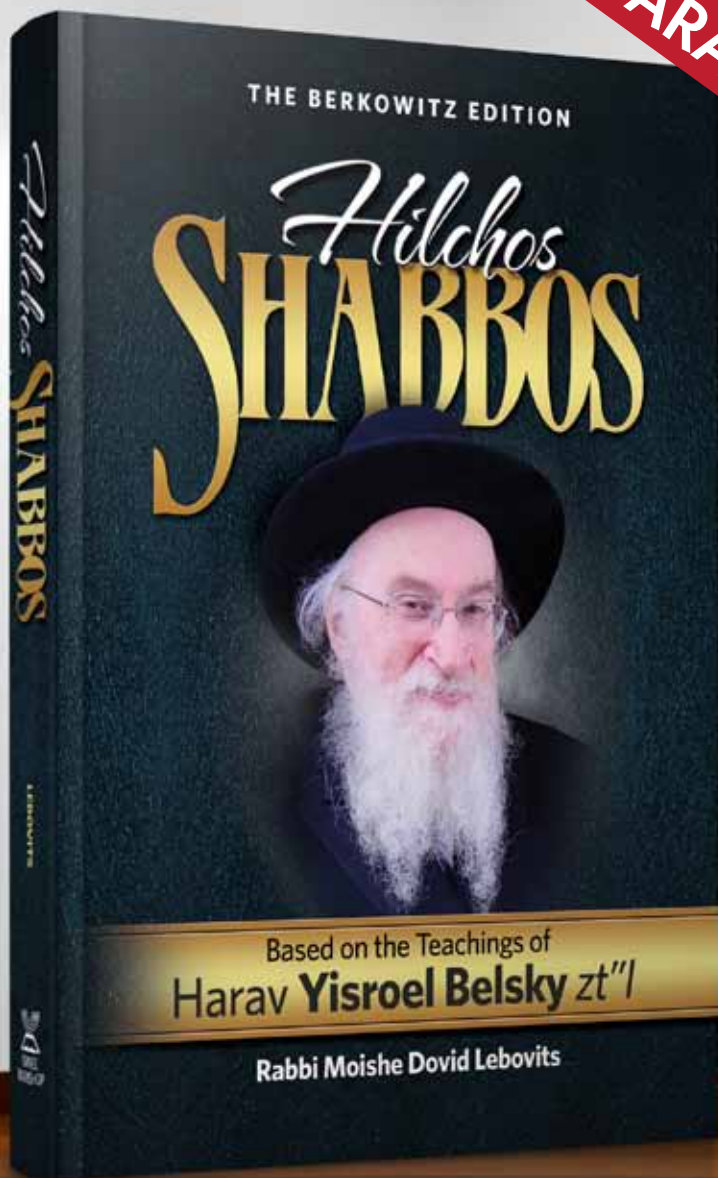
41 Refer to *Eitz Chaim* (Bobov) 6:pages 346-347.

42 *Levush Haorah* 9:13. Refer to *Eitz Chaim*, *ibid.*, pages 347-348, as to how the rainbow appeared before the days of Noach. See *Yismach Moshe*, *Bereishis* 9:13, *Gur Aryeh* 9:13, *Abarbanel* 9:13, *Kli Yakar* 9:13.

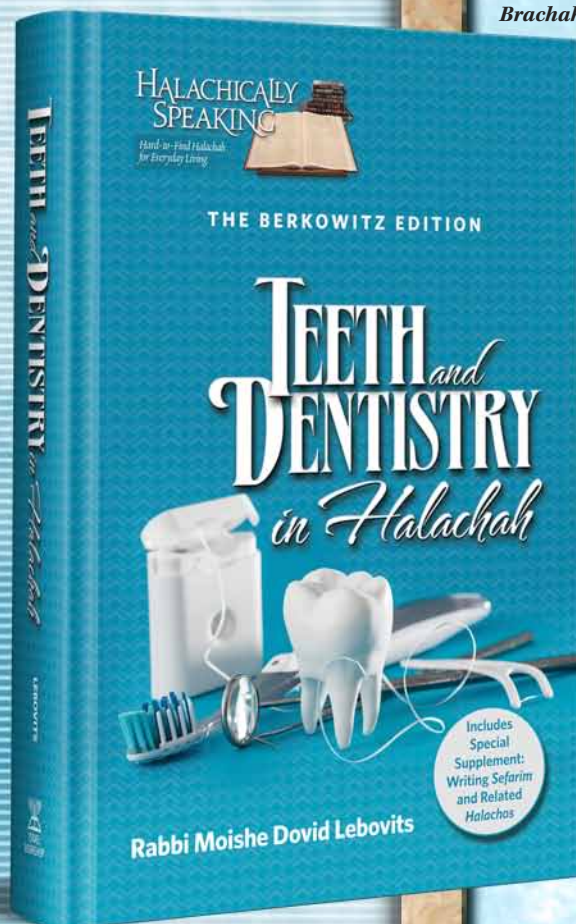
43 *Bereishis* 9:12. See *Chizkuni Bereishis* 9:13. For other reasons, see *Ralbag* 9:13.

44 See *Chizkuni*, *Bereishis* 9:13.

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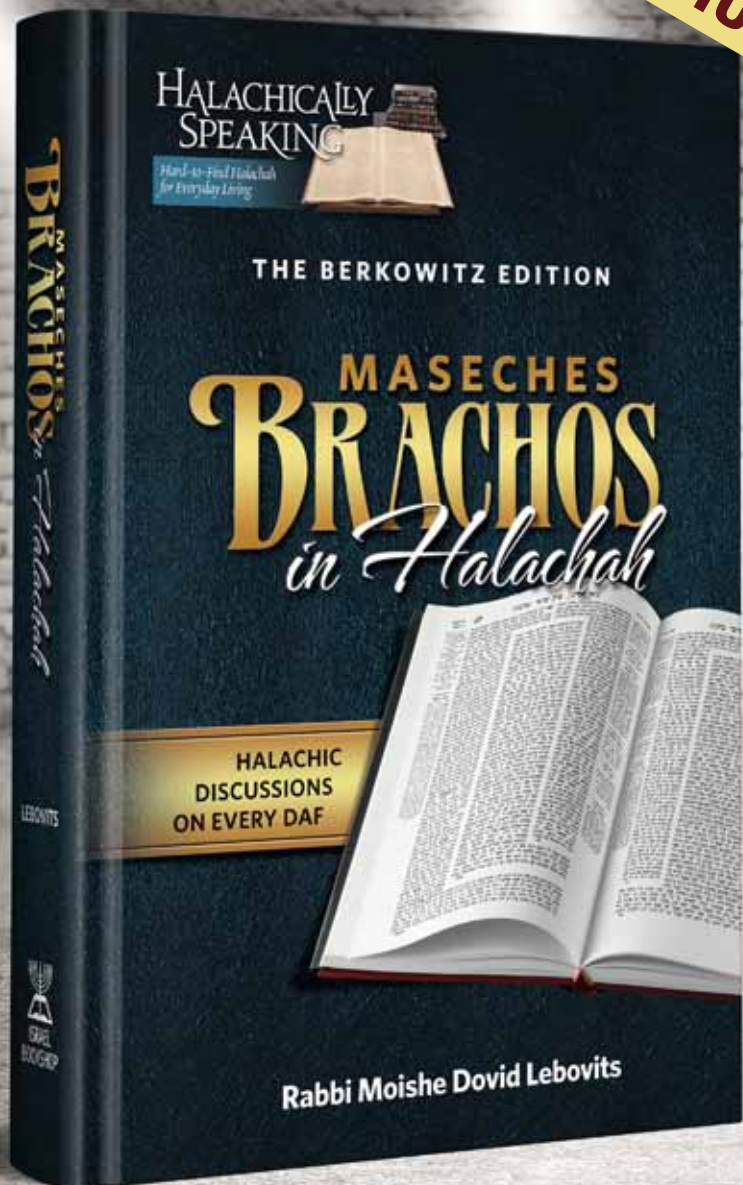
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