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Answering Amen to a Young Child's *Berachos*



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► Halachically Speaking is a monthly publication compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits, a former *chaver kollel* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and a *musmach* of Harav Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*. Rabbi Lebovits currently works as the Rabbinical Administrator for the KOF-K Kosher Supervision.

► 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, *zt"l* on current issues.

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Answering Amen to a Young Child's Berachos

When young children recite *berachos*, they often wait for an adult to answer amen. May an adult answer amen to a child's *berachah*? Does the child's age make a difference? Would it make a difference if the *berachah* was made in order to train the child in *berachos*? The following article will discuss these issues.

Source

When an adult recites a *berachah* on food, those around him answer amen.¹

When a child² is learning how to make a *berachah* and recites a *berachah* over food, one does not recite amen after the *berachah* is completed.³ It is not possible to answer amen, which is a statement that what was said is true, if such a *berachah* is not considered a real *berachah*.⁴

Child Saying *Krias Shema*

The opinion of the Magen Avraham⁵ is that a young child should not recite *Krias Shema* since he may be dirty from excrement. According to this reasoning, some say that a

1 *Maseches Berachos* 51b, 53b, *Shulchan Aruch* 215:2, *Rambam, Hilchos Berachos* 1:13, *Mishnah Berurah* 9.

2 See *Shulchan Aruch* 215:2.

3 *Shulchan Aruch* 215:3. A person teaching a child how make a *berachah* may say the name of Hashem while making the *berachah* (*Mishnah Berurah* 14). See *Birchei Yosef* 215:4.

4 *Mishnah Berurah* 13.

5 81:1.

child should not answer amen to someone else's *berachah*, and one would not answer amen to the child's *berachah*.⁶ Others say this is not a proof, since the custom is not to be concerned about being cleaned well. Therefore, answering amen to his *berachah* would be permitted.⁷ Nonetheless, if one knows the child is not clean, it is preferable not to answer amen to his *berachah*.⁸

Young Child

What is the halachah for answering amen to the *berachah* of a young child who is clean from excrement? The consensus is that if a child has not reached the age of *chinuch* (see below), one should not answer amen to his *berachah*.⁹ Others are not convinced that one who hears a *berachah* from a young child should not answer amen.¹⁰ They maintain that one should answer amen to a young child who is being trained to make a *berachah*.¹¹ The custom seems to be to permit this, since when answering amen to the child's *berachah* we are training him to answer amen.¹²

The reason we don't recite amen after a *berachah* made by a young child is because there is no mitzvah of *chinuch* for such a young child. There is therefore no reason to answer amen to a *berachah* recited by him.¹³ The child is learning

6 See Yabea Omer, O.C. 2:13. Refer to Chashukei Chemed, Maseches Berachos, page 289.

7 Divrei Yatziv 2:9, Chai Halevi 4:111:3.

8 Yabea Omer, O.C. 2:13.

9 Refer to Mishnah Berurah 215:16, Kaf Hachaim 19, Yabea Omer, O.C. 2:13, Even Hapinah 2:14, Teshuvos V'hanhagos 2:130, Shaarei Haberachah, pages 214-215:36.

10 See Moriah (journal) 97:page 104-105, also see Moriah 98:pages 116-119. Refer to Salmas Chaim 50, Divrei Yatziv 6:49:2, M'Beis Levi 5:pages 85-88.

11 Salmas Chaim 50.

12 Shaarei Horah 4:page 31, Even Yisrael 8:14. Refer to Binyan Av 1:8:5-6. See Vezos Haberachah, page 186.

13 Yabea Omer, O.C. 2:13:8.

how to say the *berachah* in order to get used to saying it when he is older, and therefore no amen is recited.¹⁴

Alternative to Amen

Young children often make a *berachah* and wait for others to say amen. As mentioned, this is not correct. It is not sufficient to tell a child that one can't say amen to his *berachah*. Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zt"l*,¹⁵ advises one to say an incomplete amen, such as "*ame...*" Although this sounds like amen, it is not a true amen. This way the child thinks one is saying amen when in reality he is not. There is no concern that one is training his child to say amen improperly since at that age children don't understand.¹⁶

Chinuch Age

There is a discussion in the *poskim* as to what is the correct age for a child who has reached the age of *chinuch*. It's assumed that a child who is 6 or 7 years old knows about Hashem and what it means to make a *berachah*.¹⁷ The same age is true for girls.¹⁸ Others say the age used to be 6 or 7, but today children are taught in school at ages 4 and 5 to say *berachos*. Therefore, one should answer amen to their *berachos* at a younger age.¹⁹ Some say that it is not dependent on a specific age but instead depends on each

14 *Salmas Chaim* 50.

15 *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 22:20, *Chinuch Yisroel* 1, pages 181-182.

16 *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 22:footnote 33.

17 See *Yabea Omer* 2:13:10-11, *Yalkut Yosef (chinuch)*, pages 153-156, *Ohr L'tzion* 2:14:33.

18 *Yabea Omer*, O.C. 2:13:12, 8:25:8, *Ohr L'tzion* 2:14:33, opinion of Harav Elyashiv, *zt"l*, quoted in *Ashrei Ha'ish* 1:page 60:5. See *Aruch Hashuchan* 215:2, who says one may say *amen* to a girl's *berachah* when she is 12 years old and one day. Refer to *Rivevos Ephraim* 2:pages 38-39.

19 *Yabea Omer*, O.C. 8:25:8.

child's wisdom, in terms of understanding what *berachah* is being said and to whom.²⁰

Training

Parents should train children to answer amen to *berachos* they hear even before they start coming to shul.²¹

Child Saying *Kaddish*

The custom is that a child who has reached the age of *chinuch* says *Kaddish* for a parent who died, *R"l*. One may answer amen during the recital of *Kaddish*.²² However, in many circles even a child who is 3 or 4 years old recites *Kaddish*, and this is before the age of *chinuch*. Some say that amen to *Kaddish* is permitted in this case, although according to most *poskim* it is not permitted to say *amen* when the child makes a *berachah*, because *Kaddish* is recited for the benefit of the deceased.²³

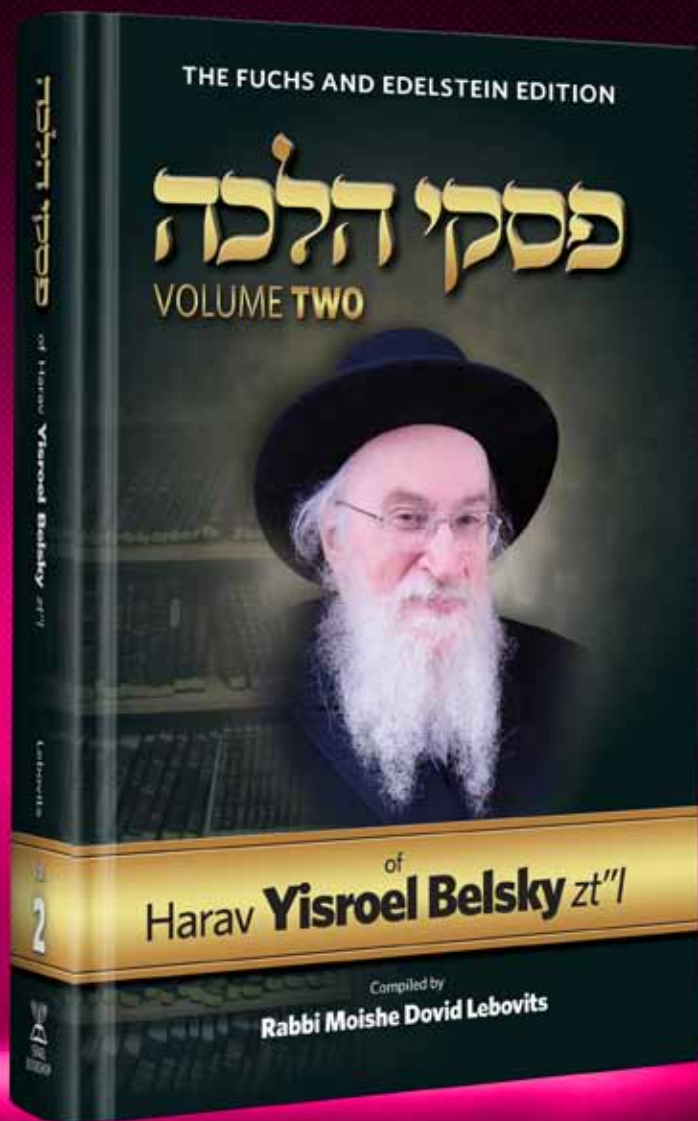
20 *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 22:20:footnote 31. Refer to *V'yan Shmuel* 10 in depth. The Steipler *zt"l* would answer a *brachah* made by a child much younger than 4-5 (*Orchos Rabbeinu* 3, page 223:22)

21 *Rema* 124:7, *Mishnah Berurah* 28, *Chanoch L'naar*, page 37:footnote 9.

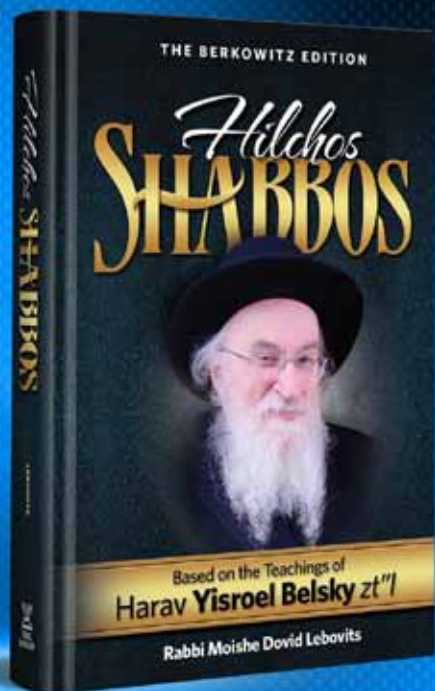
22 See *Yabea Omer*, *O.C.* 2:13, *Chinuch Yisroel* 1, pages 185-187.

23 Refer to *Nishmas Yisrael* 2:31:4-2 in depth.

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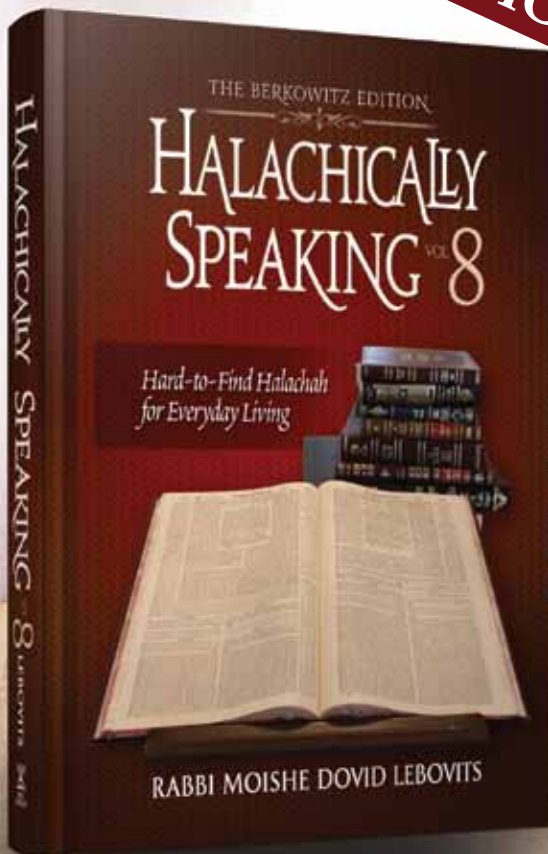
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