Day 38

Preface If Someone Inserted Food in His Mouth Without a Blessing

It is very important to always remember to recite the proper blessing before inserting any food or beverage in one's mouth. Our Sages (*Berakhot* 40b) considered it an accomplishment to always remember this. They interpreted the verse (*Devarim* 26:13), ''I did not forget,'' to mean ''I did not forget to bless You.'' See the Maharsh''a's comment on this passage, and see more on this subject in the preface to *Siman* 202.

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 50b) teaches: Rav Yehudah said that according to one *baraita*, if someone inserted food into his mouth while forgetting to recite a blessing he should simply swallow the food, but according to another *baraita* he must spit it out. According to a third *baraita*, he should push the food to one side of his mouth [and recite the blessing]. Rav Yehuda then reconciled the three *baraitot*, explaining that if someone placed a beverage in his mouth he should simply swallow it. If he inserted a solid food that would still be palatable if he spit it out, then that is what he should do. If it is a solid food that would no longer be palatable if he spit it out, he should push it to a side of his mouth. The Talmud then asks why it is necessary to spit out the food in the second case since it is possible to push it to a side of the mouth, and Rav Yitzhak of Kaskasa explained that it is because the verse states (*Tehillim* 71:8), ''My mouth will be filled with Your praise,'' meaning that if possible one should have nothing else in one's mouth when reciting a blessing to God.

The *Rishonim* debated the proper procedure when someone has inserted a beverage in his mouth without reciting a blessing:

a) According to Rashi, he should simply swallow it and recite no blessing at all. Since it is a liquid, it is not physically possible to push it the side of the mouth and recite a blessing. If he would spit the beverage out, it would no longer be potable. Rabbenu Hanan'el concurred with this ruling, explaining that once the liquid has been inserted into someone's mouth it is no longer considered a beverage and therefore it is no longer possible under any circumstances to recite a blessing for it [even if it would be physically possible].

b) Rabbenu Asher (*Berakhot* #33) ruled that he should swallow the liquid in his mouth and then immediately recite a blessing over the liquid he has already swallowed. He insisted that in all three cases there is some possibility to permit a blessing to be recited. If it is a food that can be spit out and eaten again, our Sages ruled that he must spit it out and recite the blessing. If it would not be possible to eat it again, he must push the food to the side of his mouth and recite the blessing. Since it is not possible to do this with liquid in the mouth, our Sages made an allowance to swallow it first and recite the blessing afterward. If someone ate or drank something and did not remember to recite the blessing until after he swallowed it, however, our Sages did not allow him to recite a blessing retroactively. They allowed it only when he realized his error before swallowing the beverage; he then swallows it intending to recite the blessing immediately afterward.

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* wrote that the words of Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 8:12) can be interpreted either like the opinion of Rabbenu Ḥanan'el or like that of Rabbenu Asher.

c) Maran in the *Bet Yosef* cited the opinion of Rabbenu Avraham ben David, found in the commentary of Rashba, that if someone inserted a beverage into his mouth without reciting the blessing and he has more to drink, he must spit out the liquid in his mouth, and if he wishes to drink more he can recite the blessing and drink. If he has no more to drink, he may swallow what is in his mouth and then recite the blessing. Maran pointed out that in his glosses to the Rambam, Rabbenu Avraham contradicted his own ruling, writing that in this case he recites no blessing at all.

Conclusion in practice

After explaining all the above opinions, Maran ruled that we are to follow the opinion of Rabbenu Ḥanan'el, since it is possible to interpret Rambam's words to mean the same and because Rambam's tradition was to follow the school of Rabbenu Ḥanan'el. Both Rabbenu Ḥanan'el and Rambam are among the most prominent and authoritative of all *Rishonim*. Besides, since the obligation to recite blessings is an institution of our Sages and not a mitzvah of the Torah, it is best to follow the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*. This is the ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh* (172:2). The Rama, however, ruled like the opinion of Rabbenu Asher that one should swallow the liquid and then recite the blessing. The *Mishna Berura* (172:5) commented that most *Poskim* concurred with the ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh* that one must not recite any blessing for a beverage after swallowing it.