



AL & L'

I'm revisiting a topic that I have presented probably more than once in the past - in honor of the mitzva in this week's sedra: BRIT MILA.

We'll get back to BRIT MILA soon. But first -

Many mitzvot have b'rachot which we say right before doing the mitzva. There are some mitzvot that do not get their own b'rachot. I might get to that issue in this PTDT, but probably not.

For the mitzvot that do have their own b'rachot, those b'rachot come in two different styles. The first ten words of the b'racha for a mitzva are the same. (Okay, the b'racha the kohanim say before saying Birkat Kohanim is a little different.)

BARUCH ATA... ASHER KID'SHANU... V'TZIVANU - and commanded us

And here we find two styles for the end of the b'racha.

AL ACHILAT MATZA, on the eating of matza,

L'HADLIK NEIR SHEL SHABBAT, to light the Shabbat candle(s).

the eating of matza - eating is a gerund noun (a verb turned into a noun).

to light - that's an infinitive verb.

What's the difference?

First of all, we should know that the format of the b'racha is not arbitrary, nor is it interchangeable. Our Sages fixed the wording of our b'rachot and a b'racha is not flexible.

So what's the difference. Some mitzvot that we perform are fulfilled completely by us when we do them. Here's your matza at the Seder, make the b'racha, bite, chew, swallow - repeat until the mitzva is fulfilled. Make the brachot, read Megilat Esther and 35-50 minutes later, give or take, the mitzva has been fulfilled. These kind of mitzvot get the AL form of the b'racha. AL NETILAT YADAYIM - wash, dry, done.

Other mitzvot are not finished when we have done what we are supposed to do. Light the Chanuka candles, done? Not yet. They have to burn a certain amount of time on their own, so to speak, after you have performed the mitzva. These kind of mitzvot get the L' as in L'HADLIK NEIR CHANUKA. As in LIKBO'A MEZUZA. You put a Mezuzah on your door, mitzva, but not finished. The Mezuzah has to continue to be on your

doorpost long after you put it there. LEISHEIV BASUKA. You are not done when you bench after the meal. The mitzva keeps on going. After the kazayit (or two) of matza, the mitzva is done. Not Sukka.

I'll leave you to think of other examples - some will fit neatly into the AL or L' understanding; some will be more difficult to explain.

But know that the explanation that I have presented is not the only one posed by different sources; it is the one that fits neatly in most cases.

Now let's look at the unusual situation of the b'rachot for BRIT MILA. There are two mitzva-b'rachot. The one who does the physical circumcision (usually the Mohel) will say ...AL HAMILA. Then is less than a minute the MILA will be accomplished - hence AL. But immediately after the Mohel says the b'racha, the father of the baby will say another mitzva-b'racha: L'HACHNISO... to enter him into the covenant (BRIT) of Avraham Avinu. This part of the mitzva of BRIT MILA does not end in a minute. It continues for years and years, for the father and the mother are duty-bound to raise their child to be a good person and a good Jew. That gets a L' b'racha.

You will have questions. Feel free to ask me philch@013.net or anyone else about specific mitzvot, especially the

ones that don't seem to fit my distinction between two types of mitzva.

I'll give you one more example. ...LAASOK B'DIVREI TORAH. This morning b'racha is for the Torah that we learn and the mitzvot we perform all day long. Especially including mitzvot that don't get their own b'racha, like acts of Chesed, Tz'daka, Kibud Av vaEim. The mitzva does not end when we say a few p'sukim from the Torah, a Mishna, and a piece of Gemara, which we say right after Birchot HaTorah. It goes on and on - hence, L'.

May we all be privileged to do many mitzvot and say many b'rachot for them, hopefully with the proper kavana and enthusiasm the deserve.

PTDT