

Birchas Hamapil *Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz*

I. Source of the Bracha.

The gemara in Maseches Brachos (60b) states that when one goes to sleep there is an obligation to recite the first paragraph of shema followed by the bracha of Hamapil. Tosafos (ibid. 54a) points out that the beracha must be recited with "sheim u'malchus". The Shulchan Aruch (O"H 239; 1) cites this gemara as normative halachik practice.

II. Type of Bracha.

A. **Opinion of the Maharit'z Chayus.** Tosafos (ibid. 11b) asks why one is obligated to recite a bracha only on eating in a succah and not obligated to recite a bracha on sleeping in a succah? Tosafos answers that while one has the ability to control when he will eat, one cannot always control when he will fall asleep. Since many people try to fall asleep quickly with little success, we are concerned that any beracha recited on sleep would turn into a bracha levatalah. Based on this Tosafos the Maharit'z Chayus asks how one can ever say the beracha of Hamapil? After all, shouldn't we be concerned that one will not be able to fall asleep thereby rendering his beracha a bracha levatalah? The Maharit'z Chayus (for a concurring opinion see Elyah Rabbah 239) answers that there is a fundamental distinction between the beracha on succah and the beracha of Hamapil. The beracha on succah is made on the actual sitting in the succah. It is a birchas hamitzvah. The beracha of Hamapil, however, is not a beracha that we recite on the act of sleeping. Rather, it is a beracha recited as praise - shevach v'hoda'ah - to Hashem for giving us the gift of sleep. Therefore, even if one does not fall asleep, the beracha is not considered as wasted since it has fulfilled its purpose in praising Hashem.

B. **Opinion of the Mishna Berurah.** The Mishna Berurah (Be'ur Halacha 239) takes issue with the claim of the Elyah Rabba (and Maharit'z Chayus). He claims that the text of the bracha suggests that it is a personal bracha and not merely a general bracha of praise to Hashem. As opposed to Succah where we

do not make a berach, the Mishna Berurah might answer that sleeping in the succah is that it is already covered with the beracha one makes on sitting in the succah (see Tosafos Berachos 11b).

III. Reasons not to say Hamapil.

There seems to be a prevalent minhag in many circles not to recite the bracha of Hamapil at all. Let us briefly explore the various reasons given for this minhag and the validity of each reason.

- A. The Mishna Berurah recommends that one who does not know if he will be able to fall asleep (or an insomniac) should not recite the beracha of Hamapil because failure to fall asleep would render the beracha a beracha levatalah. As we have already explained this would only be true if one assumes that the beracha of Hamapil is recited on the act of sleeping. If, however, one assumes like the Maharit'z Chayus and Elyah Rabbah, one should recite the beracha even if he is doubtful of his abilities to fall asleep. (See Responsa Yechave Da'as 4, 21; Responsa Tzitz Eliezer 7, 27; and Responsa Be'er Moshe 1, 63 who all seem to agree with the Maharit'z Chayus)
- B. Harav Moshe Shternbuch shlita (Responsa Teshuvos V'hanhagos (131) claims that the text of the beracha ("hamapil chevlei sheinah") suggests that the beracha is not said on the act of sleeping, but on the moment of exhaustion that immediately precedes sleep. Because it is difficult to ascertain the exact moment that a person reaches this stage, we do not recite the beracha of Hamapil. This explanation would seem to require further clarification because Chazal probably had the same difficulty ascertaining that moment of exhaustion, yet they instituted the saying of this beracha.
- C. Harav Herschel Schachter shlita (Nefesh Harav page 153) suggests that many do not say the beracha of Hamapil because in the generations following the times of the gemara the rabbis instituted the recital of the pesukim of "Baruch Hashem l'olam etc.". Since these pesukim contain many of the same ideas as the beracha of Hamapil, they render the

recital of Hamapil unnecessary. This argument is also difficult in light of the teaching of Chazal that one cannot change the format of a beracha instituted by Chazal. However, one could argue that this is not a change of format, but a change due to circumstance where the larger bracha of Baruch Hashem incorporates the intent of Hamapil.

IV. Conclusion.

We have explored both the source and the nature of the beracha of Hamapil. Furthermore, we have discussed three reasons that many people do not recite this beracha, and we have pointed out issues with each argument.