

## Could You Pass the Conversion Test - Section #1 - Weekday Living:

### Section #1 - Weekday Living - Class #16 Brachos (Blessings) - Part 9 - More Basics

#### Honor for Brachos:

1. You should avoid saying a bracha while involved in another activity.
2. Once you have begun saying a bracha, do not become distracted in the middle. Stay focused on the bracha from beginning to end.
3. If you are walking around, it is best to stop and focus before reciting the bracha. In descending order of preference, you should: 1) sit down while saying the bracha 2) stand in one place 3) say the bracha while walking
4. Before saying a bracha, you should already know what specific bracha you are going to say.
5. If you end a bracha incorrectly, you have basically **three seconds** to correct it -- i.e. to say the proper suffix. For example if by mistake, you said a "borei peri ha'eitz" on a glass of water, you should quickly correct the ending and say "she'hakol nih'yeh bid'varo."
6. Before beginning to say a bracha, you should know which particular **piece** of food you are going to eat.
7. Before saying the bracha, you should already have the item in your hand. At the very least, the food must be in front of you (or immediately accessible) when the bracha is made. If not, the bracha is invalid and must be repeated.
8. When saying a bracha, the food should be held in your **right hand**, which is considered the "more important" hand. (There are different opinions as what a left handed person should do.) When saying Hamotzee, all 10 fingers should be holding the bread.
9. Upon completing the bracha, you should immediately swallow some of the food without any interruption. This includes refraining from answering "amen" to someone else's bracha, or to any other communal prayer. If even one word is spoken between the bracha and the eating, then the bracha is invalidated and must be repeated.
10. One should preferably not pause more than three seconds between the bracha and the eating.
11. A bracha should be recited loud enough that you are able to **hear the words** you are saying. If you cannot hear yourself, the bracha is still valid providing it was actually enunciated.
12. If a bracha is only mouthed or recited mentally, it is **not valid**.
13. Although it is sufficient to recite a bracha in a whisper (as long as you can hear yourself), it is better to say it aloud, as this is extremely helpful in focusing one's concentration, and it enables others, who hear your bracha, to say Amen.
14. It is imperative that each word be pronounced properly. If key words of a bracha are missing, it is invalid. When words are mumbled, slurred or mispronounced, it is the same as leaving them out.
15. When saying any bracha, one's mouth should be "filled **only** with praise of God" -- i.e. it should be completely empty of anything else.

#### The Right Environment:

1. The Torah says: "Your camp should be holy" (Deut. 23:15). This means that when engaging in "holy" activities, such as prayer and Torah study, one's surrounding environment must be dignified and clean. Part and parcel of saying a "dignified bracha" is that all the people present are properly dressed.
2. It is prohibited for a man to say a bracha while totally unclothed, i.e. with private parts exposed.
3. A man is required to have a "separation between his heart and his lower body." This typically requires no special attention, as it is accomplished by wearing a belt, pants or underwear.

However, if a man is at home wearing just a bathrobe, he would need to tie the robe's belt, in order to create a separation between the heart and lower body.

4. It is improper to say a bracha with one's top half uncovered, unless there is no realistic option.
5. A man needs to have his head covered while saying a bracha. If there is no kippah or hat available, you can not cover your head with your hand, but you could 1) cover your head with your shirt sleeve, 2) or ask someone else to put their hand on your head.
6. As long as a woman is sitting down, she is permitted to say a bracha, as long as her private parts are not directly exposed. Further, there is no need for a woman to "separate between her heart and her lower body." However, in both these aspects, it is recommended, when possible, for a woman to act strictly.
7. A man may not say a bracha while facing the private parts of another male above the age of **nine**. Closing his eyes won't help; in order to say the bracha, he'll need to turn his body (not just his face) away so that he is not facing him anymore. This applies even in the dark.
8. A man may not say a bracha while facing the private parts of any girl over the age of **three**. Similar to what we said above, he would need to turn his body away.
9. Since women are required to dress modestly, a man may not see certain other parts of a woman's body when saying a blessing. These are: 1) the upper arm (i.e. above the elbow) ;2) the thigh (i.e. the leg above the knee) ; 3) the torso from the neck down ; 4)uncovered hair (if the woman is married). This applies to all women - even a wife and daughter.
10. What do you do if the woman is "improperly dressed"? (e.g. at a Shabbat table when you want to say Kiddush, but a female guest is not properly covered) In such a case, since there is no other feasible option, the man can face downwards or close his eyes while saying the bracha.
11. Similarly, if there are other people around with **private parts** exposed, a woman may not say a bracha in front of them unless she turns her body away first.
12. If a woman wants to say a bracha in the presence of other women who have **other areas** exposed -- e.g. above the elbows and knees, below the neckline, or a married woman's hair, the rules are more lenient, and it is permitted for a woman to say a bracha, even without closing her eyes or looking downwards.
13. A man is not permitted to say a bracha in the presence of any female singing voice. This even applies when one's wife or daughter is singing. A woman is permitted to recite a blessing when hearing a man (or other women) sing.
14. Part of the "holiness" of a blessing is that one may not say a bracha if s/he presently feels the need to use the bathroom. Further, before saying a bracha, the anal area must be clean of any waste residue.
15. One's hands must also be clean before saying a bracha. "Unclean" in this sense means: actual dirt and grime; touching a part of the body that is normally covered (e.g. armpit or groin area) ; scratching one's head ; touching one's shoe ;having been in a bathroom ; having been in a cemetery ; touching a deceased person ; touching lice; when getting out of bed in the morning; after a haircut; after cutting nails ; after marital relations.
16. If your hands are dirty, you should wash them before saying a bracha. In the event that water is not readily available, it is sufficient to wipe one's hands on something like a cloth or a rock.
17. If there is a bad smell around, it is prohibited to say a bracha. For example: If a child is in the area with a smelly soiled diaper, you could only say a bracha if you are 7 feet away from **where the odor ends**.
18. If you are near a bathroom, close the door and be careful that there is no bad smell emanating.
19. If someone passes wind, you need to wait until the smell disperses before saying a bracha. Alternatively, you can distance yourself till **where the smell ends**.
20. If there is a smell emanating from decaying organic matter -- e.g. a garbage can, you must be at least 7 feet away from **where the odor ends**.
21. If, however, there is **no smell**, then it depends: If the waste is **uncovered**, you would need to **turn away** from the waste, and move **7 feet** away from where it's lying. If the waste is **covered**, then there is no problem in saying a bracha (provided of course there is no smell). This applies even if the covering is "see-through," and even if you are standing right next to it.