

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

Section #1 - Weekday Living - Class #21 - Answering Amen & Shechechyanu Blessing:

Answering Amen:

1. Whenever you hear someone else saying a bracha, you should answer amen, having in mind to affirm that the words of the bracha are true.
2. You should say "amen" only to a bracha which **another person** says, but not to your own bracha. You should also have intent to be "included" in the "amen" that other people will say on your bracha.
3. You should say "amen" to:
 - Food-related blessings
 - Blessings said by others in the context of prayer and mitzvot
 - To the *Harachaman* blessings said by others in Birkat Hamazon
 - Informal "blessings" given by one person to another (e.g. "Good luck on the test." "Amen!")
4. In order to say "amen," it is important to hear **every word** of the blessing. Failing that, you need to minimally hear **the end** of the blessing. At the very least, you need to know which blessing you are "attesting" to; e.g. if you see someone holding a carrot and mouthing a bracha, you could answer "amen" even if you did not hear it.
5. Technically, whenever hearing another person's bracha, you should say the words *Baruch Hu U'varuch Shemo* ("Blessed be He, and blessed be His Name") after the words *Baruch Ata Ad-onoy*. These days, it is most commonly said in the synagogue, particularly when responding to the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei. In any event, it should not be said by someone who is being *yotzei* with the blessing.
6. "Amen" should not be said **louder** than the blessing itself.
7. "Amen" should not be drawn out too long, nor cut too short. Aim for the approximate **time** it takes to say the words *El Melech Ne'eman* (for which "amen" is an acronym).
8. It is important to carefully pronounce the word; the correct Ashkenazi pronunciation is "awe-main."
9. You must wait until the person has **completed** his blessing before you say "amen." However, you should say "amen" as soon as the person has finished, at least within 3 seconds.
10. Do not say "amen" to an **invalid blessing**. For example, if you see someone mistakenly say Hamotzee on an apple, don't say "amen."
11. If you are in a **place** where you couldn't say a bracha [e.g. a bathroom], you can't say "amen" either.
12. If you have **spoken** after the person finished his blessing, you've lost the chance to say "amen."
13. If you hear a bracha said over a microphone or the **telephone**, you should answer "amen," but not if you hear a bracha said on a recording.
14. Don't say "amen" when a **child** says a bracha just for practice. However, if the child is reciting a proper bracha at the correct time, then answer "amen."
15. **It is a very great sin if one does not answer Amen in a situation where one is obliged to say Amen.**

The Shehechyanu Brocha & For Other Events:

1. The Brocha of She'hecheyanu thanks God for enabling us to reach a particular milestone, and is articulated with the words, "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."
2. Specifically, She'hecheyanu is recited upon
 - the performance of a seasonal mitzvah
 - eating a seasonal fruit for the first time that season
 - acquiring a new garment or other item of significant value
 - deriving significant benefit from a special event
3. There is another, related bracha -- HaTov v'HaMeitiv -- which is generally recited in situations where the "event" benefits both oneself and others: "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who is good and is beneficent.
4. Because Jewish holidays only come once a year, She'hecheyanu is a way to praise God for having brought us to this time. She'hecheyanu is recited on the holidays of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret. For women, the blessing is typically said at candle lighting; men usually say it at Kiddush (except on Yom Kippur, when men say it in synagogue).
5. She'hecheyanu is also said on the rabbinical holidays of Chanukah (upon lighting the menorah of the first day) and Purim (at the Megillah reading).
6. She'hecheyanu is also said when performing mitzvot that occur only occasionally. For example: blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashana, or waving the lulav on the first day of Sukkot.
7. Whenever you eat -- for the first time that year -- a fruit that is **only available seasonally**, you give thanks to God by reciting the bracha She'hecheyanu.
8. **There is a great misconception that one makes a "Shehechyanu" for the first time one eats a particular fruit in one's life. This is not necessarily true.** The blessing is said in thanks to Hashem for providing the particular seasonal fruit in that season.
9. She'hecheyanu is said not only on fruits (i.e. which get the blessing Ha'aitz), but also on a Ha'adama food that is only available seasonally, **and** that brings special joy.
10. Foods that are generally available year round, do not get a She'hecheyanu.
11. With the advent of the global food market, where all kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables are available all year round, it is difficult to determine which fruits / vegetables would warrant a Shehechyanu brocha. One should consult with their local Orthodox rabbi.
12. When saying She'hecheyanu on a new fruit, there are two different customs regarding the order of the brachot, and either of these customs is acceptable:
 - **first say the blessing on the fruit**, followed by She'hecheyanu, and then take a bite
 - **first say She'hecheyanu**, followed by the blessing on the fruit, and then take a bite
13. If you forgot to say She'hecheyanu on the "first bite," you can still say it as long as you are in the process of eating that fruit for the "first time" that year -- i.e. in the same eating session.
14. If you want to eat a few "new fruits" in the same sitting, only one She'hecheyanu is said to cover all of them.

15. What about a fruit that comes in different varieties? Although the rules are complex and subject to some dispute, the general rule is as follows: If there is a different **name, appearance and taste**, then you should say She'hecheyanu on each fruit. But if the difference is merely a nuance in taste and texture, you do not.
- Separate She'hecheyanu blessings are said on an orange, tangerine and kumquat.
 - Separate She'hecheyanu blessings are **not** said on a navel orange, Valencia orange, and Jaffa orange.
16. Whenever acquiring a new item of value brings special joy -- that you "subjectively" regard as **valuable and important** -- we should thank God for enabling us to reach this milestone. For most people, this includes:
- a new garment such as a suit or dress
 - new household items such as a major appliance, car, or a new house itself
17. In these cases, there is an important rule to follow: **She'hecheyanu** is said when the benefit of the new item accrues to you **only** (e.g. in the case of a new garment). The bracha **Ha'tov v'Hamativ** is recited when the item benefits both **yourself and others** (e.g. where you are married and purchase a new household appliance).
18. Generally, the blessing is said not upon the actual purchase of the item, but rather upon the **first use** of the item.
19. The bracha is also said if the item is received as a gift. Furthermore, even if the item is "second hand," the bracha is still said, providing that it gives you sufficient joy.
20. On the birth of a baby **boy**, both parents recite the **Ha'tov v'Hamativ** blessing.
21. If the couple was blessed with a **girl**, the new father recites **She'hecheyanu** upon first seeing the infant, and should have intention to *motzi* his wife.