

*Brachos 41a “**Blessings From Heaven**”*

Brachos. We say them all the time. But are we doing it right? On this week's Amud, we go beneath the surface in the laws of reciting brachos. The gemara discusses whether one can fulfill his obligation of reciting a *ha'eitz* with a *ha'adama* or vice versa; whether a fruit from the seven species that Eretz Yisrael was praised (blessed) with comes before other food items; and where “personal favorites” stand on the food pyramid. After the dust settles, we have many categories and different opinions for what is first and what is second. Rabbi Binyomin Forst, the author of the acclaimed book on the laws of brachos, put together a beautiful chart detailing the final order, which we have produced here, with the kind permission of ArtScroll.

After all is said and done, there are a lot of details, and it is extremely worthwhile to learn through the laws of brachos in depth. The idea which we must inculcate into our consciousness and our action is pretty clear. Saying the blessing is of course the main thing; as we learned in the beginning of the perek, one who eats without making a blessing is considered to having “stole” from Hashem. However, what can't be overlooked, is the explanation, enthusiasm and excitement in saying the bracha. It is for this reason that there exists the concept of saying the bracha over one particular item thereby taking care of the need of saying a bracha on another. The basic litmus test to determine which item should be getting the bracha is either (1) the bracha's supremacy, (2) the food's importance, or (3) my personal enjoyment from the fruit. It's not a secret formula of words that makes the blessing work. It's the *hartz* and emotion that makes the bracha beloved by Hashem and gives us the right to enjoy our food. In fact, the *seforim* say that one of the reasons Hashem wanted us to say a blessing before partaking of food was to ensure that we actually enjoy the food, and think about it, and don't just wolf it down! How's that for an incentive to sit down, concentrate and say our brachos? (*Rabbi Yaakov Berkowitz*)