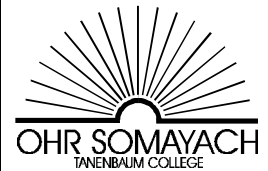




Ask The Rabbi...

Researched at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College
22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, 91180 Jerusalem, Israel
tel:972-2-810315 • fax:972-2-812890 • Internet:ohr@jer1.co.il



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This issue is dedicated in the memory of Rochel bas R' Avrohom Boruch HaLevi by her son, Jeremy Rose, of London

לְעֵינֵי הָאִשָּׁה רַחֵל בַּת ר' אַבְרָהָם בְּרוּךְ הַלֵּוִי

This edition contains:

1. Baruch Atah Hashem...al Mitzvat *Exercise*???
2. Yet Another Riddle!

Gary Boehr from Ossinny, NY wrote:

Rabbi, please tell me if it is appropriate to say a blessing before exercising, such as a workout in a swimming pool. I understand that it is a mitzva to take good care of the body.

Dear Gary,

You posed an excellent question. Exercise is certainly a *mitzva* when done for health reasons. The Torah says "...guard your life very carefully..." (*Hishamer Lecha U'shmor Nafshecha Me'od*). This means a person should do the utmost to preserve his health and prolong his life.

Maimonides states "It is a positive *mitzva* to remove any impediment that might pose a danger to life, and to be extremely cautious in this regard." In his *Hilchot De'ot*, Maimonides, who himself was a renowned physician, recommends exercise for preventing illness and for promoting good health.

Now to your question: Why don't we make a *bracha* before exercising?

Since I'm Jewish, I'll answer your question with another question: What about other *mitzvot* such as honoring parents, visiting the sick, giving charity etc. — why don't we make a *bracha* before performing these *mitzvot*? For which *mitzvat* did our Sages institute *brachot* and for which did they not?

There are various explanations given by Rabbinical authorities:

The *Rashba* lists *ten* categories of *mitzvot* for which our Sages did not institute a *bracha*, one of which is as follows:

A *mitzva* that does not entail doing a particular deed.

Well, certainly maintaining good health does not entail any *specific* action, such as exercising. Eating, sleeping, and looking both ways before you cross the street also help. By quitting smoking and avoiding overeating, you improve your health by *not* acting. Since promoting health does not entail any particular act, it does not require a *bracha*.

The *Ohr Zarua* explains otherwise. He states that there are basically two categories of *mitzvot*:

- *Mitzvot* performed only at certain times, such as *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and *succah*. These *mitzvot*, since they are not

always available, bring a person to a special sense of joy. Therefore, they require a *bracha*.

- *Mitzvot* which obligate a person at all times, such as believing in Hashem, honoring parents, and visiting the sick. These *mitzvot*, since they are always at hand and their performance thus naturally lacks the same sense of joy, don't require a *bracha*.

Promoting good health would be included in this second category: It is an ongoing *mitzva* from which a person is never absolved, and would not require a *bracha*.

Keep exercising, then, realizing that you are doing a *mitzva* whose real "*bracha*" is in promoting good health that will help you accomplish as much as possible in this life.

Which reminds me of a joke: A guy complained to his friend, "My doctor put me on such an exercise schedule! Every day, 50 push-ups, 100 sit-ups, and then a 20 mile run! It's so exhausting I can hardly stand it!"

"Wow!" said his friend, "When did you start?"

"I start tomorrow."

Sources:

- Devarim - 4:9.
- Rambam -- *Hilchot Rotze'ach U'shmirat Nefesh* (11:4), *Hilchot De'ot* (4:14-15).
- Rashba - Responsa, *Orach Chaim* #18.
- *Ohr Zarua* - Part 1, 140.

This week's riddle!

Where in the prayers do you find four different, consecutive words that all have the same root? (Hint: It's not said every day.) Answer next week...

Submitted by Mike Turniansky

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Ask The Rabbi is written by **Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh, Rabbi Benzion Bamberger**, and various other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tannenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

Production Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**

Production Design: **Lev Seltzer**

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