

Sukkot - On the Obligation to Recite 100 Blessings a Day
Rabbi Eliot Malomet September 26, 2026 15 Tishrei 5787

Sukkot is the holiday of joy. We refer to it as **זמן שמחתנו** - *zman simchateinu, the season of our joy*. Joy is what you experience when you express gratitude. The traditional instrument of gratitude is the *b'racha*, the blessing. There are blessings for practically every experience. The number of blessings we recite each day varies depending on our circumstances and whether or not the particular day includes special mitzvot. Sukkot, for example, affords the opportunity to recite at least two extra blessings a day: the blessing over the lulav, **על נטילת לולב** - *al netilat lulav*, and the blessing for dwelling and partaking of a meal in the sukkah, **לישב בסוכה** - *leisheiv ba-sukkah*. While Judaism does not require us to tabulate the number of blessings we recite each day, there is a familiar teaching that instructs us to recite **100 blessings a day**. The source of that teaching is found in the Talmud, Menachot 43b.

תנא רבי מאיר אומר: חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום שנאמר: "ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך".

*Tanya¹, it was taught, that Rabbi Meir² would say: A person is obligated to recite **one hundred blessings** every day as it is stated in the verse: "And now Israel what [ma] does the Lord your God ask of you" (Deuteronomy 10:12).*

The key to understanding this teaching is that it is based on a pun. **מה** - *Mah* (Hebrew for *what*) sounds a lot like **מאה** - *me'ah* (Hebrew for *one hundred*) so when the verse in Deuteronomy says, *Now Israel - mah - what does the Lord your God ask of you?* R. Meir interprets it to mean, *Now Israel the Lord your God asks you to do - me'ah - 100!* And it is up to the listener to figure out the connection and get the pun. *Ah. Yes. I get it. You're saying me'ah when the Torah is saying mah. How clever! And you're saying that this means me'ah brachot, one hundred blessings. Ah, I get it. God wants us to recite one hundred blessings a day!* Once we figure out the pun, we can then ask the question: Did R. Meir mean this literally? Are we really supposed to recite 100 blessings a day? There are (at least) two ways to approach this question. The first is: how often does R. Meir use puns or plays-on-words to derive a teaching or a introduce a religious norm? The second is: how often does the idea of doing something 100 times appear in rabbinic literature, and when it does, is it meant to be taken literally? **R. Meir-The Merry/Meiri Punster**. It turns out

that R. Meir has a plethora of prominent pithy puns in his pocket. To wit: when God saw everything that he had created, God's reaction was **והנה טוב מאד** - *behold it was very good* (Gen. 1:31). R. Meir said, **והנה טוב מות** - *behold, death is good* (a pun: **מות-מאד: mot-me'od**.) By means of this pun, he is arguing that, notwithstanding the sad and often tragic circumstances of death, human mortality has some positive outcomes: it promotes reflection and creativity and inspires in us the desire to do good things so that we will leave the world with a good reputation. On the verse, **ויעש ה' אלהים, לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנִים עוֹר וַיַּלְבֵּשֵׁם** - *The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of leather, and he dressed them* (Gen. 3:21), R. Meir said that God made them **כתנות אור** - *garments of light*! Here the pun is on **עור** - *leather* vs. **אור** - *light*.³ Our interpretation: God does not create physical garments but provides them an *aura* (pun intended!) of protection such that wherever they went, they would illuminate darkness. Despite their transgression, they were still God's first creatures, and radiated godliness wherever they went. Our point then is that R. Meir was fond of these kinds of interpretations which are *playful, poetic, powerful, perceptive, pleasing, perspicacious and profound*.

A Hundred Times. Intuitively, we all understand that this is an expression of hyperbole. The expression exists in English and French and *a hundred* other languages. How does *a hundred* function in rabbinic literature? 3 Examples:

הוכח תוכיח את עמיך. <i>Rebuke, yes, rebuke your fellow. (Lev. 19:17)</i>	"הוכח" אפילו מאה פעמים משמע. <i>"Rebuke" means even a hundred times. Bava Metzia 31a.</i>	One must not spare any effort to restore a relationship or correct someone's errant behavior.
השב תשיבם לאחיה. <i>You are to return, yes, return them to your brother. (Deut. 22:1)</i>	"השב" אפילו מאה פעמים משמע. <i>"Return" (the lost animals) even a hundred attempts." Bava Metzia 31a.</i>	If you return your neighbor's animal and it flees towards you, you have to keep returning it no matter what.
שלח תשלח את האב. <i>Send-free, send-free the mother. (Deut. 22:7)</i>	"שלח" – אפילו מאה פעמים משמע. <i>"Send-free" (the mother bird) even if it takes you a hundred attempts. Bava Metzia 31a.</i>	When procuring eggs from a nest, we are commanded to send the mother away. We have to spare no effort in doing so.

¹ *Tanya* is a technical term that occurs throughout the Talmud indicating that what follows is a statement (called a baraita) from the era of the Tannaim, but that this statement was not included in the final redaction of the Mishnah. The Talmud preserved many of these statements to elucidate a concept, add argumentation to an issue, or to propose different and often novel interpretations to key biblical texts. In this case, Rabbi Meir is proposing a religious practice based on a novel interpretation of a verse in the Torah.

² Rabbi Meir was one of the most important Tannaim, the rabbinic figures whose teachings are found in the Mishnah, the foundational text of Jewish law. He was one of R. Akiva's most prominent disciples. He was active in the fourth generation of Tannaim, roughly between 140-165 CE. According to Talmudic legend, he was a direct descendant of Nero, the Roman emperor, who upon hearing that God would punish the one responsible for destroying the Temple in Jerusalem, converted to Judaism (Gittin 56a).

³ Bereishit Rabbah 20:12.



We could give a *hundred* other examples! In these cases, when the Torah doubles a verb, the rabbinic interpretive move is to amplify the

Torah's own sense of urgency by using the hyperbole. But even when there is no biblical verse to anchor a mitzvah, we get some rabbinic hyperbole. Two examples: for visiting the sick Rava⁴ says, **אֲפִילוּ מֵאָה פְּעָמִים בַּיּוֹם, even a hundred times in a day is mandated** (Nedarim 39b). With regard to Torah study, **וְאִינוּ דוֹמֶה שׁוֹנֶה פֶּרְקוֹ מֵאָה פְּעָמִים לְשׁוֹנֶה, פֶּרְקוֹ מֵאָה וְאַחַד, one who reviews his studies one hundred times is not comparable to one who reviews his studies one hundred and one times** (Chagigah 9b). In this last instance, studying something **100** times is, of course, a lot. But we can learn something new even on the **101st** time! In each of these cases, we can argue that the tradition is speaking rhetorically and not literally. But if we go back to the original source in the Talmud, we notice a rather interesting move. Right after R. Meir's teaching, the Talmud cites a much later authority:

רַב חִיָּיא בְּרִיהַ דְּרַב אַבְיָא, בְּשַׁבָּתָא וּבְיוֹמֵי טְבִי, טָרַח וּמַמְלִי לְהוֹ בְּאַיִסְפָּרְמָקִי וּמַגְדִּי.

The Gemara relates that on Shabbat and Festivals, when the prayers contain fewer blessings, Rav Hiyya, son of Rav Avya, took pains to fill this quota of blessings with blessings on spices and sweet fruit, of which he would partake in order to recite extra blessings.

Evidently, this Rav Hiyya (who lived ~300 years after R. Meir!) took it upon himself to fulfil R. Meir's teaching **literally**. We might attribute it to religious zeal; we might attribute it to a desire to demonstrate ostentatious piety; or perhaps it was his way of showing reverence for a now legendary figure whose teachings animated his life. In short, there are *a hundred (!)* reasons why Rav Hiyya chose to say additional *b'rachot*. But let's step back and observe what is going on here. The original teaching is based on a verse in Deuteronomy. Here is the context in full:

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שֹׂאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אַם לִירְאָה אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַבֵּת בְּכָל דָּרְכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָהוּ אֹתוֹ וּלְעַבְדוֹ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ. לְשֹׂמֵר אֵת מִצְוֹת ה' וְאֵת חֻקָּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לָשׁוּב לָךְ.

And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your God ask of you except to hold Hashem your God in awe, to walk in all his ways and to love him and to serve Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your being, to keep the commandments of Hashem and his laws which I command you today, to have it go-well for you.

⁴ Rava is the one who is most cited in speaking this way. Evidently, he was quite insistent about amplifying the Torah's urgency.

⁵ Laws of Prayer, 7:14. An elegant summary which I will condense as follows: 23 blessings of the morning wake-up

This verse is about reverence and love of God, walking in God's ways and serving God with your total being and following all the commandments. **R. Meir reads this verse and finds in it a verbal clue, a pun, that teaches us how to engage with God with reverence and love.** **Mah-me'ah** is clever, disarming, surprising, and inspirational all at once.

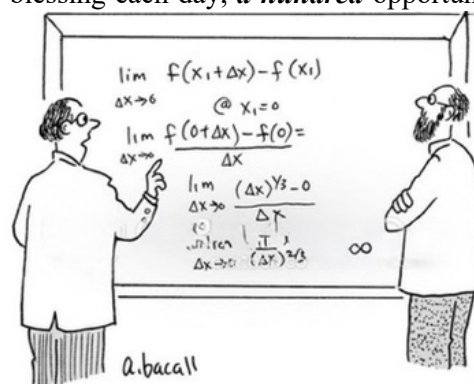
The takeaway: you can live the life that God wants you to live - a life of reverence, love and mitzvot - by being abundantly grateful to God throughout your day through blessing God at every imaginable moment! Let's appreciate that when R. Hiyya studies R. Meir's statement several generations later, he wonders to himself if he could actually

achieve the goal of 100 blessings a day. He realizes that on Shabbat and Yom Tov he is going to come up short because there are fewer mandatory blessings on those days. So, he makes an extraordinary effort to solve this problem. He challenges himself to find more and more opportunities to bless God, by smelling beautiful fragrances, eating sweet fruits etc., in other words, by creating more joy and beauty in his life. That is the religious impulse at work. And because this is clever, spiritually meaningful, and within the reach of ordinary Jews, this teaching became codified as halakha. Maimonides demonstrates how easy it is to arrive at this total.⁵ **What may have started out as a pun and a clever expression of hyperbole, eventually became a norm of Jewish religious behavior.** On the one hand, we can understand how satisfying it would be to keep a tally of our blessings each day, the same way we track our 10,000 steps a day(!) our calorie and water intake, our sleep, and *a hundred* other fitness goals. On the other hand, even if we don't take R. Meir literally, we could appreciate that challenging ourselves to find *a hundred* moments of blessing each day, *a hundred* opportunities to thank God,

is an awesome and amazing way to cultivate a life of gratitude and joy. And, it's not so difficult to do either!

Hag Sameah!

חג שמחה!



I proved that when you start to count your blessings, you find that they're infinite."

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Sally Klinger Rogers and Skip Rogers in honor of the birth of their granddaughter to Elana and Matt. Mazel Tov!

routine, plus 7 blessings connected to morning and evening recitations of the Sh'ma, plus tzitzit, tefillin, the amidahs of Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv (18x3=54), totals 86. Add to that 2 meals' worth of blessings, at 7 blessings/meal, and **voila!** 100 blessings!