

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's [and next week's] question:

One has whole grapes and pitted olives or dates before him. He plans to eat all of them. On which of these should he recite the *brocha ha'eitz*? What about a whole dried fig? Is there a difference between a dried whole fruit and a fresh one?

One has two types of cookie, one made with wheat flour and the other made with oatmeal or a blend with the majority oatmeal. He plans on eating both cookies. Is it preferable to recite the *brocha* on the wheat cookie?

The issues:

A) *Birchos hanehenin*, the *brocha* on foods

B) *Kedimah*, order of priority when reciting brochos or a *brocha* on many foods

Next week:

C) *Shivas haminim*, the seven species that *Eretz Yisroel* is praised about

D) *Chamaishes minei dagan*, the hierarchy of the five cereal grains

A) *Birchos hanehenin*

Every food requires the reciting of a *brocha* before it is eaten. The Talmud debates whether the source for this Rabbinical *mitzvah* can be traced to the Torah. The logic for this institution is that partaking of Hashem's bounty without "asking" or thanking Him first is tantamount to stealing from Him. Thus, the *brocha* is called *birchas hanehenin*, the blessing of those who benefit. It is linked to the Scriptural requirement of *bircas hamazon*, the *mitzvah* to thank Hashem after eating a meal. The text of the *brocha* is a blessing of praise for Hashem for creating this type of food. The *brocha* reflects the purpose of Creation of a particular food as a benefit to mankind. While one could theoretically fulfill this with a single general *brocha*, this would not truly reflect full thanksgiving. Therefore, each food is analyzed according to the way it was created. Two foods rise to the level of an individual *brocha*, due to their unusual sustaining powers: bread and wine. Other foods are categorized into semi-general groups. Tree fruits are more sophisticated creations than ground products, so they get a *brocha* of their own, *ha'eitz*.

There are various ways that one can recite one *brocha* before eating many different species of foods. The simple case is where all the foods share the same *brocha*, such as the cases in our question. The more complex case is where the foods are being eaten as a group. There would usually be one food that is considered the primary food, with all others being auxiliary to it. The primary food is the *ikar*, and the secondary food is *tafel*. The *brocha* is recited only on the *ikar*. Some ponder whether this means that the secondary food becomes part of the primary food and requires no *brocha* of its own. Does it lose all identity? Or perhaps it requires a *brocha*, but due the way it is consumed, the *brocha* on the primary food exempts it. It loses independence. The latter idea would be to equate the *tafel* to a second fruit eaten with a first fruit of the same *brocha*.

The other ways one *brocha* works for many foods are when they are eaten as part of a bread-based meal, the *brocha* recited when drinking wine that covers other drinks, and when one does not know the *brochos* of the foods. In that case he would recite a generic *brocha*, *shehakol*. This is known as a *brocha hakoleles*, all-inclusive *brocha*. It should not be relied on if one is able to determine the true *brochos* of the foods. However, in the event that he does not know them, this one *brocha* happens to cover each individual food. Therefore, it works in the same way that a single *brocha* works on many foods that share the same *brocha*. In a meal, the single *brocha* on the bread works for the entire meal. Some consider this an enhanced type of *ikar* and *tafel*. In fact, when eating a small amount of bread to 'dilute' the saltiness of another food, it becomes *tafel* to the other food. When drinking wine, the poskim debate how much must be drunk to consider the wine the only item that has its own *brocha*. Therefore, one should preferably drink a cup of wine when relying on this. [See Brochos 35a 40a-42b 44a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 177 178 187 202-206 212, commentaries. References to Halochoscope IV:33.]

B) Kedimah

When eating a number of different foods, one usually eats them in the order that he desires. However, especially when a *brocha* must be recited, there is a *halachic* order of preference. Two factors are taken into account: the *brocha* and the food. If the foods are of different *brocha* categories, there is an order of *brocha* levels. The more specialized the food the more specialized the *brocha*. The *brochos* begin with those on foods on a lower level in Creation. Non-vegetable foods are on the lowest level. These include meat, milk, eggs, fungi and minerals such as water and salt. Their *brocha* is *shehakol*. The same is true of extracts of other foods that are not considered as significant, such as fruit juice. Some other foods also have this *brocha*, due to doubt. For example, sugar, coffee, tea and cocoa are all plant products. Some of them should have the *brochos* of *ha'eitz* (coffee and cocoa beans) or *ha'adamah* (tea leaves and sugar cane juice. Though they are extracts, they happen to be the main benefit of their plants. The plants are actually planted with this use in mind, and indeed, all appearances are that Hashem created them for this purpose. A minority holds that their *brocha* should reflect their origins. The prevailing practice is to recite *shehakol*, though this is quite controversial. Due to their more specialized origins, coupled with the minority views, their true nature is taken into account in terms of *kedimah*, according to some poskim.

The next level up is food of vegetable origin. Those that do not grow on trees have the *brocha ha'adamah*. Those growing on trees get their own *brocha*, *ha'eitz*. This is due to the elevated status of trees over vegetables that die at the end of their season. Accordingly, one eating tree fruits with ground vegetables recites the *brocha* and eats the fruit first. The next level up is the special *brocha* recited on wine and the special *brocha* recited on bread. There is a slight difference between these, as bread always forms the staple of a meal. It is automatically eaten at the beginning, and its *brocha* happens to exempt any other *brocha* anyhow, with the exception of *hagafen*, recited on wine. This *brocha* is recited whenever one drinks the wine, whether before during or after a meal, or when drunk separately. If one drinks wine and other beverages, he recites only *hagafen*, assuming that he plans to drink the amount that the respective poskim require.

When the foods are all on the same *brocha* level, there are other considerations to take into account. Some of these will be discussed shortly, but here we will mention *shalem*, the concept of a complete item. To understand this, and other preferences, we must explain the idea that one food is singled out to have its *brocha* recited. In a sense, one could say that this distinguishes the singled out food as an *ikar* of sorts, with the others becoming *tafel* to it. In any event, the *brocha* required for each of the other foods is being exempted by that recited on this food. Since one food represents all the others, it is proper that it should be the most prominent of them.

The reason for a preference is based on *hidur mitzvah*. The *brocha* is a way of preparing to eat with a *mitzvah*. Since one needs an item for the performance of this *mitzvah*, the food, one should use the best item available. Thus, though this is not *hidur mitzvah* in the traditional sense of beautifying a *mitzvah* article, it shows appreciation for the *mitzvah*. We use something that either is valued specially by the Torah, or one that the person eating has a special reason to value.

Chaviv, personal liking for an item, is a major value for *kedimah*. The Talmud debates whether it trumps other values, such as *shivas haminim* [see below]. We follow the view that *chaviv* is superior, but that one may show preference for the *shivas haminim*. *Shalem* is even more preferred than is *chaviv*. Thus *shalem* is the most preferred value for *kedimah*. *Shalem* means complete. A whole item is usually more respectable than a piece of an item. There is an interesting detail in the laws of *terumah*, the tithes given to the *kohain*. Some parts of foods can be viewed as more valuable than whole specimens, relative to each other. Large onions are better than small ones. What if one has a choice of giving a small whole onion or a half large one? This is more complicated when the *kohain* will not receive it until much later. The whole onion will fare better over time. This is debated by the Talmud. In another instance, one making an *eruv* on behalf of another consigns bread to be used for his *eruv*. He should rather consign a small whole loaf than a broken piece of bread.

When reciting a *brocha*, these considerations are both taken into account. Generally, one should use a whole loaf of bread for the *brocha*, rather than a slice. If one has a choice of bread made of higher quality flour and one of a lower quality, he should use the higher quality loaf. What if his choice is between a whole loaf of unsifted flour and a piece of bread of sifted flour? To make it more interesting, what if the whole loaf is also smaller than the broken piece? The Talmud debates these cases. We follow the view that says that the whole loaf is always preferred.

The same basic idea applies with fruits of the same *brocha*. If all the fruit is broken into pieces, the same order of precedence applies as when all of them are whole. If some are mashed, the ruling might change slightly. The poskim debate whether mashed fruit retains its *brocha*. We follow the ruling that as long as the fruit is still recognized, it retains its *brocha*. [Some items, like halvah and tehinah, are recognized because one knows what it is, rather than any visual signs of the original. These are debated by the poskim.] However, once again, due to the debate, there could be an issue with *kedimah*. If some of the fruit is in recognizable pieces, while others are mashed, the larger pieces might be better to use. At least there is no debate about their *brocha*. If some fruits are whole and

others are broken, the *brocha* should be said on the whole fruits.

There is actually some discussion among the poskim about fruits of a different *brocha*. It is possible that *shalem* is so prominent that even a lower level fruit would take precedence over a higher level that is broken. For example, one might have a whole banana, *ha'adamah*, and a piece of apple, *ha'eitz*, before him. One would have in mind when saying *ha'adamah* that he does not mean to include the apple (which could be exempted by *ha'adamah* since it grew from the ground). This is because of all the factors for *kedimah*, *shalem* is considered the most prominent. Taking this further, a *shalem* regular fruit could even take precedence over one of the *shivas haminim*. This last point is rejected by many poskim, who maintain that *shivas haminim* should trump. Others say that if *chaviv* trumps *shivas haminim*, and *shalem* trumps *chaviv*, it is the most preferred.

Our question is about a whole fruit, minus its pit. There is a slight difference between a pitted olive and a pitted date. The olive usually has a small amount of its fruit removed in the process. Therefore, it cannot be considered a *shalem*. Most strains of date produced commercially have loose pits, especially once they are fully ripened and dried. There is no need to remove fruit with the pit. Nonetheless, there are two popular methods of pitting. In one, the same basic process is used for them as for olives. These dates are not *shalem*. Our question is about those that are pitted by slitting the sides. The rest of the date remains whole. A dried fruit has a similar issue. A prune, even when not pitted, has lost a part of its wholeness due to being dried. None of the flesh was removed, but the weight and volume is reduced. One could say that the juice has been evaporated away from it. It appears from the language of the poskim that a dried fruit is considered whole. A pitted fruit is not discussed by earlier authorities. Perhaps they did not pit fruits ahead of time the way we do nowadays. However, from other sources it would appear that if it is not whole in the way it was created, it loses its special status. A dried fruit is still whole. A pitted fruit is not whole in the way it was created. [See Brochos 39b 40b-41a, Poskim Tur Sh Ar OC 210:1 211:1 Shaar Hatziyun 5, Kaf Hachaim 3, commentaries. Ben ish Chai Year 1, Matos.] .. to be continued ...

On the parsha *This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him .. [15:2] beautify yourself before Him with mitzvos, a beautiful sukah etc. .. [Shabbos 133b]*. Pit seems that the meaning is taken to be “I will beautify Him ..” How does one “beautify Hashem”? Indeed, how does one beautify a *mitzvah*? And why is using a beautiful item beautifying oneself? Perhaps it refers to the *brocha* recited before performing the *mitzvah*. When one recites the Name of Hashem when performing the *mitzvah*, one recognizes the kindness involved in giving us this *mitzvah*. By using a beautiful item, we are inspired to recite a more meaningful, and maybe a more beautiful *brocha*. Perhaps when using an item that the person himself enjoys more, he feels more beautiful when reciting the *brocha*.

Sponsored by Noah Bass and Debby Rotenstein in memory of Debby's mother,

Rochel bas Chaim a”h, whose *yahrzeit* os on the 17th of Shevat. ׀

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