


HALOCHOSCOPE



This week's question:

What is the correct *brocha* on a coconut macaroon?

The issues:

A) The *brocha* on coconut; *Ikar achilaso*, the main manner an item is eaten

B) Chopped, grated or ground up fruits

C) *Nimuach*, disintegrated by cooking

A) *The brocha on coconut*

The *bircas hanehenin*, *brocha* on benefit of a food or drink, is based on its purpose in Creation. Some foods are harder to determine. Certain foods are eaten raw. When eaten cooked, they lose much of their appeal, or they become secondary to other foods. Other foods cannot be eaten raw at all. Some foods can be eaten either raw or cooked. Certain foods can be eaten raw if they reach a certain stage. Before this stage they need to be cooked or toasted to be made edible. Yet others need to be sweetened artificially, that is, by adding sweeteners to the natural food. If a food is eaten in a manner other than the 'normal' for that type, its *brocha* is affected. Some foods are a by-product of another food. For example, the caper bush has four edible products, including skin or even leaves. Some plants have an edible stalk. On some plants, even the shoots remain edible while soft, before they turn into hard wooden branches.

Coconut is an interesting plant. The 'nut' is encased in a very hard shell, which is used as a non-food, both for its fiber and its wood. Inside there is a hard meat, and inside that, a liquid 'milk'. The fruit grows on a palm tree, and its *brocha* should be *ha'eitz*. However, the poskim debate the normal *hana'ah*, benefit of this fruit. Since the meat is so hard, and breaking it into pieces takes some effort, is it reasonable to consider its normal manner of eating when whole and raw? The milk is a delicacy, but this, too changes its appeal as the fruit is stored. Furthermore, if the milk is considered a juice, its *brocha* would also change. The only fruits that have a significant juice are olives and grapes. The juice of the grape is considered its primary purpose in Creation, to produce wine. It actually gains an even more specialized *brocha* after it is extracted. The liquid produced from olives is olive oil. Depending on circumstances, its *brocha* is *ha'eitz*. Any other juice is considered a watery extract, which has the *brocha shehakol*.

There is some discussion about the juice of fruits that are grown specially for their juices. Since this would be their main *hana'ah*, the juice could have the main *brocha*, *ha'eitz* or *ha'adamah*. Some watery extracts are not squeezed out, but are produced by cooking the fruit in water. A soup or other item that absorbs the flavor of a vegetable is not considered a water extract, but actually has the original *brocha*. Some poskim temper this by questioning whether the item was meant to be used in this way. A vegetable soup

can easily qualify, if the vegetables seem to be created for soup. Thus, the Talmud says that borscht should have the *brocha ha'adamah*. However, fruit soups (without the actual fruit) are the subject of debate. Thus, some say that prune 'juice' should be *ha'eitz*. The Talmud discusses the *brocha* on water of *sheves*, a herb used as seasoning (possibly dill). It is used either to dispel other flavors, or to impart its own flavor. In the former case, its benefit is not the taste. In the latter case, the *brocha* should indeed be *ha'adamah*.

There is more debate on the syrup contained in some plants. For example sugar is produced from a cane, that is itself a question of *ha'etz* or *ha'adamah*. It is a reed or grass, but some consider it *ha'eitz*. The sugary syrup collects inside, and is also squeezed. It is then processed by cooking. This is quite obviously its main benefit. Some maintain the *brocha* should be *ha'eitz*. Others say that it is a grass and should have the *brocha ha'adamah*. Others say that the sugar is a juice, and only grape and olive plants get a specific *brocha* on their juices. Therefore, sugar's *brocha* is *shehakol*. By-products include alcohol and the fibers. The cane can be chewed as well. The poskim discuss the *brocha* on fibrous plants and roots that are not eaten themselves, but are chewed to extract their juices and flavors. There is also debate about chocolate, both in its drink form and the candy, coffee and tea. All of these have little or no use raw. The only reasonable benefit is in their cooked state, and their *brocha* should be *ha'eitz* or *ha'adamah*, just like soup or borscht. Though this seems to be the most correct *brocha*, the prevailing practice is to recite *shehakol*. Nonetheless, many maintain that one who recites *ha'eitz* on chocolate or coffee, or *ha'adamah* on tea, fulfills his obligation.

Coconut is grown for the actual meat and for the oil. However, its meat is hard to eat raw. It is invariably eaten as part of other foods. This leads some to consider it the same as pepper, a seasoning. Pepper is discussed by the Talmud and poskim. Many maintain that dried pepper can never have its own *brocha*. It is never consumed by itself. When it is consumed with other foods, which is indeed its intended benefit, it becomes secondary to them. In the same way, they maintain that coconut is used as a garnish or a coating. If an item is used primarily as a seasoning, but sometimes eaten in its own right, there is a question about the *brocha*. Some say that even if the original item grows on a tree, when it is eaten in its own right with sugar and the like, its *brocha* should be *ha'adamah*. Some point out that in that case, candies should be *ha'adamah*.

In fact, there are two popular uses for coconut as a main ingredient: candy bars sometimes with a chocolate coating, and macaroons. Macaroons are popular around *Pesach*. They can have flour or matzo-meal added to thicken them. Flour of the five cereal grains can be added to food either as a staple, a main flavor ingredient, or a thickener. If it is a staple, its *brocha* is *mezonos*, even if the flavor is masked. The same is true if it is a minor ingredient, but is included for flavor. If it is added to thicken the batter but not for its flavor, it does not lend the food its own *brocha*. The poskim discuss the *brocha* on macaroons. If they have flour or matzo-meal, the first issue to decide is whether the flour or meal is intended to provide satiety. If so, the *brocha* is *mezonos*. If it is purely to thicken, the *brocha* could be *ha'eitz*, based on the coconut, or *shehakol*, based on the other ingredients. [Since one of the other main ingredients is sugar, this itself raises some controversy.] However, in a sense, this is the most popular use and benefit of coconut in a 'pure'

form. Although it is cooked, this seems to be a normal way to benefit from it. [There seems to have been an erroneous notion that it is part of the cocoa plant. Accordingly, the claim is made that the main use and benefit of the plant is in chocolate. However, some revive this idea when they point out that in the larger scheme, a primary product of the coconut is the oil. This is often the reason to grow it as a crop.] [See Brochos 35a-39a etc., Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 168 202:1 3-6 8 10-18 [Kaf Hachaim 62-63] 203:6-7 204:11-12 205:2-3 208:3 9, commentaries. Imrei Chaim (Lerner) I, p. 8. Minchas Shlomo I:91. Btzail Hachochmah VI:92.]

B) Chopped, ground etc.

There is another major issue with the macaroon cookie. The coconut is chopped into small pieces. When a food is ground fine and is no longer recognizable, it loses its *toar*, identity. The Talmud discusses bread made of rice, millet or legumes. In the case of rice, if the original grains are no longer visible, the *brocha* is *mezonos*. In the case of the other types of bread, the *brocha* is *shehakol*. If, however, there are small pieces of the original grain, the *brocha* is *ha'adamah*. However, as we shall see in the next section, if the grains are mashed, this could change, depending on the type of food. The poskim debate the status of a food type that is grown specifically to be made into a bread-type food. For example, in some countries, corn is routinely made into bread. Since this is the main use and benefit of the corn, the *brocha* on the bread (tortillas) should be *ha'adamah*. While the poskim reject this, the objection is based on the idea that it is really grown as animal feed. A secondary use is for corn-cakes. Accordingly, in a region where the primary reason for growing the crop is human consumption, and the primary use is as a flour, the *brocha* should be *ha'adamah*. Sesame can be eaten whole in a mixture, or ground as *tehina*. Some seasonings are added to the *tehina*, but it remains basically sesame.

Really, even if finely ground, a food item can retain its *brocha*. For example, when ginger is ground and made into a candy, its *brocha* remains *ha'adamah*. This is the way it is eaten, so this is its identity. [A minority view maintains that this applies only if it was not finely ground. However, others disagree and find this hard to reconcile.] However, an additional idea is introduced in the case of corn or bean bread. This final product has undergone a longer process than simple grinding. It has been mixed with other ingredients and baked into a totally unrecognizable item. Unlike the ginger candy, which is recognizably ginger, this has no obvious resemblance to the original food. Some say that this idea should only apply to items that are regularly consumed in a more natural state. When they are eaten after more stages of processing, they lose their identity. This would apply to bread made from beans. If, however, the corn is mainly eaten in a processed state, this is its identity. This debate can be applied to our question as well.

If the item is not ground fine, but chopped, the Talmud concludes that it retains its original *brocha*. Since the original item is still visible, albeit in broken pieces, it has not lost its identity. Some poskim maintain that this would really depend on whether the original food can indeed be identified. If the small pieces are such that they resemble any other food with the same color or texture, they should not be considered identifiable. Some poskim combine the concept mentioned before, wherein the item undergoes multiple processes and changes totally, with this concept. Thus, a potato kugel, which is made

of finely chopped pieces, is the matter of debate. In one view, since it is not ground into a flour, it retains *ha'adamah*. The other view maintains that the small pieces of potato are too little to be identified. Combined with the fact that a kugel is a new item, they maintain that it loses *ha'adamah*. Falafel is not the only way chick-peas are eaten. Therefore, it is viewed, at best, as a type of bean bread. Usually, the pieces are so small that they are almost ground fine. However, they are just big enough that they can be recognized. To further complicate matters, the finished product has a distinctive recognizable look.

Macaroons pose similar problems. The finished product looks nothing like a coconut or a piece of one. The original item has been chopped up. The fineness of the chopped coconut varies according to region. In some locales it is more like shaved stringy pieces, and in others, almost as finely chopped as falafel. Most commonly, it is chopped but distinct enough to be recognized as chopped coconut. This variation could affect its *brocha*. In addition, the original coconut has been processed through various stages to the point that it no longer resembles the original. It so happens that the main other ingredient is sugar, which is controversial as well. The remaining ingredient, egg-whites, and sometimes, matzo-meal, are added for binding. [See Refs to section A, Brochos 37a-39a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 202:7 15-18 205:4 208:8, commentaries. Pesach halacha p. 50 note 126. Seder Brochos 12:note 16. Vezos Habracha 12:1-3, brocha chart n87-87b.]

C) *Nimuach*

If a food loses its identity because it disintegrates, it should lose its original *brocha*. For some foods, this applies even if it only partially disintegrates. However, this is due to its getting a specific new *brocha*. This applies to cooked grains of the five cereals and rice. Other foods would retain their identities unless they completely disintegrate. Some distinguish between mashing them by hand, as one might do to cooked potatoes or to avocado, and blending by machine. In former times, a strainer was used to blend the item finely. The Talmud makes certain exceptions. Namely, dates, that are already quite mushy, can be mashed into a paste and retain their *brocha*. While some rule this way for similar foods like jam, the *minhag* has become to recite *shehakol*. If one recites the original *brocha*, he fulfills his obligation. The question is whether this could be expanded to other foods, that are not eaten raw, and are commonly eaten in a finely mashed manner.

Macaroons seem to be mashed together by the cooking process. However, they are really still separate distinct pieces that are stuck together through the baking process. The sugar and egg-whites serve as a type of glue. They are not in the form of a paste. It is possible that they are somewhat dried so that they cannot become a paste. [See Brochos 38a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar 202:7, commentaries. Refs to previous sections.]

In conclusion, while there is no clear consensus on the *brocha*, in a region where macaroons are popular, the *brocha* should be *ha'eitz*. Where macaroons are only a very minor use of coconuts, some say that the *brocha* should be *shehakol*.

Sponsored by Dr. Robin Knee in memory of Allan Goodkind, Avrohom ben Kalman Leib, a"h,
whose *yahrzeit* is the 29th of Iyyar. ך

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