

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

On *Rosh Hashanah* night, it is customary to eat various symbolic foods. What is the correct order to eat them?

The issues:

- A) *Simana milsa*, the symbolic significance of the *simanim* on *Rosh Hashanah*
- B) *Birchos hanehenin, brochos* on foods
- C) *Kedimah*, the correct order of priority of *brochos*
- D) *Toch seudah shelo machmas seuda*, snacks eaten during a meal

A) *Simana milsa*

Judaism steers clear of divination, superstition, attaching significance to incidental events and the like. However, the Talmud specifically allows *simana*, symbolically eating special foods on the night of *Rosh Hashanah*. We begin the year on a positive note. It should be a good omen for the year. The Talmud lists certain types of food that one eats on this night, and the symbolism inherent therein. The poskim add more of these. They also say that one may add his own foods that have a positive connotation. The text used by the Talmud has two versions. In one, the idea is not to eat these foods but to see them. Some poskim say that the purpose, either way, is that these foods will stimulate prayer. This fits with the meaning given to the *simanim* by some commentaries. Some say that the particular foods mentioned by the Talmud grow faster or are sweeter than regular foods. Others say that their names reflect good things, and not necessarily in Hebrew. The idea is to mention the word and to be reminded to pray for something similar.

The Talmud seems to refer to eating these foods at the meals. However, the Talmud could indicate a practice to snack on these foods at any time during *Rosh Hashanah*. The *minhag* has arisen to eat them as snacks of sorts, rather than as the main courses, but to eat them in the meal. In reality, this satisfies neither interpretation, as we shall discuss.

The *simanim* mentioned by the Talmud are: *kra*, a gourd, possible pumpkin, with a Hebrew connotation of ripping up condemning documents; *rubia*, which some say is a legume; the consensus is that one reason to eat this is due to its Aramaic name, that implies growth or gain; accordingly, in other countries, foods are eaten with names that have similar double meanings; *karti*, leek or cabbage, with a Hebrew connotation of defeating our enemies; *silka*, beets, with a Hebrew connotation of removal of our enemies; *tamrei*, dates, a Hebrew connotation of extinction of the enemies of Hashem.

Other foods have become traditional. Ashkenazim dip apple in honey. Both of these have deep significance, besides the sweetness associated with them. They also dip the *challah* in honey. Other communities dip it in salt first. Salt is a taste enhancer, *lematek*, in Hebrew, the word for to sweeten. Indeed, salt symbolically sweetens divine judgment.

Pomegranate also has symbolic meaning. It is customary to eat meat from the head of a lamb or of a fish. Both the lamb and the fish are independently significant. Fish symbolize proliferation. The lamb is connected to the *shofar* and its other connotations. We pray to be the head, rather than the tail, based on verses in the *Tochacha*. All these additional foods happen to be used in various Scriptural references as a metaphor for Israel. Honey is also a metaphor for Torah. The prevailing custom is to avoid sour and bitter foods.

When eating the *simanim*, one recites a short prayer. Thus, each *siman* is understood by those eating it. Many believe that this is the real reason to eat them. It begins the year and the prayer of the special day on a positive note. [See Horiyos 12a Krisos 5b-6a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 583:1-2, commentaries.]

B) Brochos on foods

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.

One can recite one *brocha* before eating many different species of foods, when all the foods share the same *brocha*. When foods with different *brochos* are being eaten as a group, there would usually be one food that is considered the *ikar*, primary food, with all others being *tafel*, auxiliary to it. The *brocha* is recited only on the *ikar*. The poskim raise a question on the honey eaten with the apple. Clearly each of them are part of the *siman*. Accordingly, should they not both require a *brocha*? If one is the *ikar*, which is it? When foods are eaten as part of a bread-based meal, the single *brocha* on the bread works for the entire meal. Some consider this an enhanced type of *ikar* and *tafel*. [See Brochos 35a 40a-42b 44a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 177 178 187 202-206 212, commentaries.]

C) Kedimah

One usually eats different foods in the order that he desires. 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*. 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*. Vegetables that do not grow on trees have the *brocha ha'adamah*. Those growing on trees get their own *brocha*, *ha'eitz*, due to the fact that trees do not die at the end of their season. Accordingly, one eating tree fruits with ground vegetables recites the *brocha* and eats the fruit first.

When the foods are all on the same *brocha* level, other considerations are taken into account. 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*. [We will not discuss *shalem*, a complete fruit. This can often trump other reasons for *kedimah*.] The *shivas haminim*, seven species with which *Eretz Yisroel* is blessed, are singled out for *brochos*. Their mention is juxtaposed to the *mitzvah* of *birchas hamazon*, the model for all *birchos hanehenin*. The Talmud debates whether they deserve *birchas hamazon* Scripturally, concluding that they do not. Having established that these seven crops are so highly valued, the Talmud debates whether they should always have *kedimah* for the *brocha*. That is, if one has many fruits of the same *brocha*, should he recite the *brocha* on the fruit of the *shivas haminim* and eat it before the others? Three views are cited by the poskim. In the first view, if their *brochos* are all equal, one should recite the *brocha* on the *shivas haminim*, rather than the favorite food. If there is no species of the *shivas haminim* in the variety, he must choose his favorite. If their *brochos* are different, one chooses the favorite if he so wishes, or he may choose the item of *shivas hamnim*. In the second view, in this case, too, he must choose the favorite. [Note: The poskim debate whether one may recite *ha'adamah* before *ha'eitz* out of choice. There is no clear consensus either way.] In the third view, one always chooses his favorite. If they are all equally favored, one chooses the item of *shivas haminim*. The consensus is to follow the second view. However, it is recommended that one use the fruit of the *shivas haminim*.

The question arises whether there is an order of *kedimah* for the *brocha* within the seven. One would think that the Torah lists them in order of their value. Indeed, this is the presumed order of *kedimah* – with one caveat. The *passuk* mentions the word *Eretz*, the holy land, twice. Five crops are listed after the first mention, and the remaining two are listed after the second mention. The order is: wheat, barley, grapevine, fig and pomegranate after the first *eretz*. Olive and date after the second *eretz*.

Accordingly, the Talmud says that the order is according to the proximity to *eretz*. Thus, it is possible that the seventh fruit, a date, takes *kedimah* over the third fruit, a grape. In our case, the date would come before the pomegranate. [See Brochos 39b 40b-41b 44a 48b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 187-9 208 210:1 211:1-5 211:1 Shaar Hatziyun 5, Kaf Hachaim 3, commentaries. Ben ish Chai Year 1, Matos.]

D) Snacks in the middle of a meal

Other foods are considered part of a bread meal. At certain stages in a meal foods require their own *brochos*, mainly due to their not being included in the meal. In Talmudic times, people reclined on couches for meals. The main food was placed on individual low tables. Sometimes, a snack was eaten before *netilas yadayim* and the first bite of bread, or right after it. The snack was not part of the main meal and might not be brought in on the little table. It required its own *brocha rishona* and often, *brocha acharona*, unless more of it would be consumed later on during the meal. When the meal was over the little table was removed with the remaining bread. More snacks might sometimes be served up. They could be the type otherwise eaten with bread. They were brought after the main food, and they required their own *brochos*. Though modern meals seem to merge the desert with the meal, the rules for the beginning of the meal are the same nowadays. Ap-

petizers intended to complement the meal do not require their own *brochos*.

Foods eaten in the middle of the meal but not directly connected to it require their own *brocha rishona*, but no *brocha acharona* [though this point is debated by the Talmud]. To determine this, two factors are considered. Food eaten to fill and satisfy is evidently part of the meal. Food normally eaten with bread, as part of the main course, or eaten with bread this time, is either considered part of the meal or *tafel* to the bread. Fruits, at least raw, snacking vegetables, and sweets or cakes and cookies, are all generally not considered part of the meal, unless eaten with meat or cooked foods or to fill oneself. Wine always requires its own *brocha rishona*. [See Brochos 35b 40b-42b 44a, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. OC (174) 176 177:1 212, commentaries. Chazon Ish 27(:9). Igros Moshe OC III:33 IV:41-42. Tzitz Eliezer II:2 III:2.]

This raises many questions in our case. First of all, should any *brochos* be recited on the *simanim*? The Talmud implies either that they are eaten as part of the regular *Rosh Hashanah seuda*, or that they are snacked on throughout the day. We try to satisfy both, but really do neither. We eat them as snacks, during the *seuda*! Some poskim avoid the issue by eating them with the bread. Others maintain that one should not recite the *brochos* on them, but count them as part of the meal. One *minhag* is to recite a *brocha* on the fruits, but not on the *ha'adamah* foods. Some recite *ha'adamah* as well. [The poskim point out that those who recite *brochos* on the *simanim* should not recite the *brocha* on dessert, even if they usually do so.] We have already mentioned the issue raised with the honey. Most people are accustomed to considering it *tafel* to the apple. Alternatively, since it was used for the *challah*, there is no need to recite a *brocha* on it with the apple. The other question is whether to begin with the apple, which is the common *minhag*, or with the date, which has the added value of *shivas haminim*. [Perhaps, since the *minhag* is to dip the apple in the honey, rather than other fruits, this must be considered *chaviv*.] [See e.g. Sh Ar OC 583:1 MA 1, commentaries. Mateh Efraim 583:1, Ktzei Hamateh 5 6. Kaf Hachaim OC 583:13 15 25. Nitei Gavriel Rosh Hashanah 29:4, notes.]

In conclusion, one should not change his *minhag*. If he recites a *brocha* on the apple, it is preferred that he leave the *shivas haminim* off the table until after the *brocha*.

On the parsha Hashem, your G-d, will cause a surplus in all of your handiwork, in the fruit (products) of your womb, in the fruit of your animals and in the fruits of your land, for goodness .. [26:11] Why do we need a surplus? Why is the word *letova*, for goodness, added? Surely all of this is for goodness! Why is it not enough that we have all the food that we need, and that we recognize that all of it is due to Hashem's goodness? It seems that we need these special *brochos* to be able to recognize the goodness of Hashem. In reality anything he gives us is good, but we need to be shown it. It is also possible to be given an abundance of things that are not so good. This *brocha* is for abundant good business work, good children, good animals and good fruits. On *Rosh Hashanah*, we pray that we should be able to see the blessing in our successes, and that the abundance should be a good and sweet abundance!

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כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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