


# HALOCHOSCOPE



**This week's question:**

**What is the correct *brocha* on pine-nuts?**

**The issues:**

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

B) Pine nuts

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*.

To recap, the principal benefit referred to is eating and drinking. The logic for instituting *birchos hanehenin* is that before benefiting from this world one should acknowledge Hashem Who created it. Taking it without a *brocha* is akin to stealing. The *brocha* is to 'ask permission' before benefiting from the item in the way Hashem intended it. Hashem created types of foods, used in their intended way to benefit mankind. When using something in an unintended way, one still feels benefit. However, the *brocha* recited would need to reflect this usage.

Accordingly, products of a plant other than its main fruit do not take the standard *brocha*. Vine leaves, for example, are considered *pri ha'adamah*, fruit of the ground. The classic Talmudic example of a multiple fruit plant is the caper bush. It has four edible parts. Certain products are not even really meant for regular consumption, but can be altered to make them edible. Thus, if one manages to turn wood into something edible, it would take the *brocha shehakol*. The Talmud compares the laws of rinds, shells and pits of *orlah*, fruit grown on a young tree less than three years old, to the *brocha* laws. Based on this, the poskim maintain that one should recite *ha'aitz* on edible pits. The shells or rinds are sometimes an integral part of the fruit, sometimes a protective cover, and sometimes they are not critical to the protection of the inner fruit. This raises some question

about how much they can be considered a part of the fruit.

As mentioned, the *bircas hanehenin* 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 mentioned earlier 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. Some plants have parts that are treated as delicacies by some, but garbage by others, such as vine leaves and orange peels.

Some plants seem to have been created for their food qualities, yet the food cannot be eaten directly. It needs to be extracted, and sometimes the 'wood' is not even eaten. Only the 'flavor' is consumed. Many spices and seasonings are like this. In those cases, the actual 'food' does not even require its own *brocha*. It becomes secondary or even absorbed in the food which it flavors. However, if the 'food' it flavors is plain water, this becomes a question. Is the *brocha shehakol* on the water, or is it the *brocha* on the original food whose flavor is absorbed in the water? Or is the original food changed in a way that its own *brocha* turns to *shehakol*? For example, the Talmud discusses *maya deshivta*, water flavored with *sheves*, which is defined as caraway or dill by some. It is compared to *maya desilka*, beet soup. In the case of the beets, the food can be eaten, but the water extract is an additional food. The *sheves* can also be eaten, but is usually eaten in another food. The poskim also discuss beer, which has a content based on the extract from barley malt. Barley, too, can be eaten in its original state. Should the *brocha* be *shehakol*, due to the main ingredient being water, or *mezonos*, since the water is simply a way to extract the malt flavor and alcohol?

The aforementioned products are mainly used in their original form, but can also be brewed to remove their flavor. Thus, part of the discussion is whether the food should lose its original *brocha* in this state. 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. [See Brochos 35a-39a etc., Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 168 202:1 3-6 8 10-18 203:1-7 204:11-12 205:2-3 208:3 9, commentaries.]

### **B) Pine nuts**

We mentioned the caper bush, known as *nitzpeh* or *tzelaf*. This is a *halachically* recognized tree. It sometimes grown in rock crevices (including on the Western Wall). It has four edible parts: the actual fruit, called *evyonos*; *kafrisin*, the soft surrounding flesh; *alin*, the leaves; *temaros*, the leaf buds. The Talmud debates the *brocha* status of palm shoots. Neither view holds that it is *ha'eitz*. It is not considered actual fruit of the palm, like the dates. In one view it should be *ha'adamah*, since it grows from the ground. In the other view its *brocha* is *shehakol*. At first, the reason seems to be due to the fact that it will eventually harder and become a branch. Thus, it appears to be an immature branch, that happens to be edible. On wood, one recites *shehakol*. The Talmud then retracts this explanation. A second explanation is then provided: the palm is not cultivated with the shoots in mind. Thus, it is not a fruit of the palm. The Talmud distinguished between this and the *nitzpeh* or *tzelaf*. In the case of *tzelaf*, the plant is cultivated for all of its edible parts, except that the fruit parts are given the *brocha ha'eitz*, and the leaves are *shehakol*. In ruling, the poskim debate the *brocha* on the peachy outer part. In further ruling, later poskim maintain that it depends on the times. If the main purpose of cultivation changes to the peachy part, one recites *ha'eitz* on it, and *ha'adamah* on the inner fruit. This leads us to pine nuts.

The pine nut is actually discussed by the Talmud and poskim. The Talmud considers pine a species of *arza*, the family that includes cedar. This seems to be a general term for coniferous trees, so called due to the cones they produce. The names used for pines include *tornisa*, *itzrubelin* and *tzenobar*. The latter might be of Arabic origin, used by post-Talmudic literature. The fruit of the pine is considered a highly-prized commodity. There are issues with regard to its sale to idolaters, especially since this product might be used as an offering to the idols. The Talmud's name for the fruit seems to be *pairi de'arza*. Later poskim call it simply *tzenobar* or *egozei tzenobar* or *oran*.

The nuts are found inside the cones. The cones themselves usually need more than one season to mature enough that their nuts can be harvested. Certain species are not worth harvesting, but others produce a large number of these edible nuts. The cones are either gathered from the ground after they fall down, or are picked a week or two before they are fully dried out, and then dried in sacks. The cones are beaten to break them apart and the nuts are separated. They come in a shell of varying thickness, depending on the strain. The fruit is usually used in recipes, rather than eaten alone. Accordingly, they would not be given their own *brocha*, but would become secondary to the main ingredient of the recipe. However, it is evident from the debates by the poskim that they were and can be eaten alone. Nowadays, due to their high mineral content, they are fashionable to eat, especially by those who do not wish to take artificial mineral supplements. The question is, if they are eaten this way, what is their *brocha*.

The pine is obviously a tree. The *halachic* status of the fruit, however is the matter

of much discussion. The cedar family of trees were cultivated for their wood products. In some countries, pines are cultivated for their fruit. In many countries, the nuts are harvested from wild forest trees. Even if the trees are grown in farms, the primary purpose of the tree is its wood. The general term for such trees is *ilanei serak*, or barren trees. This is a term used for all types of tree that do not produce edible fruit, do not produce enough fruit to merit cultivation, have ceased producing well, or whose fruit is not the main crop.

However, there is an additional definition that is the subject of debate. Fruit might be gathered from wild trees, that may or may not be edible raw. Since the fruit was not cultivated as a crop, it could be called fruit of *ilanei serak*. Others maintain that this does not refer to readily edible wild fruit, but to fruit that is additionally inedible in its raw state. Many cultivated crops need to be cooked, yet they retain the *brocha ha'eitz* or *ha'adamah*. Since they are cultivated specially, this is considered the *hana'ah* intended in their creation. If they are wild, the case can be made that they were never intended as a food. The fruit is a secondary by-product. Therefore, the *brocha* would be *shehakol*. A third view maintains that the reason the fruit is not cultivated is due to its insignificance. If it is significant, but is not cultivated for other reasons, it is *ha'eitz*.

Based on this debate, pine nuts could be *shehakol* or *ha'eitz*. If one follows the view that anything growing on wild trees not known as primarily fruit-bearing are *shehakol*, the same would apply to pine nuts. If one maintains that readily edible fruit of *ilanei serak* take the *brocha ha'eitz*, this should apply to pine nuts. Certainly if the criterion is its prominence and significance, pine nuts would be the ideal example of a wild fruit that gets the *brocha ha'eitz*. It is indeed a delicacy. Two out of the three opinions mentioned here would require *ha'eitz* on pine nuts.

In addition, it seems that earlier poskim specifically singled out pine nuts to rule on their *brocha*, and they say it is *ha'eitz*. Some later poskim maintain that at the very least, the *brocha* should be *ha'adamah*, if it is considered a secondary by-product. Accordingly, the view that rules that their *brocha* is *shehakol* is in the minority. Therefore, one should recite *ha'eitz* on them. [See Brochos 36a Rosh Hashanah 23a Avoda Zara 14a, Poskim. Tur BY Sh Ar OC 202:6 (Kaf Hachayim) 203:4, commentaries.]

In conclusion, the correct *brocha* is *ha'eitz*.

**On the parsha ...** *Vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware lest you forget Hashem ... [6:11-12]* Why would we forget Hashem specifically because we eat and are satiated from fruits of trees that we did not plant? True, it was planted by someone else. But the very fact that Hashem gave it to us should cause us to remember Him and thank Him for it. Surely, it is more likely to forget about Hashem when we eat the fruit of our own labors [see next week's parsha.] Perhaps this is a reference to reciting the correct *brochos*. One might think that if the fruit is just gathered from trees that are there 'by themselves', it is not as significant and does not get its own special *brocha*. Ultimately, Hashem is the one Who put them there for this purpose. Therefore, we always recite the special *bircas hanehenin*.

**Sponsored by the Silver family in honor of the birth of a girl to Mendel and Goldie Darabaner.**

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