

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

A dressing is made of wine and olive oil, with some other spices. If one wishes to taste a spoonful of it before adding it to the food, or before eating the food, does he recite a *brocha*, and if so, which *brocha*?

The issues:

- A) *Birchos hanehenin*, *brochos* on food; the *brocha* on olive oil
 - B) *Te'imah*, is there a *brocha* on tasting food?
 - C) *Ikar* and *tafel*, primary and secondary foods eaten together
 - D) *Brocha* on wine and/or olive oil adulterated with other liquids
- A) *Birchos hanehenin*.

Brochos are based on a Scriptural concept, though most are Rabbinically ordained. *Bircas hamazon*, the grace after a bread meal, is a Scriptural obligation. Many maintain that *bircas hatorah*, recited before fulfilling the *mitzvah* of Torah study, is also Scripturally mandated. Based on this, the Rabbis instituted *brochos* of three types. *Birchos hamitzvah* recited before performing a *mitzvah*. *Birchos hasheva'ach* recited as praise on the existence of Hashem's Creation, His control and monitoring of nature, and other kindnesses. *Birchos hanehenin* are recited before benefiting from the bounty of the Creation.

The principal benefit referred to is eating and drinking. The logic for instituting *birchos hanehenin* is: 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 gaining Hashem's intended benefit. 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. The *brocha rishona*, before consumption, is recited on any amount. Thus, before eating a breadcrumb, one would recite *hamotzie*. [*Netilas yadayim* and its *brocha* require a minimum *shiur*.] The *brocha acharona* requires consuming a *kezayis*, olive-sized piece.

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 *ortah*, 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.

A liquid extracted from fruit is considered 'sweat'. It does not retain the *brocha* of the fruit itself. This is not *pri ha'eitz*, the fruit of the tree, but a water extract. If a vegetable is cooked in water, the flavor gives the water the same *brocha* as the vegetable. Rather than 'sweat', it is considered to have absorbed part of the fruity flesh.

The two big exceptions to this rule are wine and olive oil. The *brocha* reflects the main purpose of the tree, both in Creation and in current planting purposes. Vines and olive trees are planted with the fruit in mind, so its *brocha* is *ha'eitz*. The juice is also a primary purpose of that fruit, and thereby the primary purpose in Creation. When reciting the *brocha* on these juices, one must acknowledge it having been purposely created.

Thus, both of these are not water or 'sweat', with the *brocha shehakol*. Wine has a special *brocha* of its own, *borei peri hagafen*, due to its special properties. Olive oil retains the *brocha borei peri ha'eitz*. However, the Talmud ponders this *brocha* when consuming oil. If it is drunk alone, it is harmful. On a harmful food, the *brocha* is not the same. The poskim debate whether it is *shehakol*, or no *brocha* at all. [See Brochos 35a-36a 38a 39a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 202:1 6 205:2 208:1 212:1, commentaries.]

B) Te'ima

The *hana'ah*, benefit, from foodstuffs is eating or drinking them. Smelling can also require a *brocha*, but it relates specifically to the benefit of smell, regardless of whether the item is edible. There are various *brochos* on smelling, depending on whether it is a ground or tree plant. There is a special *brocha* on smelling a food item, but most poskim maintain that this *brocha* is only recited if one has no plans to eat it. This raises the question about tasting. The benefit from eating is swallowing the food and being nourished by it. True, the taste is important as well, but tasting alone does not seem to be a full benefit. Unlike smelling, which is considered its own form of benefit, based on a *passuk*, taste is considered a part of the eating benefit. [The poskim debate smoking tobacco (as opposed to sniffing). It could be viewed as a taste or as benefiting from a smell or fume.]

In the context of fasting, the Talmud says that one who tastes does not recite a *brocha* and one who is fasting may taste food. This is up to a *revi's* volume (2½ to 4½ fluid ounces, depending on the opinions). The poskim debate the meanings of the statements. Some maintain that the entire passage refers to both fasting and reciting the *brocha*. Others maintain that it is meant to be split. Similarly, some maintain that the entire passage refers to tasting and spitting out. Others maintain that this is only an issue with regard to fasting, but for a *brocha*, even swallowing does not count if it was merely a taste. A further debate questions whether swallowing or spitting out have minimum or maximum measures of *revi's*. Two rulings are cited by *Shulehan Aruch*: Tasting up to a *revi's* does not require a *brocha*, but more than a *revi's* requires one, regardless of whether it was swallowed; or that swallowing always requires a *brocha*, but spitting out never requires a *brocha*, regardless of the amount. The consensus is to rule leniently, and even if one swallows, since his intent is to taste rather than consume, there is no *brocha*. Ideally, one who tastes and swallows should have in mind to benefit from the food as though he is eating it. He may then recite a *brocha*. [Incidentally, the Talmud could have proposed the solution to the *brocha* on olive oil this way: a person dips his finger in it to

taste it, and swallows it. In this small amount it is not harmful.]

Thus, in our case, if the person is simply dipping his finger in and licking it, he need not recite the *brocha*. If he intends to swallow it, he should have intent to benefit, and then recite the *brocha*. [See Brochos 14a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 210:2, commentaries.]

C) Ikar and tafeil

When eating more than one food at the same time one recites *brochos* appropriate for each food before consuming it. Many foods are eaten together. In many such circumstances, the *brocha* is recited only on one of them. First, one must determine which of the foods is the *ikar*, or primary food. The other is considered *tafeil*, secondary, and a *brocha* is not recited on it. If neither is primary, nor secondary, both *brochos* are recited. If the foods are mixed or joined, this would require separating them to recite the separate *brochos*, or eating other like-*brocha* foods before eating the joined or mixed foods.

Ikar and *tafeil* can occur in various forms. The most simple include a mixture of two foods in small parts, a dip or coating, a second food to help eat the primary food, a soup or salad, and two distinct dishes usually eaten together. For example, corn chips are often dipped in salsa. The chips are *ikar* and the salsa is *tafeil*. In some locations a food might always be eaten with a salad, such as falafel, with or without a pita. In this case, the question must be raised, is this one food, or are they two foods? Is this a situation of one primary with a secondary food, or are they both primary?

Various rules determine *ikar* and *tafeil* that are applied separately or in combination. Sometimes, one rule will conflict with another. Therefore, the issues must be studied and it might involve consulting a *halachic* authority. Obviously, the most likely way to determine it is by measuring the majority. A second way could be by determining which of the foods is usually considered a staple or primary in most situations. However, neither of these would apply in the following case. Certain foods are very sharp or strong. They are never eaten 'neat'. They are always eaten with a cracker or other neutral food. Even if the neutral food is bread, the *brocha* is recited on the salty food. The bread is not eaten in its own right, but to dilute the salty fish or meat. In this situation, it is conceivable that more bread or cracker is eaten than salty fish. Bread is usually a main staple. Nonetheless, these two foods are always eaten this way, and the salty fish is primary. This is because this food is the reason for eating both.

The poskim debate the meaning of the lack of a *brocha* on the secondary food. In one view, since it is secondary it loses its significance and does not require a *brocha*. In the other view, it requires a *brocha*, but its significance is as an appendage to the primary food. Therefore, its *brocha* is the same as that of the primary food. This can be likened to spices added to a food. The spices might be in recognizable pieces, but are assimilated into the other food, rather than considered a mixture. [See Brochos 41a 44a, Poskim. Tur, Sh. Ar. OC 212, commentaries. Chazon Ish OC 27:9. Igros Moshe OC IV:42-43.]

D) Adulterated wine or olive oil

Wine is considered a concentrated drink. The Talmud debates whether a *brocha* is recited on undiluted wine. The commentaries say that we no longer cultivate the type of grapes that produced the concentrated wine. It is unclear whether it was extra strong flavor-wise or alcohol-wise. We follow the ruling that wine can be diluted by the proportion

practiced locally, up to five times the wine and still retain its special *brocha*. However, it must still retain the basic wine flavor. This refers to diluting with water, or adding honey or sugar and other spices. If it is mixed with a different drink, it depends on the strength of the flavor of the other drink, and whether water has already been added to the wine. Fig beer does not adulterate the flavor until it becomes the majority. Other drinks might spoil the pure wine flavor at a lower proportion.

In the course of the discussion about the *brocha* on olive oil, the Talmud suggests that a mixture reduces its harmful effects. *Anigrón* is a mixture of stewed vegetable water and olive oil. The oil is *tafel*, so its *brocha* is not *ha'eitz*. If one has a bad throat, he gargles and drinks this mixture for its oil component which is medicinal. It is now the *ikar*, and the *brocha* is *ha'eitz*. [There is separate debate based on the usage as a medicine, which does not usually get a *bircas hanenhenin*.] On *Shabbos*, when medicine would be prohibited, one with a throat complaint may drink *anigrón*. Since it can also be drunk as a beverage, it is permitted. The poskim debate the meaning of this ruling. It could mean that in this case, the oil is a greater proportion and becomes the *ikar*. Or it could be that the focus of the drinker is on the oil component, only due to his sore throat. The ruling could also depend on the day of the week. During the week, one need not drink the concoction at all. Gargling is enough, and no *brocha* is recited. If one chooses to drink it, he says *shehakol*. On *Shabbos*, he has no choice but to drink it for the oil, and says *ha'eitz*.

In our case, the olive oil is certainly a major component in the dressing. The wine seems to be an equally major component. Depending on the proportions, and assuming that they can be mixed (which the Talmud discusses elsewhere) the issue might be whether the taste of the wine is compromised enough to remove the *brocha hagafnen*. The next question would be whether the dilution is enough to render the oil harmless and edible, in which case the *brocha* would be *ha'eitz*. Or perhaps, due to the mixture, neither the wine nor the oil is dominant enough, and the *brocha* would be *shehakol*.

Another factor is whether the person is planning to eat the salad right away. The dressing is definitely *tafel* to the salad. If one eats a *tafel* by itself before eating the *ikar*, he must recite a *brocha* on it. However, the poskim debate which *brocha* should be recited. In one view, he does not recite the original *brocha*, but *shehakol*. The food is *tafel*, but one must recite a *brocha* before benefiting. *Shehakol* is enough. In the other view, it does not lose its *brocha* when it is eaten separately, only when it is actually a *tafel* to another food. In our case, the dressing is not an independent type of food. Its *brocha* might even be *shehakol*. Therefore, if one plans to swallow it, he could have intent to benefit from the eating and say *shehakol*. Nonetheless, since the issue raises so many questions, it is better to avoid swallowing, or if one does swallow, to avoid the intent to eat it. [See refs to earlier sections. Tur Sh Ar OC 202:1 204:5-6 212:1, commentaries.]

In conclusion, one should not recite any *brocha*, and should avoid swallowing.

Sponsored by Noah Bass and Debbie Rotenstein in memory of Debbie's mother Rochel bas

Chalm a"n, whose *yahrzeit* is the 17th of Shevat. ם

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