

## Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 38:

On this page we see connections made between brachot and other mitzvot. When we make connections between mitzvot and learn things about one mitzvah from another, we share the kedusha of the mitzvot and embed higher spiritual knowledge in the practice of seemingly mundane mitzvot. So what deductions can we make about brachot based on other topics?

1. **The mitzvah of challah.** We know that the bracha for bread is *hamotzi*. And we know that when someone bakes bread, there is a mitzvah to separate some dough, which is called challah, and give it to the kohen (or, as we do today, burn it). But how exactly do we define bread when it comes to these two mitzvot? Does the mitzvah of challah only apply when we make dough that is *hamotzi*? The gemara discusses a type of bread made for *kutach*, which is some kind of sour milk mixture. The dough is similar to bread but has a crumbly texture. Do we make a *hamotzi* or *mezonos* on this *kutach* bread? Rashi specifies that we're talking about a kind of bread that is baked in the sun. According to the gemara, what the dough is depends on how the batter is prepared. If you make it thick like a brick (Rashi says if you make it pretty, like a roll), then you have to separate challah. And the bracha on this dough is *hamotzi*. But if you make it thin, similar to a matza (and bake it in the sun), there is no need for challah and the bracha is *mezonos*. Rabbi Soloveitchik says it doesn't necessarily matter how the dough is baked. What matters is how it looks. So if it looks like a roll, even if it was baked in the sun, it's bread (and requires challah and a *hamotzi*). But if you're making it really different, for example very thin, then it's not bread (so the bracha is *mezonos* and challah is not needed). The Rambam says it depends on how it's made. If it's thick, it's bread. If it's thin, it's not. The Rambam says nothing about baking in the sun. Rabbeinu Tam says that it's about the dough, not necessarily the baked item, so challah must be taken from any dough that is fit to make into loaves, regardless of what the final product will be. In practical terms, an individual baking bread will usually not separate challah because the mitzvah requires a large amount of flour. If you're using less than 2.5 pounds of flour you don't separate challah, and if you're using less than five pounds you don't make the bracha on the mitzvah. But a professional baker who uses large quantities does need to separate challah. Even for cake, when you are baking a large amount and the batter is thick and unpourable, challah should be taken.
2. **Anchoring a meal.** Mar Zutra was eating something doughy that had been thrown in the oven but not actually baked. It was not bread, but he made a *hamotzi* on it and said *bircat hamazon* when he was done. Why? Because it was his meal. Even if something wouldn't normally be defined as bread, if it becomes the anchor of a meal then the bracha becomes *hamotzi*. The term used to define this type of dough is *pas haba b'kisnin*, which is difficult to translate. It might mean cake, pie, or something that has a pocket. Whatever it means, it is something for which the bracha is *mezonos* unless it makes a meal. Pizza might fall into this category, which is why some people will make a *mezonos* for a slice or two but a *hamotzi* for more than two slices. Some say that even if you're having only one slice, if you're eating it with other things, like fries and a salad, the bracha is *hamotzi* because altogether it's a meal. But culturally, these days *mezonos* just isn't as significant as it used to be. Food that is *mezonos* arguably wouldn't be considered the anchor of a meal the way it might have been in the past. In fact the same is true for bread, but there's something different and special about bread. We don't really understand what that something different is, but we maintain the custom of considering it the anchor of a meal. We use bread in our sanctification of Shabbos and Yom Tov, and that extends to regular weekdays when we say that even a bit of bread is considered a meal, just because of that indefinable special quality. Or perhaps it is our psychological appreciation of bread, because of

Shabbos and Yom Tov, that gives it status as the most important part of the meal even during the week.

3. **The mitzvah of *terumah*.** In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, a regular tithe was given to the kohanim. This tithe was called *terumah*. It was not permitted to turn fruits into juice before giving them to the kohen as *terumah*. The only exceptions were wine and olive oil, which could be given as *terumah*. Mar bar Rav Ashi says that the bracha on date honey is *shehakol*. You might think that date honey would get a *ha'eitz* because of its delicious taste, but that is not the case. Just like other liquids, which are considered inferior to the fruits they come from and therefore cannot be given as *terumah*, the bracha for date honey is *shehakol*. If it is not *terumah*-worthy, it does not rate a *ha'eitz*. Does it make a difference if the fruits are grown specifically for the juice? Rashba says in that case, the bracha on the juice is *ha'eitz*, but most rabbis disagree. Rav Asi says that while fruits could not be turned into juice for the *terumah*, they could be turned into mush. A date paste is acceptable for *terumah* and gets a *ha'eitz*, while date beer is not acceptable for *terumah* and gets a *shehakol*. This makes sense because turning a fruit into mush, like applesauce, does not change what it is.
4. **Medicinal foods.** The bracha on *shesisa* depends on its thickness. *Shesisa* is made by taking moist wheat kernels, putting them in the oven, and then grinding them. It makes a mixture similar to oatmeal. Like oatmeal, *shesisa* was usually thick, and the bracha would be *mezonos*. But sometimes people would make it thinner and drink it medicinally. When it's medicinal, the bracha is *shehakol*, and it can even be eaten on Shabbos. But haven't we learned that medicine should not be taken on Shabbos? Of course medicine is permitted when there is danger or when someone is sick in bed, but a therapeutic *shesisa* mixture is not something that is used when there is real danger. It is used by someone who is feeling a little under the weather. So why is it permitted on Shabbos? Because it's food. It's not like taking a pill, which isn't normally eaten and for which one might accidentally violate Shabbos. When the medicine is regular food, it is permitted on Shabbos. Think of chicken soup. Chicken soup can certainly be curative, but it is also delicious. If you happen to have a sore throat on Friday night, we're not going to say you can't eat chicken soup because it can help your throat. You can enjoy as much chicken soup as you want on Shabbos. And just as medicinal food is considered regular food on Shabbos, we learn that it is considered regular food during the week as well. You might think that if you're eating *shesisa* during the week purely for medicinal reasons, you shouldn't make a bracha at all. But despite its healing properties, it is food, and food requires a bracha.
5. **Conformity vs. innovation.** What is the correct wording for the bracha we refer to as "*hamotzi*"? Rabbi Nehemia says it should be "*motzi lechem min ha'aretz*," while the rabbis say it should be "*hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*." Everyone agrees that "*motzi*" is past tense, and the bracha should be in the past tense because we are thanking G-d for the bread He has already given to us. But is "*hamotzi*" also past tense? The rabbis say that it is, and therefore it is preferable to "*motzi*." Rabbi Zeira was once told about a great rabbi, Rab Zvid, who was an expert in brachot. He invited Rab Zvid to his house, gave him bread, and asked him to make the bracha for everyone. Rab Zvid said "*motzi*," and Rabbi Zeira exclaimed, "This is why they say you're great?" He was upset because everyone knew that "*motzi*" would work, but some were saying that "*hamotzi*" was also good. "*Hamotzi*" was newer, and Rabbi Zeira had expected that Rab Zvid, a known expert in the field, would support the more innovative opinion. But Rab Zvid was trying to avoid conflict by sticking with the wording that everyone could agree with. Is it such a bad thing to keep the peace and shy away from debate? Not necessarily, but sometimes when new opinions were suggested the rabbis were specifically looking for people to stand up and loudly support them. Otherwise no new opinions would ever be accepted, the status quo would remain, and halacha would stagnate. Sometimes taking a stand is important.

6. **How to hold your bread.** Tosfot says “*hamotzi*” is better because the word right before it is “*haolam*,” so if we say “*motzi*” the two “m” sounds will blur together. We can have the same problem with “*lechem min*,” but we do not change that wording because it comes from a Biblical verse. Tosfot also says that when you make the bracha, you should hold the bread in both hands with all ten fingers, because there are ten words in that verse.
7. **Bread and vegetables.** The gemara says that vegetables are like bread. Just like bread changes when you bake it in fire, vegetables also change. But the bracha is still *ha'adama*.
8. **Cooked vs. raw vegetables.** Some vegetables are normally eaten raw but can also be eaten cooked. Other vegetables are normally eaten cooked but can sometimes be eaten raw. We make a *ha'adama* when the vegetable is eaten the normal way, and a *shehakol* when it is eaten the unusual way. For example, a raw watermelon is *ha'adama* and a cooked watermelon is *shehakol*. A cooked potato is *ha'adama*, but if you have raw potato it would be *shehakol*.
9. **Trustworthy sources of mesorah.** Rav Chiya bar Abba says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, the bracha for boiled vegetables is *ha'adama*. Rav Binyanim bar Yefes, also quoting Rabbi Yochanan, says the bracha for boiled vegetables is *shehakol*. Rav Zeira says Rav Binyanim bar Yefes cannot be compared to Rav Chiya bar Abba. Rav Chiya was very meticulous when he learned from Rabbi Yochanan, and every thirty days he would sit with Rabbi Yochanan and review what he'd learned. Rav Binyanim was not nearly as careful. So when the two students disagreed about what Rabbi Yochanan had taught, Rav Chiya was the one who could be trusted. When a great rabbi passes away and we can no longer learn from him directly, we must rely on his students to pass along his teachings. Sometimes the students will share knowledge that does not match what's been written down. That mesorah is extremely important, but we must be careful whom we learn it from. Only the student who dedicates himself strongly, who is meticulous in his learning and who reviews everything with his teacher to make sure he's understanding it correctly, can be trusted to pass along the rabbi's teachings.
10. **Matza during the year.** Is matza really bread, or is it just a cracker that becomes bread on Pesach when we do not have real bread? Ashkenazim consider matza to be bread, and make a *hamotzi* on it all year long. But Sefardim say that matza is a cracker, so during the year they will make a *mezonos* on it. Only on Pesach, when there is no bread and the matza makes all of our meals, will Sefardim make a *hamotzi* on it.