

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 39:

1. **The size of an olive.** Rabbi Yochanan ate a pitless pickled olive, and then he made an after-blessing. We assume, based on how the story is told, that he made the same after-blessing that is made for fruit, even though the olive was pickled. However, that after-blessing is only said if a specific amount of fruit is eaten - the equivalent of an olive. Since Rabbi Yochanan's olive did not have a pit, it was technically a little smaller than a full olive. So how could he make the after-blessing? The gemara explains that the minimum amount required for the blessing is the size of an average olive, but that does not mean that one actually needs to eat a whole olive. Perhaps the one that Rabbi Yochanan ate was a little bit bigger than the average olive, so it could have been big enough to require the after-blessing even without the pit.
2. **The minimum requirement for an after-blessing.** According to this gemara, the amount of fruit that necessitates an after-blessing is the equivalent of a medium-sized olive. An alternate understanding, based on the Yerushalmi, is that as long as you're eating a whole fruit, even if it's not the size of an olive, you need to make an after-blessing. However, the Shulchan Aruch says that it's best not to make the after-blessing on a fruit smaller than an olive unless you're also eating other foods and altogether you have more than an olive. Why do we have this minimum requirement for after-blessings but not for the blessings we make before eating? The blessing before eating is always necessary because any time we benefit from this world, we must thank G-d. Food is like a sacred item that must be redeemed before it is taken for personal use. Even a single bite must be redeemed, and the blessing is the method of redemption. After-blessings are different. They are based on the verse, "You shall eat and be satisfied and bless." The Biblical requirement of after-blessings therefore applies when one has eaten enough food to be satisfied. The rabbinic requirement may have a lower threshold, but it still needs to be enough that it is truly considered eating. We can learn another difference between before- and after-blessings based on Brisker teachings. The focus of the blessing before food is the *gavra*, the person eating the food. You want to eat something, so you must make a blessing first. The focus of the blessing after food is the *cheftza*, the item itself. It's no longer about you; it's about the food that you've just finished eating. Since the food is the focus, the amount of food makes a difference. *Borei nefashos*, however, may be different from other after-blessings. It's like the *shehakol* of after-blessings, the generic catch-all that we use when a more specific blessing doesn't apply. For this, perhaps it is the enjoyment that matters more than the amount, so as long as you enjoyed the food that you ate the blessing is required no matter how much of it there was.
3. **Mostly *gavra*...but a little bit *cheftza*.** You're holding some food, you make the bracha and get ready to eat it...and then you drop it. Now you can't eat it. What do you do? You might think that you can just grab another piece of food that gets the same bracha and eat that. But you'd be wrong. If the food that you made the bracha on is no longer available to eat, the bracha is invalidated. You must say the verse, "*Baruch shem kevod malchuso le'olam va'ed*," and then you can make another bracha and eat other food. This is because while the focus of blessings before food is mostly the *gavra* (person), the *cheftza* (specific item) is still important. You can't make a bracha and then decide what you're going to eat. A bracha must be made with a specific food in mind, and ideally in hand. If you end up not eating that exact food, the bracha doesn't count. We have a similar rule for the blessings before reading from the Torah. The bracha is made for the specific Torah portion that you're about to read. If after making the bracha you suddenly realize that you have the Torah open to the wrong section and you need to roll the scroll to find the right place, you need to make the bracha again when you find the right place. Tosfot asks, what if you're drinking water from a stream? You can't hold water in your hands, so you'd need

to make the bracha before collecting water in your hands. But since the stream is flowing, the water that is in front of you when you make the bracha is not the same water that will end up in your hands. But, says Tosfot based on the Yerushalmi, that is not a problem because you take the flow into account when you make the bracha and your intention is to drink the water that will be in front of you when you're ready for it. The Rambam says you cannot make a bracha on something that is not in front of you. If it's in the kitchen when you make the bracha, you need another bracha when it comes out.

4. **If you made an invalid bracha.** If you drop your food after making a bracha but before beginning to eat, the bracha becomes invalidated and you should say "*Baruch shem kevod malchuso le'olam va'ed.*" What is accomplished by reciting this verse? Making a bracha *levatala* (an invalid bracha) is a violation of the prohibition against taking G-d's name in vain. According to most opinions it is not technically a literal violation of this prohibition, but it is similar enough to be a serious problem. Saying the *baruch shem* verse mitigates the violation. It is as if to say that the use of G-d's name in the invalid bracha was not in vain, but rather was for the purpose of glorifying His name. Though in this case it was done by accident, we still try to salvage what we can of the situation.
5. **The bracha hierarchy.** Rabbi Bar Kapara invited two of his students to a meal. He served some kind of chicken or duck dish as well as cooked vegetables (possibly cabbage). The vegetables were obviously a significant part of the meal and not just a side dish. Today the halacha is that we make a *ha'adama* on cooked vegetables, but in those days there was a debate. When bread is served and a *hamotzi* is made the debate becomes irrelevant, but at this meal there was no *hamotzi*, either because it was an appetizer course that wasn't covered by the *hamotzi* (Rashi), or because bread was not served at all (Tosfot). So Rabbi Bar Kapara asked one of the students to lead the bracha, and the student made a *shehakol* on the chicken/duck. The other student immediately started insulting him, saying, "Do you love duck so much that you couldn't make a bracha on the vegetables?" The second student held that the bracha for cooked vegetables is *ha'adama*, but perhaps the first student held that it was *shehakol* and that the vegetables therefore didn't need a separate bracha. Rabbi Bar Kapara yelled at the second student for making fun of the first, but then yelled at the first student for disrespecting his teacher by not asking him which bracha to make. According to many Rishonim there is a hierarchy among the brachot, and *ha'adama* should come before *shehakol*. Therefore, if cooked vegetables do indeed get a *ha'adama*, the student should have made that bracha first, even if he liked chicken more than cabbage. Meiri rejects the hierarchy and says that you should make the first bracha on whatever you want to eat first. Doesn't that opinion go against this story? Arguably, we cannot learn halacha from a story that contains insults and anger. The Torah gives us multiple warnings that someone in a state of anger can forget the law. This happened even to Moses. When Rabbi Bar Kapara yelled at his students, he might have been overreacting. While he may have been correct that the first student should have asked for advice on which bracha to make, it certainly seems like an innocent mistake, unless there is another part of the story that we are not told. It's possible that the student made the correct bracha, or at least had the support of rabbinic opinions, and Rabbi Bar Kapara didn't realize because of his anger.
6. **Why does *ha'adama* come first?** Rashi says that *ha'adama* is more important than *shehakol*, because *ha'adama* is more particular and is made on more significant things. Maybe that's because food that comes from the ground is "better" than food that requires animal slaughter. After all, according to the Midrash, in an earlier stage of humankind all people were vegetarians. Tosfot says that the hierarchy is not about the food but rather about the actual bracha. The *ha'adama* bracha is more important than the *shehakol* bracha because it is more specific. It could be that *ha'adama* is about the *cheftza*, the specific food, while *shehakol* is more about the

gavra, the person recognizing that he is receiving a benefit but not acknowledging specifically what it is.

7. **How to cut challah.** There are different opinions regarding the correct way to handle cutting challah and making a *hamotzi*. One opinion is that you're supposed to start cutting the challah while you make the bracha, so that you finish making the first cut as you finish the bracha. That way when you've completed the bracha you have the specific piece ready to eat, because as we know there is an advantage to being specific about which piece of your food you're going to eat. Another advantage of this method is that there is no interruption between making the bracha and eating. But there is another opinion that says you should first make the bracha and only then start cutting. This is because making a bracha on a whole loaf may be better than making a bracha over a single piece.
8. **Cutting challah on Shabbos.** The gemara states that the law is that we make the bracha and then break the bread. Rashi and the Rambam understand this to mean that, following the second opinion noted above, we finish the bracha and then begin to cut the bread. Tosfot and the Rosh disagree, saying we should begin cutting before the conclusion of the bracha but only complete the cut after completing the bracha, so that there is no significant interruption between making the bracha and eating. It could be that Tosfot is disagreeing about the meaning of "make the bracha and then break the bread," but it is also possible that Tosfot is disagreeing with the gemara's statement that this is the law. That is actually not unusual, as Tosfot often takes statements of "the law is x" not as the final word but rather as only one of many factors in determining the halacha. Tosfot does note that Shabbos is an exception: because of the requirement to make the bracha on *lechem mishneh* (two whole challahs), the bracha should be completed before the bread is cut. But aren't we worried about making an interruption between the bracha and the eating? Apparently, the need to have *lechem mishneh* makes the cutting part of the eating, and therefore it is not an interruption.
9. **Old bread or new.** We know that a bracha must be made on a specific food. So if you have a loaf of bread and you also have a piece of bread, which should you make the bracha on? Rav Huna says you should make the bracha on the single piece, while another opinion says you should make the bracha on the loaf. In a way, this debate hinges on what brachot are really about. Do they follow common sense? Common sense says you should finish a started loaf before starting a new one. Or are brachot special things that follow their own rules? If a bracha is supposed to be special, you would want to make it over the food that's the most significant, and that would be the whole loaf. The Mei Hashiloach has a different suggestion: the piece of bread came from a started loaf that you have probably already made a bracha on. When you did that first mitzvah over the loaf, it was as if you entered into a relationship with the loaf, and it is better to continue an existing relationship than to create a new one. Therefore, it is best to continue with this started loaf and make another bracha on it. This is the same reason that Abraham would always go back to the same hotels when he traveled. He had relationships with those hotels, and the people who ran them treated him well. Why abandon those relationships in search of new ones?
10. **Lechem mishneh.** There was a man named Shalom who would try to satisfy both sides of the debate: he would take the loaf as well as the piece, put them together, and make the *hamotzi* over both. This would only work during the week, because on Shabbos we are supposed to make *hamotzi* over *lechem mishneh* - two whole loaves. There is actually a debate regarding *lechem mishneh* on Pesach. We have one broken matza and one whole matza, and some say that we should add a second whole matza so that there is *lechem mishneh*. Others say that is not necessary. Today, most have the custom to have three matzos at the Seder, but those who follow the Rambam have only two. The Vilna Gaon asks a question on the Rambam's ruling: if

there is no need for *lechem mishneh* at the Seder, why would we need a whole matza and a broken one? What is the point of a single whole matza? And the Vilna Gaon answers: the Rambam rules that even during the week, it is preferable to make a *hamotzi* over a full loaf. So at the Seder, it is still preferable to have a whole matza to combine with the broken matza when making the bracha, even if *lechem mishneh* is not necessary.