

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 40:

1. **Acceptable interruptions.** If someone is making a *hamotzi*, and before eating his bread he says to the people at the table, "Take a piece of the blessing," he does not need to make the bracha again. Generally, when there is an interruption between the bracha and the eating, the bracha doesn't count and a new one is needed. But we make an exception when the interruption is specifically related to the meal, because that's not an interruption of intention - it's just part of the eating. So when the host tells his guests to "take a piece of the blessing," or to take bread and eat, he doesn't need to make the bracha again because he hasn't diverted his intention. This is especially true on Shabbos, when the host is making the bracha on behalf of the guests, because having the guests eat is part of the mitzvah. Asking for the salt is also not considered an interruption. The same rule applies to shechita: the shochet makes a bracha on the mitzvah, and he is not supposed to interrupt before shechting the animal, but he is allowed to say "bring me another chicken" without needing another bracha.
2. **The point of the salt.** Saying "pass the salt" before eating the challah does not count as an interruption, because the salt is part of the mitzvah. But is that still true today? According to Tosfot, the original reason for adding salt to the challah was that the challah didn't taste good without it. Bread used to be dry and not flavorful, but when you're making a bracha on food the food should be enjoyable. Salt was part of the mitzvah of challah because the salt genuinely enhanced the mitzvah. Now that challah tastes good by itself, perhaps we don't need to bother with salt. But one of the Baalei Hatosfot, Rabbenu Menachem, was nonetheless always careful to have salt on his table. Why? Because when everyone has washed their hands and is sitting at the table waiting for a piece of challah, everyone is silent. This time of silence is not good, because it is not filled by Torah or mitzvot. As long as we are learning Torah or doing mitzvot, we are protected from the *mekatreg*, the dark force that speaks against us to G-d, but when we are silent we are vulnerable. To offset this we put salt, which has a covenant and used to be part of the sacrificial order, on the table. The salt makes the bread sacred and reminds us of the sacrifices. The Mei Hashiloach says that the word for salt, *melach*, is also the word for sailor. Water can be dangerous, and the sailor's job is to guide the ship through it. Salt represents the powers in our desires and angers that are dangerous. Just as the sailor must navigate difficult elements, we must navigate our own desires to create the right balance. By putting the salt on the table, we sanctify the things that could make us dangerous or unholy and transform them into things that can preserve and protect, and even make things "tasty" if applied correctly.
3. **Feeding animals.** According to Rav Sheshet, one is even allowed to interrupt between *hamotzi* and eating the bread to say, "prepare food for the animals." This is because one who owns animals is responsible for taking care of them, and we are supposed to feed our animals even before we feed ourselves. This applies specifically to food, not to liquids, and there is a *machloket* about whether or not it applies to snacks. So if you're sitting down to your meal about to eat challah and you realize you haven't yet fed your animals, you can and should pause to do that before eating, and you do not then need to make another *hamotzi*. That doesn't mean that you should go to wash your hands with the intention of feeding your animals before you eat; it just means that if you've already washed and you suddenly realize the animals haven't been fed, feeding them is not considered an interruption.
4. **Torah is different from worldly things.** G-d's attributes are not like human attributes. When it comes to human utensils, something that is full cannot hold any more. But when it comes to Torah, someone who is full can always become more full. In fact, the more saturated a person is, the greater his hunger is to learn more. According to the Ishbitzer, people usually become driven to succeed because they feel inadequate. When we feel a lack, we strive to achieve what we are

missing. It is the student who doesn't feel good enough who works extra hard to prove himself. It is the businessman who doesn't think he has enough money who will do whatever he can to make more. You might think that someone with a lot of Torah knowledge will not feel such a lack and thus will not have a drive to learn more. But that is not how Torah works. Feeling "full" of Torah only strengthens a person's desire to learn even more and become even closer to G-d.

5. **What fruit did Adam and Eve eat?** If you accidentally make a *ha'adama* instead of a *ha'eitz*, it counts. But if you make a *ha'eitz* instead of a *ha'adama*, that does not count. This is the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda. We might have thought he would not hold this opinion, because he says in a beraita that the Tree of Knowledge was a wheat stalk. If the Tree was actually a wheat stalk, perhaps that means that one could make a *ha'eitz* on a vegetable. But Rabbi Yehuda says no. Rabbi Meir says the Tree of Knowledge was a vine, because wine brings misfortune and wailing to the world. Rashi elsewhere says that the "fruit" Adam and Eve ate was actually wine, and the sin wasn't eating from the Tree but becoming drunk. Rabbi Nechemia says the Tree of Knowledge was a fig tree, in fact the same one Adam and Eve got their fig leaf clothes from. What can we learn from these three opinions? Wheat, or bread, represents money. Money is something that we need but it can create danger, as can knowledge. Knowledge can lead to death, because when we use our knowledge to decipher between good and bad we also start judging, and this can lead to us judging ourselves, which we sometimes do too harshly. From Rabbi Meir and Rashi we learn that addiction has been around since the beginning of time, and we recognize that it can lead to harmful situations. And figs represent sexual desire, suggesting that Adam and Eve's perception of love became twisted, favoring pleasure over intimacy. This is also something that still happens today. The Beis Yaacov of Ishbitz says that the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life were the same tree. The tree was not intrinsically good or bad; the only difference is whether we connect with it on a "life" level or a "knowledge" level.
6. **Defining what makes a tree.** Whether or not a plant halachically counts as a tree affects both the bracha made on the food that grows from it and the application of the mitzvah of *orla* to that food. According to Rashi, we define a tree as something with branches that grow up and spread out and last from year to year. However, according to the Rosh, as long as the roots remain, even if the branches wither in the interim, it is still considered a tree for the purposes of the *ha'eitz* bracha. This would affect the bracha we make on something like a banana. Since the banana bush restarts every year, Rashi would say that it is not counted as a tree and the bracha on bananas is *ha'adama*. The Rosh may disagree, but we follow Rashi. The *ha'eitz* bracha is used not just for obvious fruits, where we can see a hard trunk of a tree, but also for grapes and berries, as well as nuts, which are considered to grow from trees. However, pineapples get a *ha'adama*, definitely according to Rashi and probably even according to the Rosh. Papayas also get a *ha'adama*, although there is some debate about the matter. The Shulchan Aruch agrees with Rashi that the branches need to last from year to year in order to count as a tree.
7. **The primary element of the bracha.** In every bracha we mention the name of G-d and call Him the King of the world. Which is the more important element? The name of G-d implies a sort of distance. He is transcendent, separate. Kingship implies a relationship with the world. He is involved in everything; nothing happens without His direct supervision. Which of these ideas do we want to focus on when we make a bracha? In Kabbalah, the main focus is on unifying these two aspects of G-d. They are different but equally important.
8. **Shehakol - for literally everything?** For food that doesn't grow from the ground, like meat, fish, milk, and eggs, the bracha is *shehakol*. For foods that have lost their original form, the bracha is *shehakol*. And if you made a *shehakol* on something that does grow from the ground, it counts. Rav Huna says a *shehakol* will count for anything except bread and wine. Rabbi Yochanan says a *shehakol* will count for literally anything, even bread or wine.

9. **Mushrooms.** The bracha for mushrooms is *shehakol*. Technically they grow from the ground, but they are not considered to have the status of something that grows from the earth. Interestingly, one who makes a vow not to benefit from fruits of the ground is allowed to eat mushrooms, but one who makes a vow not to benefit from anything that grows from the ground is not allowed to eat mushrooms. What is the difference? Abaye explains that mushrooms have a relationship with the ground such that you can say they grow from the ground, but they do not draw their nourishment from the ground. Therefore, “anything that grows from the ground” would include mushrooms, but they are not in the category of vegetables and do not get a *ha'adama*.
10. **Do you make a bracha on locusts?** There is a debate about whether a bracha should be made on food that is a curse, like locusts. Some opinions say that because there's a curse you shouldn't make a bracha.