

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 42:

1. **Wine is unique.** If you're having wine during a meal, even if you're already made *hamotzi*, you need to make a separate bracha for your wine. Most people don't realize this because they only drink wine on Shabbos when there is already kiddush before the meal starts. But wine is not covered by a *hamotzi*, so if there was no kiddush before the meal started you will need to make a *hagefen* on the wine. What makes wine so special that it can't be covered by a *hamotzi*? Wine causes its own bracha. Rashi explains that we drink wine for many occasions, and usually we're not drinking it because we specifically want the wine. We're drinking it for the mitzvah. Wine is used for kiddush, havdala, and *bircat hamazon*, as well as weddings, sheva brachos, and bris milah ceremonies. When a bride and groom have a sip of wine under the chuppah, it's not because they care about having wine. The wine is part of the mitzvah of the marriage ritual, and as such it necessitates its own bracha. Because of this wine is extra important, too important to be covered by a *hamotzi*. Other Rishonim say that wine is unique because it is the only liquid that is an improvement over its fruit form, with the possible exception of olive oil.
2. **What exactly is *pas haba b'kisnin*?** Rav Huna ate thirteen *kisnin* breads (*pas haba b'kisnin*) and he didn't make a bracha. Most understand this to mean that he didn't say *bircat hamazon* afterwards. Rav Nachman says he should have said *bircat hamazon*, because he had eaten a lot. He must have been hungry to eat that much, and even if he didn't intend it to be a meal most people would consider that amount of food to be a meal. At the wedding of Rabbi Yehuda's son *kisnin* bread was served, and Rabbi Yehuda heard people making *hamotzi*. They told him they'd heard a ruling that *pas haba b'kisnin* is *hamotzi*. He said they were making a mistake, because that ruling only applies when the food is anchoring a meal. What kind of food are we talking about? There are three general opinions. The first is that it's some type of parched grains, perhaps with nuts mixed in, which is heart-healthy, put into a dough and eaten all together. Rashi indicates that the reason this food is not *hamotzi* is that it's a mix of so many different things that you don't actually eat the required amount of bread. The second opinion is that *kisnin* means pocket, and *pas haba b'kisnin* is dough that is similar to bread but that has a pocket that is filled with something else. Things like pies and croissants probably fit into this category. The third opinion is that it is something like a cracker. The three opinions can be subdivided further and might also include things like pizza and cake. The Shulchan Aruch rules *safek brachos lehakel* – when there is a doubt about brachot, we are lenient - and so we can consider all food that falls into any of these three categories to be *pas haba b'kisnin*. That means that any food that falls into these categories is *mezonos* unless it is anchoring a meal. What if you're at a smorgasbord and you have a cracker? That's *pas haba b'kisnin*, and with the amount of food, in addition to the crackers, that people usually eat at a smorgasbord it's probably considered a meal. So do you need to wash? Maybe we can say that since you don't really sit down at a smorgasbord, it doesn't count as a meal and there is no need to wash. Or we can argue that people today don't consider crackers to be an important part of the meal, so if you are not filling up on the *mezonos* then the custom is not to make a *hamotzi*.
3. **Individual vs. group intention.** When you make a meal with bread, the *hamotzi* on the bread covers all the food at the meal, with exceptions as we've discussed. If you make your *hamotzi* early in the day and have in mind that you'll be eating all day, the *hamotzi* can cover everything you eat either until you decide you're finished or until you stop eating for a certain length of time. But if you don't have in mind to eat more later, then once the meal is over you cannot keep eating under the same *hamotzi*. At what point is the meal considered to be over? Is it when you decide you've had enough, even before you say *bircat hamazon*? In the time of the gemara, bread was typically eaten continuously throughout the meal until at some point it was

removed from the table. According to Rav Papa, once the bread is removed from the table the meal is over and any further food requires a new bracha. If you want to eat more bread you even need to wash again. But Rava and Rav Zeira were once visiting the *Reish Galusa* (Exilarch), and the people who served their meal at some point took the table away, as if to indicate that the meal was over, and then served more food. Rava ate from this food without making a new bracha, and Rav Zeira did not. Rav Zeira thought that the meal had officially ended when the table was taken away, so he did not understand how Rava could be eating more without a new bracha. Rava explained, “We are dependent on the table of the *Reish Galusa*.” In other words, when you’re part of a group your individual intention becomes irrelevant. It doesn’t matter when you think the meal is over, because that’s not your decision. It’s up to the group you’re with and its host. If the host intends to continue serving food, as the *Reish Galusa* obviously did, then the meal is not over and the *hamotzi* still counts.

4. **Applying this rule on Pesach.** What if you’re having your Seder on Pesach, and just when you’re starting to bentsch you realize you’ve forgotten to eat the *afikoman*? Do you have to go ahead with *bircat hamazon* because you already ended the meal? Perhaps because the *afikoman* is a mitzvah of the night, we can say that your intention doesn’t matter here. It’s as if G-d is your host, and the meal is not over until He decides that it’s over, which would be after the *afikoman* is eaten.
5. **When is the meal over?** When you wash *mayim acharonim*, that is officially the end of the meal. Some people today no longer follow the practice of *mayim acharonim*, since the original reason it was instituted – the danger of the salt of S’dom (Dead Sea salt) – no longer applies. For these people, the meal ends when the host formally declares, “Gentlemen, let us bentsch.” There are three things that come right next to each other: *Mayim acharonim* and *bircat hamazon*, *semicha* on a korban and the sacrifice, and a mention of redemption and tefillah. Some even have the custom not to talk between *mayim acharonim* and *bircat hamazon* unless absolutely necessary.
6. **Influence of Roman culture.** The mishna says that if you make a *hagefen* on a cup of wine before a meal, the bracha covers wine during and even after the meal as well. Likewise, a bracha on an appetizer served before the main course covers food that comes after the main course, though of course it does not cover the bread. The bracha on the bread covers meats and side dishes. At the time the mishna was written, Israel was controlled by the Romans and had adopted many Roman cultural practices related to dining. It was common in Roman culture for meals to be lavish affairs with multiple courses. They would start with cocktails before the meal, continue serving wine throughout, and then have some more wine when the meal was over. When the first cup of wine was served before a meal, there would be an expectation that more wine was coming later. Therefore it makes sense that the first *hagefen* would suffice for all wine during and after the meal. The same was true for appetizers: there was an expectation that more food was coming, so the early bracha could count for the food that came later.
7. **A note from the Yerushalmi.** Rava bar Bar Chana says that on Shabbos and Yom Tov a single *hagefen* can cover all wine during the meal, but during the week a new bracha is needed for every drink. This is because on Shabbos and Yom Tov, you’re making a seudah on your wine, while during the week it is not normal to have a lot of wine. If you’re having more wine than is normal, you need extra brachot. The Talmud Yerushalmi points out that this opinion in the Bavli does not follow the mishna, which clearly states that the first *hagefen* covers all wine during the meal. Why would the Bavli not follow the mishna? Because Bavel was not controlled by Rome. The rabbis of the mishna were accustomed to having a lot of wine even during the week, but the rabbis of the Bavli were not. The fundamental law hasn’t changed: if you were not expecting to have another cup of wine, you need to make a new bracha. The difference between the mishna and the Bavli is in the application of the law, which is dependent on common practice. Even

today, the laws of brachot are influenced by common practice. For example, it used to be the law that one person could not make a *hamotzi* on behalf of others unless they were reclining at a meal together. But Tosfot says that nobody reclines anymore. That used to be the way people ate meals, but we no longer do it. How do we make a meal today? By sitting down at a table together. So if a group of people is sitting around a table, one person can make *hamotzi* on behalf of the group. If others are sitting elsewhere, the *hamotzi* does not count for them because being part of a group meal requires sitting at the table with the group.

8. **Wine today.** The Shulchan Aruch rules like the Bavli, that during the week each cup of wine requires a new bracha. For the most part, today we do not live like the Romans, always expecting another cup of wine. But there are some occasions when we can have an expectation that more wine will be coming. You may go to a wedding, or an Annual Dinner, or some other catered event, and there's always a waiter hovering ready to refill your wineglass when it gets even close to empty. If you have in mind when you make the first *hagefen* that you'll be having more wine, you certainly don't need another bracha on your next glass. But what if you don't have that specific intention when you start drinking? According to the Shulchan Aruch, it would seem you need a new bracha every time the waiter refills your glass. But perhaps we should consider occasions such as these to be similar to life in the time of the mishna, when they didn't have to make a new bracha every time because even without having a specific intention, it was always assumed that there would be more wine. The truth is that this issue is complicated, but in general if you're at a simcha with an open bar and you usually drink more than one glass, then your first *hagefen* can cover multiple glasses over the course of the event.
9. **Making brachot for others.** In general, brachot on food are individual mitzvot, and one person cannot fulfill the mitzvah for another. Since you're getting a real benefit from the food, hearing somebody else make the bracha isn't good enough to fulfill your own obligation. Making *hamotzi* on behalf of a group at a meal is actually an exception to the general rule. It is allowed in this specific situation, because establishing a group meal changes the nature of the eating and morphs the group of individuals into a singular group in which one person can fulfill the mitzvah for the others. Prayer is similar. Every individual has an obligation to pray, and you can't just have someone else do it for you. But a chazzan can pray on behalf of a community, because establishing a communal prayer creates a new reality in which people are part of a group.
10. **The loss of a *gadol hador*.** After Rav died, his students were traveling back from the burial and they stopped at a town to eat. They planned the meal in advance but didn't manage to establish a full meal with reclining, so they weren't sure if they could have one person do *bircat hamazon* on behalf of the group. One of the rabbis tore his clothes a second time and said, "Our master has left us and we don't even know the laws of how to bentsch after a meal!" They didn't know what to do until an old man came and showed them a contradiction in the mishna, which he reconciled by saying that deciding to stop at a place and eat counts as if you reclined, so they could do a communal *bircat hamazon*. This is the power of a *gadol hador*. We rely on them not just for big important questions, but for the small everyday things that come up all the time. Things like what bracha to make and how to bentsch. In 2020 we lost the great *gadol* Reb Dovid Feinstein, zt"l. His importance to our generation was beyond words, and his loss is deeply felt.