

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 44:

1. **Jalapeno herring.** If you're eating fish that is extremely salty or spicy, like jalapeno herring, and you eat some bread or toast with it to offset the saltiness or spiciness, do you need to make a *hamotzi* on the bread? The mishna says no, you make a bracha only on the fish, because the bread is secondary. In fact, this is a rule: when you have a primary food (*ikar*) and a secondary food (*tafel*), only the food that is *ikar* requires a bracha. The Yerushalmi points out that this ruling about fish is actually not the custom. It was the custom in the time of the mishna, when salty fish was often eaten as an appetizer before a meal was served, but these days (ie. in the time of the Yerushalmi) fish is generally part of the meal, so nobody eats fish with bread and makes a bracha only on the fish. The Shulchan Aruch rules that we follow the mishna, but only when the bread is actually necessary because without it the fish would hurt or be unhealthy. Therefore the rule may not apply to jalapeno herring, because while jalapeno herring does go down easier with toast, some can eat it without toast. It may also depend on the custom of the place – do people regularly make salty fish into an important part of a meal?
2. **The fruits of Ganeisar.** The Bavli says that the mishna can't mean what it sounds like, because bread could never be *tafel* to salty fish. Perhaps it was not the norm in Bavel to have something very salty as the main part of a meal. Rather, the mishna must be discussing people who are eating the fruits of Ganeisar. These fruits are so delicious that one can never be satisfied; he will always want more. People would go mad from eating these amazing fruits. They're so good that they're more valuable than bread and would be the center of a meal. You can't just eat these fruits by themselves - you need some salty fish to mitigate the incredible sweetness. And once you're having that salty fish, you'll need some bread or toast to go with it. In this situation, says the mishna, you don't need a bracha on the bread because it is *tafel* to the fish, which is itself *tafel* to the fruit. But, asks Tosfot, if the fish is also *tafel*, why do you need a bracha on the fish? Tosfot answers that you might not have planned to eat fish. You only meant to eat the fruits of Ganeisar, but now you're done with the fruits and realize you need fish. So you go and get yourself some fish, and some bread to go with it, and since that wasn't part of the plan now you need to make a new bracha. But you don't need a *hamotzi* because the bread is still part of the whole fruit-eating experience and therefore is *tafel*, so you only need to make a bracha on the fish. The Ritva explains that this is the meaning of the verse, "and to Naftali sated with favor and full of G-d's blessing" (Deuteronomy 33:23), to which Targum adds "the blessing of Ganeisar." Similarly, Targum Onkelos on Genesis 49:21 says, "Naftali will be in a good land...and will produce fruit that we will be grateful and make blessings on," explaining that this fruit is so special that it requires a blessing even more than bread.
3. **Bircat hamazon after fruit.** Rabban Gamliel says if you eat grapes, figs, or pomegranates, you must say the full *bircat hamazon*. The sages say only the short version is needed. Rabbi Akiva says even if you eat cooked vegetables, and certainly if you eat any of the seven species that Israel is known for, you must say *bircat hamazon*. The gemara explains: The verse in the Torah that describes the seven species that Israel is known for is closely followed by a verse that says "you shall eat bread in the Land," which is followed by the verse, "*ve'achalta vesavata uveirachta*," from which we derive the requirement for *bircat hamazon*. According to Rabban Gamliel, all of these verses go together. The Land is known for seven species, and if you eat any of them or if you eat bread, you must say *bircat hamazon*. But the sages say that the word *eretz*, which appears multiple times in these verses, comes as an interruption between the different ideas. Therefore, the verse about eating bread in the Land is connected to the verse about *bircat hamazon* but the verse about the seven species is not, and so *bircat hamazon* is required for bread and not for fruit.

4. **Al ha'eitz.** Rather than the full *bircat hamazon*, after eating fruits we say *bracha me'ain shalosh* - the abridged version of *bircat hamazon*. The specific after-blessing for fruits is known as *al ha'eitz*. "*Baruch atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech haolam al ha'eitz ve'al pri ha'eitz ve'al t'nuvat hasadeh ve'al eretz chemda tova urechava shehinchalta la'avoteinu le'echol mipirya velisboa mituva. Rachem Hashem Elokeinu al Yisrael amecha ve'al Yerushalayim irecha ve'al mikdashcha ve'al mizbechecha vesivna Yerushlayaim ir kadshecha bimheira b'yamainu vaha'aleynu lesocha vesamcheinu ba ki Atah tov umeitiv lakol baruch Atah Hashem al ha'eitz ve'al hapeiros/peiroseha*" - Blessed are You Hashem, our G-d, King of the world, on the tree and the fruit of the tree and on the produce of the field and for the desirable land which is good and spacious that You gave as an inheritance to our forebears, to eat from its fruits and be satisfied with its produce. G-d have mercy on Your people Israel and Jerusalem Your city and Your temple and Your altar, and may You rebuild Jerusalem the holy city quickly in our days and bring us up to it and let us rejoice with it, for You are good and You do good to all. Blessed are You, Hashem, on the land and for the fruits/its fruits.
- Bircat hamazon* was instituted with three blessings: one thanking G-d, one acknowledging the Land, and one looking ahead to our return to Jerusalem. *Al ha'eitz* contains shorter versions of each of these three blessings. We thank G-d for sustaining us with nourishment and with the desirable Land, and we ask Him to return us to Jerusalem. A fourth blessing, *hatov vehemetiv*, was later added to *bircat hamazon* and is reflected in the last line of this bracha (*ki Atah tov umeitiv lakol*), though not everyone has this line in their text. The ending of *al ha'eitz* is different inside and outside of Israel. If you're in Israel, or if you're certain that the fruit you ate came from Israel, you say *peiroseha*. Otherwise, you say *hapeiros*. The Bach says that the reason we go so crazy over the fruits of the Land is that when we taste these fruits we get nourishment from the sanctity of the Shechinah that rests in the Land, and we are satiated from its goodness.
5. **Al hamichya.** The after-blessing for baked grains other than bread is identical to *al ha'eitz* except for the beginning and the end. Instead of "*al ha'eitz ve'al pri ha'eitz*" at the beginning, we say "*al hamichya ve'al hakalkala*" - on the nourishment and the sustenance. Instead of "*al ha'eitz ve'al hapeiros/peiroseha*" at the end we say "*al ha'aretz ve'al hamichya*" - on the Land and on the nourishment. This after-blessing is known as *al hamichya*. If you're not sure whether or not you said *bircat hamazon*, you need to say it again, because *bircat hamazon* is Biblical. But since other brachot are rabbinic, we are lenient and do not repeat them when we are unsure. *Al ha'eitz* and *al hamichya* are abridged versions of *bircat hamazon*, so what is their status? There is a debate about whether or not *al hamichya* is Biblical, but nonetheless we rule that you do not need to repeat it if there is a doubt.
6. **Bracha me'ain shalosh on Shabbos and holidays.** The Yerushalmi says that when we say *al hamichya* on Shabbos, Yom Tov, or Rosh Chodesh, we should mention the day by adding a few words before the conclusion. This would not apply on Chanukah or Purim. The Bavli does not mention this custom, and Tosfot says that we do not follow it. Maybe in the past, when it was common for people to establish a meal over fruits or mezonos foods, it was the custom to mention the day in *al hamichya*, but that is not the custom now. However, we do not follow Tosfot. This debate hinges on the exact nature of the *bracha me'ain shalosh*. Is it literally an abridged version of *bircat hamazon*? Or is it a rabbinic institution that happens to resemble the Biblical *bircat hamazon*? It's a *machloket*, and though most rule that it is rabbinic there are questions that remain. Does *bracha me'ain shalosh* have the same rules as *bircat hamazon*? For example, do you have to say it in the same place where you ate? If it must follow all the same rules as *bircat hamazon*, then of course we must include additions for Shabbos, Yom Tom, and Rosh Chodesh. But if not, if this bracha is something new and different instituted by the rabbis

(as the Bavli and Tosfot seem to indicate), then we do not need to include these additions. (See Reshimas Shiurim from Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.)

7. **A bracha after a mitzvah.** The Mishna in Nidah says that anything that requires a bracha at the end also needs one at the beginning, but there are things that need a bracha at the beginning but not the end. What would need a bracha at the beginning but not the end? The gemara suggests water, but ultimately we rule that even water requires an after-blessing. Perhaps the Mishna is referring to mitzvot. We make brachot over the beginning of mitzvot but not the end. However, some people make a bracha when taking off tefillin: "*asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu lishmor chukav*" - Who has sanctified us and commanded us to observe His decrees. Today this bracha is not common. Rabbi Soloveitchik, quoting Tosfot, explains why we do not have this custom today: in the past people would wear tefillin all day and only take them off at nightfall, and according to Rabbeinu Tam putting on tefillin at night violates a commandment. Because by taking off the tefillin they were stopping themselves from doing something forbidden, they would make a bracha when doing so. But if you don't hold that wearing tefillin at night is forbidden, and especially if you don't wear them all day, there is no need for a bracha when taking them off. But why would we only make a bracha on completing a mitzvah in a situation where we're preventing ourselves from doing something forbidden? Rabbi Soloveitchik says that just like we're commanded to put on tefillin, we're commanded to take them off, and thus by taking them off we are completing the act of the mitzvah. Some rishonim made brachot when finishing other mitzvot as well, such as shaking the lulav, which is not something that specifically needs to end.
8. **Smell is different.** Usually when we benefit from something in this world, we need to make an after-blessing. But for smell there is no after-blessing. Why? Smell brings pleasure but does not satisfy the way that food does. When you finish eating food, you are no longer hungry and have no need for more food. The same is not true for smell. Smell is the only sense that was not blemished by the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Smell is also not selfish the way that eating is. When one person eats nobody else gets benefit from the food. That is why one person cannot make a bracha on behalf of someone else who is eating unless they are sharing food. But the benefit of smell can be shared. Because smell is not selfish, it does not need to be guarded the same way that eating does.
9. **Eggs are the best food.** Rabbi Yanai says in the name of Rebbe, an egg is better than anything else the size of an egg. Ounce per ounce, eggs provide among the highest biological value for protein and are exceptional in helping you feel full. Although not all eggs are created equal, and they have been demonized because of cholesterol, they can be safely enjoyed as part of a healthy diet.
10. **Caring about health.** The Talmud contains many discussions of health and remedies, and most of these discussions are not applicable today. In fact, some say that we specifically should not try the remedies recommended by the Talmud, because if they don't work we might come to lose faith. But the remedies themselves are not the point. The point is that the Talmud considers health to be supremely important. We should recognize that and try to live our lives in a healthy way.