

THE PROPER BLESSING OVER FRUIT DURING A MEAL

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

A fig, or grape, or a pomegranate (19:5)

While the laws governing the blessings over fruit are complex, they become even more so when fruits are eaten right before a meal, or during a meal as an appetizer or a dessert. There are many details and different views to consider on the subject, but we will attempt to review these halachos in as concise and organized a manner as possible.

There is one basic rule to bear in mind: The blessing of ha-Motzi, recited over bread at the beginning of the meal, includes anything in the meal which is normally eaten with bread - even though it is not actually being eaten with bread at this particular moment. Meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, cheese, and other foods eaten to satisfy one's hunger are all foods normally eaten with bread, and are therefore included in the ha-Motzi blessing. Fruit, on the other hand, is not normally eaten with bread. It is eaten as a separate food within the meal and therefore requires its own blessing. This basic principle is agreed upon by practically all the early authorities and is recorded in the Shulchan Aruch.

What remains unclear and in dispute is the exact classification of certain fruits - cooked or raw - which are eaten either as an appetizer or as a dessert. These can be classified either as aiding in the digestion of the meal, which would exempt them from a blessing, or as an independent part of the meal, which would require that a blessing be recited over them. In many cases the poskim differ and no clear consensus emerges. We must, however, establish some basic guidelines:

Note: Although the ha-Motzi exempts all other foods which are normally eaten with bread, this holds true only if at least a k'zayis of bread (approximately 1 fl. oz.) is eaten within 3-4 minutes at one point during the meal. If a k'zayis is not eaten within that time span, each food eaten during the meal requires its own blessing. One must, therefore, decide at the beginning of the meal if he is going to eat a k'zayis of bread or not⁽¹⁾.

FRUIT EATEN BEFORE THE MEAL:

One who eats fruit before a meal and plans to eat fruit during the meal as well [a common

occurrence on Rosh Hashanah night], should recite the proper blessing over the fruit before the meal begins, while intending to exempt the fruits which will be eaten later. No berachah acharonah is made over the fruits eaten before starting the meal - the Birkas ha-Mazon recited at the end of the meal includes them.

If, however, one has no intention of eating fruit during the meal, then a berachah acharonah must be recited over the fruit eaten before the meal began. The Birkas ha-Mazon after the meal does not include that fruit(2), and a berachah acharonah will have to be recited over them even after Birkas ha-Mazon was said.

FRUITS EATEN DURING THE MEAL BUT BEFORE THE MAIN COURSE IS SERVED:

Grapefruit - usually eaten to whet the appetite(3). The Rishonim differ as to whether or not such an appetizer is an intrinsic part of the meal, since it is served as an "introduction" to the meal. The commonly accepted practice is not to recite a blessing over fruits served as appetizers(4). The same applies to olives and pickles served before the actual meal. Cantaloupe - and other such fruits, e.g., fruit salad, honeydew. Contemporary poskim debate the halachah concerning these fruits. Some consider them appetizers just like grapefruit, which - according to our custom - exempts them from a blessing(5). Other poskim, however, consider these fruits as a first course of a meal. In their opinion, these fruits do not merely whet the appetite; they are full-fledged first courses. Since, as explained, fruits are not normally eaten with bread, the ha-Motzi blessing does not exempt them and a separate blessing is required(6). Thus the proper blessing remains questionable and problematic. It is recommended that one follow either of the following two methods: 1) Before washing, recite the proper blessing over a small piece [less than a k'zayis(7)] of fruit, then wash for the bread, and continue eating the fruit(8); 2) Eat the fruit while eating bread along with each bite of fruit(9).

DURING THE MEAL:

Fruit soup - no blessing is recited(10). Cooked fruits as a side dish - no blessing is recited(11). Applesauce with a latke - no blessing is recited(12). Fruit eaten as the main course of the meal - most poskim hold that no blessing is required. Since there is a minority opinion that requires a blessing, it is best to eat a sizable amount of bread with the fruit before partaking of the fruit alone(13). Fruit-filled blintzes, etc.- no blessing is recited(14). Fruit eaten as a snack between courses - requires a blessing.

DESSERT:

Raw fruit (apples, grapes, etc.) - the correct blessing is recited(15). Cooked fruit - there are conflicting views. Most poskim hold that a blessing should be recited(16), while a minority opinion holds that no blessing is recited(17). One who wants to avoid a questionable situation should eat cooked fruit only with bread(18) or recite a blessing over a raw fruit before eating the cooked fruit(19). Popcorn - the correct blessing (ha-adamah) is recited. Peanuts - the correct blessing (ha-adamah) is recited. Chocolate - the correct blessing (shehakol) is recited.

GENERAL RULE: No fruits eaten during a meal, whether a blessing was recited over them or not, require a berachah acharonah. The Birkas ha-Mazon will exempt them all(20).

FOOTNOTES

1. Igros Moshe O.C. 4:41.
2. With the exception of dates, which are covered by the Birkas ha-Mazon.
3. When the grapefruit is eaten for the sake of the grapefruit itself and is considered one of the courses at the meal (e.g., when a grapefruit is eaten on a diet), the blessing should be recited.
4. Mishnah Berurah 174:39; Aruch ha-Shulchan 174:12. One who would like to satisfy the other view should recite the blessing and eat part of the grapefruit before washing his hands.
5. Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Vesain Berachah, pg. 93).
6. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesain Berachah, pg. 93); Ohr l'Tziyon 46:15.
7. Mishnah Berurah 174:37. See also 473:53.
8. Based on Mishnah Berurah 174:39 and 176:2 (Alef).
9. Based on Mishnah Berurah 177:8 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 13.
10. Beur Halachah 177:1; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 76).
11. Beur Halachah 177:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 177:10. There is a minority view which requires a blessing, so it is better to eat the cooked fruit with bread or recite a blessing on raw fruit.
12. Ibid.
13. O.C. 177:3 and Beur Halachah.
14. Mishnah Berurah 177:10.
15. O.C. 177:1.
16. Mishnah Berurah 177:4; Chazon Ish (Dinim v'Hanhagos 6:7); Orchos Rabbeinu 66; Yalkut Yosef, pg. 196; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78 and Vesain Berachah, pg. 87).
17. Several sources report that the Chafetz Chayim eventually changed his ruling and exempted cooked fruits served for dessert from a blessing; see Orchos Rabbeinu 66 and Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78. Others dispute that the Chafetz Chayim changed his ruling.
18. Custom of the Brisker Rav (quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:177).

19. Harav A. Kotler (reported by several disciples); Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78).
20. Mishnah Berurah 177:7. cc
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