

Iyun Halacha is sponsored by the Dr. Philip & Mrs. Leah Mehler Family Foundation

In memory of their parents Dr. Irving & Mrs. Bernice Mehler & Mr. Gedalja & Mrs. Miriam Zupnik

לעילוי נשמת ר' יצחק מאיר בן אליהו ובריינא בת אברהם ע"ה ור' גדליה בן אברהם מנחם הכהן ומרים בת ישראל ע"ה

## Precedence When Reciting Blessings

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

*When a person has different foods that require different blessings, which blessing should be recited first?*

*When one has different foods with the same blessing, upon which food should the blessing be recited?*

The holiday of Tu B'Shvat is replete with customs associated with fruits. Of particular importance are the *Shivas Haminim*, the Seven Species of *Eretz Yisrael*: Wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates (expressed in the Torah as honey). Items made from wheat and barley flour require a *mezonos* blessing<sup>1</sup>, while the rest of the items are fruits whose blessing is *ha'etz*. When eating the different items on Tu B'Shvat, a person will likely be confronted with some questions regarding which blessing to recite first and upon which food the blessing should be recited. This article will focus on some of these halachos.

There are two main questions that must be addressed: One is determining the order of precedence as to which *bracha* should be recited first when one is planning to eat different foods that require different blessings. The second question is determining upon which food one should recite the blessing when there are different foods that require the same blessing. A number of different factors are discussed in the Gemara and further analyzed and debated by the Rishonim and Acharonim.

The Rema, in his glosses on the Tur and Bais Yosef titled *Darcho Moshe* (Orach Chaim 177:1), cites the Kol Bo who says that one of the students of the French rabbis said, upon making a *bracha* on the food he wished to eat first, "This food is preferred by me, and I wish to recite the *bracha* on it first, to praise my Maker Whom I love." The overarching principle is maximizing the praise and honor one gives to Hashem through the *bracha*. This is achieved by determining the level of *chashivus*, importance, of each possible *bracha*, and choosing the one that is most *chashuv* to take precedence.

**The factors:** The Mishna (Brachos 40b) discusses a case of one who has many different types of fruit in front of him. Rabi Yehuda says that if one of these fruits is of the Seven Species, he makes the *bracha* on that fruit first. The Chachamim say that the *bracha* should be recited on the fruit that is *chaviv* (preferred).

There is a *machlokes* (dispute) in the Gemara (ibid. 41a) as to whether this disagreement between Rabi Yehuda and the Chachamim is limited to items that require the same *bracha* or even if they require different *brachos*. There are different opinions in the Rishonim (see Tur with Bais Yosef Orach Chaim 211:1) regarding how to understand the former approach. Some Rishonim say that when the items have different *brachos*, there is no precedence of a *Shivas Haminim* item or a *chaviv* item; one may choose what he pleases. However, other Rishonim understand that Rabi Yehuda agrees to the Chachamim that when there are different *brachos* to be made, one should make a *bracha* on the *chaviv* item first.

<sup>1</sup> However, toasted grain requires a *ha'adama*. The proper blessing for puffed grain (e.g., puffed wheat) and items made from toasted grain combined with other ingredients (e.g., granola bars) is questionable and beyond the scope of this article.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 211:1) rules in accordance with Rabi Yehuda that *Shivas Haminim* takes precedence over *chaviv* when there are multiple items with the same *bracha*<sup>2</sup>. For a situation of multiple *brachos*, the Shulchan Aruch cites both the opinion that there is no precedence as well as the opinion that *chaviv* takes precedence. However, the *poskim* say that one should follow the opinion that a *chaviv* item takes precedence for two different blessings (Mishna Berura 211:9; see also Bi'ur Halacha ibid. s.v. *viyesh omrim*).

There is a *machlokes* among the Rishonim whether *chaviv* is based upon the person's general preference or his preference at that moment. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) rules that the general preference takes precedence, though he cites (ibid.:2) the opinion of the Rambam that *chaviv* is based on that moment. The Mishna Berura (ibid.:11), citing the Taz, notes that one who makes the *bracha* upon what he prefers at that moment has upon whom to rely, indicating that one may make the *bracha* upon what is *chaviv* at that moment. The Bi'ur Halacha (ibid.:1 s.v. *viyesh*) gives considerable weight to the dissenting view that *chaviv* of the moment is of greater importance. Therefore, if both food items are of equal general preference, the one that is preferred at that moment takes precedence.

The Rishonim note that there is another important factor in determining precedence when the items do not have the same *bracha*. The Gemara (ibid. 39a) teaches that one should recite a *ha'adama* blessing prior to reciting a *shehakol*, even though the *shehakol* item is *chaviv*. Rashi (ibid. s.v. *umilagleg*), Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *chaviv*) and other Rishonim explain that *ha'adama* is a more specific *bracha*, as it is focused on food that grows from the ground, while *shehakol* is a more generic *bracha*; the more specific the *bracha*, the more *chashuv* it is. This halacha establishes the idea that the specificity of a *bracha* is a factor in determining precedence of one *bracha* before another. The Rishonim (see Tosafos Brachos 41a s.v. *aval* and Rosh Brachos 6:25) understand that the *chashivus* of a more specific *bracha* takes precedence not just over *chaviv* but also over *Shivas Haminim*.

A third factor discussed in the Gemara (ibid. 39b) is where one has pieces of bread and a complete loaf. There is a *machlokes* which one takes precedence for the *bracha*. The halacha (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 168:1) follows the opinion of Rabi Yochanan that one makes the *bracha* upon the complete loaf of bread, even if it is of inferior quality relative to the other bread. This idea is applied to other foods, as well.

A fourth factor focuses on precedence within the *Shivas Haminim* themselves. The Gemara (ibid. 41a) teaches that there is an order of precedence based upon the verse that lists the *Shivas Haminim*. The Torah (Devarim 8:8) states, "A land of wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, and

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:2) does cite an opposing opinion of the Rambam, who rules in accordance with the Chachamim.

pomegranates; a land of oil-producing olives and honey.” The Gemara says that the fruit that is closer to the word “land” that precedes it takes precedence; if there are two fruits equidistant from the word (which appears twice in the verse), then the one in the first part of the verse precedes the one in the second half. In addition to this, spelt is regarded as a secondary type of wheat, and rye and oats are regarded as a secondary type of barley (see Mishna Berura *ibid.*:24). Thus, the order of precedence is as follows: Wheat<sup>3</sup>, barley, spelt, rye, oats, olives, dates, grapes (including raisins), figs, pomegranates. Although it would seem that spelt, as a type of wheat, should precede barley, it does not since it is not explicitly mentioned in the verse (Mishna Berura 168:12). There is also a question as to whether rye precedes oats or oats precede rye. The Mishna Berura (168:13) places rye before oats, but the Chayei Adam (57:8) puts oats before rye.

**Practical halacha for foods with different brachos:** There are numerous opinions regarding the proper order of precedence. Contemporary *poskim* (see Halachos of Brachos [Rabbi Pinchas Bodner] 11:A:1; Laws of Brachos [Rabbi Binyamin Forst] 5:I:A) give the order of precedence as follows: *hamotzi* (Rema Orach Chaim 211:5)<sup>4</sup>, *mezonos* (Mishna Berura 211:25)<sup>5</sup>, *hagafen* (Rema *ibid.*:4), *ha'eitz/ha'adama* (Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*:3), *shehakol*.

There are two opinions cited in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 211:3) as to whether *ha'eitz* precedes *ha'adama* (since it is somewhat more specific) or if they are of equal stature. The Mishna Berura (211:18) cites Acharonim who rule that it is proper to recite *ha'eitz* first if both foods are of equal preference to the person. However, there are a number of other factors that must be considered:

1) If the *ha'adama* food is generally *chaviv*, *ha'adama* should be recited first (Mishna Berura *ibid.*:9,18). However, if the *ha'eitz* item is *chaviv* at the moment and the *ha'adama* is generally *chaviv*, the combination of *ha'eitz* and *chaviv* at the moment combine to give the *ha'eitz* precedence (Chayei Adam 57:5; see Bi'ur Halacha 211:1 s.v. *viyesh*). 2) If there is no general preference, but the *ha'adama* food is of the *Shivas Haminim*, such as roasted grain (which requires a *ha'adama* blessing), the *Shivas Haminim* item goes before the *ha'eitz* item (*ibid.*<sup>6</sup>). 3) Even if the *ha'eitz* food is generally *chaviv*, if the *ha'adama* food is of the *Shivas Haminim* and is *chaviv* at the moment, the Bi'ur Halacha (*ibid.*:1 s.v. *viyesh*) rules that the *ha'adama* food takes precedence. 4) The factor of *shaleim* in this

<sup>3</sup> In the context of determining upon which food the blessing should be made, wheat and barley are in one category of *mezonos* while the other five items are in the category of *ha'eitz*. However, there is discussion as to whether one should make a *bracha* on olives before barley, since olives are first after the word “land” in the latter half of the verse, while barley is second in the first half of the verse. The Mishna Berura (*ibid.*:25) cites different opinions on the matter, and seems to rule in accordance with the opinion that because barley requires a *mezonos* blessing, it takes precedence.

<sup>4</sup> It is usually not relevant to determine precedence when *hamotzi* is being recited, as *hamotzi* exempts the other foods that are part of the meal from a blessing. However, certain foods, though eaten during the course of a meal, may require their own *bracha*. See Mishna Berura *ibid.*:28.

<sup>5</sup> There is a question if rice, which requires a *mezonos* but is not one of the Five Grains (wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats), is always included in this; some say that one of the Seven Species would precede rice. See Halachos of Brachos by Rabbi Pincha Bodner 11:B:f with fn. 31.

<sup>6</sup> See Mishna Berura *ibid.*:27 where he cites the opinion of the Gra that *Shivas Haminim* is not a factor when dealing with foods that require different *brachos*.

context is a source of uncertainty. The Sha'ar Hatziyun (*ibid.*:5) cites the Derech Hachaim who rules that a complete item takes precedence even to *chaviv*, and certainly to *Shivas Haminim*. However, the Sha'ar Hatziyun objects to the proof cited by the Derech Hachaim and remains uncertain whether *shaleim* would give precedence to a *ha'adama* item only in the absence of *chaviv* and *Shivas Haminim* or if it would give precedence even when the *ha'eitz* item is *chaviv* and/or *Shivas Haminim*.

**Practical halacha for foods with the same bracha:** As discussed above, the Shulchan Aruch rules in accordance with Rabi Yehuda that *Shivas Haminim* take precedence to *chaviv*. *Shivas Haminim* is thus the overriding factor in determining precedence. If there are multiple items of the *Shivas Haminim* with the same *bracha*, the order of precedence discussed above, based upon the position of the different foods within the verse relative to the word “land,” determines which food should have the blessing made upon it.

If there are no items of the *Shivas Haminim* present, the next factor that determines precedence is *shaleim*, a complete item (Mishna Berura *ibid.*:4). If all the items are whole or all are broken, the one that is generally *chaviv* takes precedence. If there is no general preference, the preferred item at that moment takes precedence.

When making a *bracha* upon bread, there are several more factors before utilizing *chaviv* to determine precedence. If one has a complete barley bread and a piece of wheat bread, although the wheat bread takes precedence (as it is earlier in the verse), the Shulchan Aruch (168:1) rules that one should place the barley bread under the wheat bread and make the blessing upon both. The Mishna Berura notes that since this a stringency, it is only necessary for barley, not oats or rye (which are included in the barley category, as noted above)<sup>7</sup>.

If one has two breads and they are both whole or both broken, the higher-quality one takes precedence (Mishna Berura 168:6). If they are both of equal quality, the larger one takes precedence (Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*:2).

If none of these factors are relevant, then *chaviv* determines which bread should have the blessing made upon it.

Within *mezonos*, there is another factor as well; items that are baked take precedence to items that are cooked, since they have the status of *pas haba'ah bikisnin* and could require a *hamotzi* blessing if one eats them as a meal (Ketzos Hashulchan: Badei Hashulchan 54:6).

When one has a food and a drink with the same *bracha* (generally *shehakol*), the Aruch Hashulchan rules that the food takes precedence to the drink. However, the Pri Megadim (Mishbitzos Zahav 211:6) says that there is no difference.

This article has attempted to lay out the guidelines for precedence in making *brachos*. Indeed, these laws can be complex and require one to give thought before beginning to eat. However, the Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a) teaches that one who wishes to be a *chasid* (one who does more than he needs to out of love for Hashem) should be very careful with the laws of *brachos*. Learning and paying attention to these sometimes complex laws is the first step toward reaching this lofty level.

<sup>7</sup> It is unclear as to whether a whole spelt bread, which is included in the wheat category, would require the same treatment as barley.

## ***Points to Ponder:***

***If a person recited the blessing upon the less important item, does the blessing cover other more important items?***

***Are olive oil and date honey (silan) considered Shivas Haminim?***

*Iyun Halacha is a publication of the Denver Community Kollel  
Please consult with a qualified halachic authority for all practical questions of halacha*

Halachic Editor: Rabbi Shachne Sommers · General Editor: Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

5080 W. 14th Ave. Denver, CO 80204 • 303-820-2855 • [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) • [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org)

To receive Halacha Weekly by email, contact [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org)