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

## The Proper Blessing on Overnight Oats

Rabbi Yitzy Melamed

*Why should oatmeal that is made without cooking have a different bracha?*

*What bracha is recited on raw grain?*

This article will analyze the appropriate *brachos* (*rishona* [blessing before eating] and *acharona* [blessing after eating]) are for overnight oats. Overnight oats is a popular spin on the original Bircher Muesli, a breakfast food composed mostly of fruit and milk with a small portion of grain. The dish is left overnight to allow for the grains to soften. Overnight oats are prepared the same way, but with a higher proportion of grain, resulting in essentially a cold oatmeal in flavor and texture. After mixing, the oats are left overnight in the fridge.

**Technical background:** In order to determine the *bracha rishona* and *acharona* of these oats, the proper *bracha rishona* at two points of the process must be determined. Firstly, what *bracha* would one recite on one-minute quick oats straight out of the box (assuming they are fit for consumption), and secondly, what *bracha* would one recite when they are left overnight to soak in liquid in lieu of cooking them in hot liquid.

While there are a few different kinds of oats available for purchase, we will focus on one-minute quick oats. Regular quick oats are commercially processed by first steaming and then rolling the oats, thereby flattening the kernels into flakes. Quick one-minute oats are made the same way, but they are steamed for a longer period of time and subjected to more rolling. The result is smaller, thinner and more fragile flakes. This process results in a faster cooking time. Despite the steaming, the oats are insufficiently cooked to be ready for consumption without further cooking. However, nothing more than some scalding water is necessary to cook the oats at this point.

**Halachic background:** Chazal enacted a special *bracha rishona* for foods that are made from the Five Grains: wheat, barley, spelt, oats, and rye (Brachos 36b). However, not all grain products warrant a special *bracha*, and their *bracha* may change according to the level of *chashivus* (lit., importance), meaning the status that they hold in the eyes of the consumer (Vezos Habracha Ch. 12, pg. 104). It is important to note that there are times when the appropriate *bracha* is *hamotzi* or *shehakol*, but such situations are beyond the scope of this article. Of relevance to this discussion is the *bracha rishona* recited on grain that is eaten whole, referred to as *koseis chitim*<sup>1</sup>, as well as the *bracha* on a *ma'aseh kedaira* (lit., food cooked in a pot), meaning a grain product that is cooked with liquid as opposed to dry heat.

The Gemara (Brachos 37a) cites a *beraisa* that states that the *bracha rishona* on a *ma'aseh kedairah* made from one of the Five Grains is *borei minei mezonos* and the *bracha acharona* is *bracha achas me'ein shalosh*<sup>2</sup>, colloquially known

<sup>1</sup> Rashi in several places in the Gemara says that the term *koseis* means eating a food in an unusual way. *Chitim* means wheat, and so *koseis chitim* means eating whole kernels of grain, which is unusual.  
<sup>2</sup> *Achas me'ein shalosh* means "one similar to three." It is the name of the general *bracha acharona* recited on foods made from the Five Grains, one of the *Shivas Haminin* (Seven Species of Eretz Yisrael [see Devarim 8:8-10]), or wine (including grape juice). Each of these three categories has a unique verbiage inserted in the general text, and for Five Grains foods, a major part of that verbiage is the words "*al hamichya*", the source of the colloquial name mentioned in the main body of the article. The *bracha* is an abridged version of the first three *brachos* of *Birkas Hamazon* (recited after eating bread) and is therefore called *bracha achas me'ein shalosh* (though often referred to colloquially as "*me'ein shalosh*").

as *al hamichya*. The *beraisa* lists different examples of grain that was split into different numbers of pieces (e.g., halved, quartered) that, once cooked, would fall under this category. It is on such a food that Chazal enacted the *bracha* of *mezonos*, for in such a form, the food would be consumed to satiate oneself and is worthy of a meal, and thus considered *chashuv* in the eyes of the consumer (Vezos Habracha, Birur Halacha 27, s.v. *kevar*).

The Gemara (ibid.) further cites a *beraisa* that states that one who is *koseis chitim* recites a *borei pri ha'adama*. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:44) explains that the reason for this is that even though such a food is fit for consumption, since it is not consumed for the purpose of satiating oneself, Chazal did not consider it *chashuv* enough to warrant the high-level *bracha* of *mezonos*. Instead, its *bracha* remains *ha'adama*, as would be appropriate for any other food that grew from the ground. However, the *beraisa* continues that if the grain is broken down<sup>3</sup> during the cooking process, one would recite *borei minei mezonos* beforehand and *me'ein shalosh* afterwards. The reason for this is that at this point, the food is considered to be a *ma'aseh kedaira* and warrants a *mezonos*, as discussed above (Vezos Habracha ibid.).

At what point does the food change from being considered *koseis chitim* to being considered a *ma'aseh kedaira*? Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *koseis*) imply that cooked kernels retain their status of *koseis chitim* until the grain has been softened thoroughly to such an extent that the dish resembles a food called *daysa* (a porridge-like dish made from crushed grain). Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona (Brachos *dapei harif* 25b, s.v. *chavitz*) cite the Gemara (Brachos 36b) that states that one recites *mezonos* on *chavitz kedaira* (a porridge-like dish made from flour, honey and oil) and on *daysa* that resembles *chavitz kedaira*. The Gemara, continue Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona, clearly emphasizes that *daysa* only warrants a *mezonos* in a case where it resembles *chavitz kedaira* in which the grains have become mushy and adhere together. This would only happen if they were first crushed or split and cooked thoroughly. However, if they were cooked whole and they are still whole, separate grains, they would retain their status of *koseis chitim*. Thus, while according to Tosafos, substantial softening of the whole grains suffices, according to Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah, a more extensive process of them actually becoming mushy and adhering to each other is required for the *bracha* to switch to *mezonos*.

The Rambam's view is the topic of much debate. As discussed above, the Gemara (Brachos 37a) states that *koseis chitim* warrants a *ha'adama*. The Rambam (Brachos 3:2) thus rules that one recites a *ha'adama* on boiled kernels. Also previously discussed is that a *ma'aseh kedaira* warrants a *mezonos*, and that *ma'aseh kedaira* is defined by the aforementioned *beraisa* as a dish made of different types of split grain. For this, the Rambam rules (ibid.:4) that one makes a *mezonos* on grain which has been *nechelak* (split) or *kusash* (lit., pressed<sup>4</sup>) and cooked.

The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 208:2 s.v. *sheshalkan*) says that the Rambam's *kusash* cannot mean splitting the kernel via pressing, as this is the same as *nechelak* mentioned first by the Rambam. The Magen Avraham

<sup>3</sup> This shall be further explored below.

<sup>4</sup> The meaning of "pressed" will be explored below.

(as understood by the Pri Megadim Aishel Avraham ad loc. s.v. *sheshalkan*) therefore suggests that the Rambam understands *kusash* to mean “the outer shell was removed” (before cooking) through some kind of pressing process. The Rambam would then be ruling that even if a grain had not gone through a *nechelak* process and only had its peel removed, it would be sufficient to change its *bracha* to *mezonos*, even if the kernel appeared to remain whole despite the cooking process.

The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 208:15), however, disagrees, saying that the Rambam does not make an exception for whole grain whose peel was removed. The Aruch Hashulchan therefore explains that the Rambam’s *kusash* means that through processing, the peel of the kernel is removed together with parts of the actual kernel, so that it is no longer whole. Only then would the dish be considered a *ma’aseh kedeira*.

The Machatzis Hashekel (Orach Chaim 108:2 s.v. *aval*) interprets the aforementioned Magen Avraham differently than the Pri Megadim, explaining that the Rambam requires the kernels to soften thoroughly and stick together (in accordance with the Talmidei Rabeinu Yona) to warrant a *mezonos*. The Magen Avraham only meant, says the Machatzis Hashekel, that in a case where the peel was removed, the grain would soften and stick together sufficiently enough to be considered a *ma’aseh kedeira* with less cooking than if left unpeeled. Similarly, the Olelos Ephraim (*siman* 11, pg. 25) understands the Rambam to be saying that the *bracha* would only change to *mezonos* if cooked to the point that the grain softens thoroughly.

In summary, most Rishonim hold that in order for whole grain to warrant a change in *bracha* from *ha’adama* to *mezonos*, it must be changed to such an extent that the grain substantially softens and, according to some, becomes very soft and sticks together. The Pri Megadim understands that the Magen Avraham interprets the Rambam to mean that even grain that remains whole after cooking also requires a *mezonos* if the peel was removed. Others disagree, however, and understand that even the Rambam would require the food to soften thoroughly and stick together to warrant a *mezonos*.

**Halachic application for overnight oats:** Typically, oatmeal is cooked with liquid, either through conventional means in a pot over heat or by pouring scalding water over the oats. A *mezonos* is recited on such a food since it has the status of a *ma’aseh kedeira*. However, the oats that we are discussing will only be soaked in cold liquid overnight and will not be cooked. Would the fact that the oats will indeed soften and stick together, resembling cooked oatmeal, be sufficient to warrant a *mezonos*, or is specifically “cooking” required?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (ibid. 46) rules that the *bracha* of *mezonos* was only enacted on a *ma’aseh kedeira* that was actually cooked. This is so even though the food underwent a different kind of processing that completes it to the point of edibility<sup>5</sup>. The Sefer Vezos Habracha (Birur Halacha 27 3:3) quotes Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv who rules that as long as the food is fit for consumption and has the texture that Chazal set forth (i.e., softened thoroughly and sticks together), the *bracha* would be *mezonos*. He further cites (Birur Halacha ibid. 4:9) the ruling of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that only whole grain kernels require cooking to warrant a *mezonos*. However, kernels which have been broken down (such as quick oats) that did not undergo any cooking but, through an alternate process (such as soaking), still resemble regular oatmeal (i.e., softened and sticking together) would warrant a *mezonos* even without actual cooking<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, if it was made into a dough and baked, its *bracha* would be *hamotzi* or *mezonos*. Rabbi Feinstein is discussing other methods.

<sup>6</sup> The reasoning for this distinction is because whole kernels require a more significant process – namely, cooking – to change the blessing to *mezonos*, while broken kernels, which more readily soften and adhere to each other, do not require as significant a

change. According to the opinion that the *bracha* would not change to *mezonos*, an additional question presents itself. If the oats in question remain whole and separate after going through the original steaming and rolling process, they would retain their status of *koseis chitim* and would require a *ha’adama*. However, some types of oats, such as the quick oats under discussion, are broken down during the rolling process, which poses a different problem. The Gemara (Brachos 36a) cites a *machlokes* (disagreement) between Rav Yehuda and Rav Nachman as to what the *bracha* on flour is. Rav Yehuda says that it is *ha’adama*, whereas Rav Nachman says that it is *shehakol*. Rashi (ibid. s.v. *di’ishtani* and s.v. *hacha*) explains that the reason for Rav Nachman’s view is that by reducing the grain to flour, it has been downgraded, for it has not yet reached its intended final state (to be made into a baked or cooked item), and so it loses its status as a fruit of the ground and the attendant *ha’adama* blessing such products require<sup>7</sup>. The Shulchan Aruch rules (Orach Chaim 208:5) rules in accordance with Rav Nachman. The question now is, what *bracha* would one make on quick oats that have been broken down through the rolling process? Would they retain their *ha’adama* status, or are they similar to flour and so their *bracha* changes to *shehakol*?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:44 s.v. *ulifi ma*) and Rabbi Bentzion Abba Shaul (Ohr Letzion 1:14:11) both say that if grain hasn’t been completely broken down and still holds some of its original form (as in the case of quick oats), it retains its original *bracha*. However, Rabbi Shmuel Wosner (cited in Chut Shani 8:36) disagrees and rules that one would make a *shehakol* if its original form is no longer recognizable even if it still retains some of its original form. He therefore rules that one would recite *shehakol* on quick oats where its original form is not readily discernible. According to Rabbi Wosner, then, one would actually recite a *shehakol* on a bowl of overnight oats made with quick oats. In regards to old-fashioned rolled oats, however, one would recite *ha’adama* even according to Rabbi Wosner, since the oat is still readily discernible.

**Bracha acharona:** Chazal enacted a special *bracha acharona* of *me’ein shalosh* for certain foods they deemed *chashuv*, including *al hamichya* on food made from the Five Grains. If one follows the opinion to recite *ha’adama* on overnight oats, what is the appropriate *bracha acharona*<sup>8</sup>?

Rabbeinu Tam (cited by Tosafos Brachos 37a s.v. *hakoseis*) originally considered that one should recite *me’ein shalosh* after being *koseis chitim*. However, he subsequently retracted this idea in light of the fact that such a *bracha* could not use the text *al hamichya*, which is predicated on the *bracha rishona* of *mezonos*, but would have to instead be *al ha’adama*, and such a text was not created by Chazal. Because this food is made from the Five Grains, it requires a *me’ein shalosh*; however, there is no text that exists for the unique needs of this food which has a *bracha rishona* of *ha’adama*<sup>9</sup>. Because of this dilemma, Tosafos (ibid.) suggest that one who is *koseis chitim* should preferably do so during a meal with bread. One would thereby avoid the question of what *bracha acharona* to recite, as the full *Birkas Hamazon* recited after a meal of bread covers the food eaten during the meal, as well (Shulchan Aruch ibid.:4).

The laws of *brachos* can be quite complex, and this article illustrates why this is so. Understanding some of the issues provide a person with the tools to gain a greater appreciation of these laws and advance in his knowledge of the proper blessings for all manner of foods.

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change.

<sup>7</sup> *Shehakol* is therefore the appropriate blessing, as it covers all foods that don’t have a more specific blessing.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the aforementioned Gemara that discusses *koseis chitim* does not state what the *bracha acharona* is.

<sup>9</sup> The standard *borei nefashos* cannot be recited where a *me’ein shalosh* is required.

## Points to Ponder

**What is the proper bracha for granola?**

**What is the proper bracha for cookie dough?**

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*Please consult with a qualified halachic authority for all practical questions of halacha*

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