**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

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***Shiur* #33:   
*Birkat She-Hakol***

**Introduction**

In previous *shiurim*, we studied the laws of *Birkat Ha-Motzi* and *Birkot Ha-Peirot*. We discovered two different models of blessings: The *Birkot* *Ha*-*Peirot*, including the more general *Borei Peri Ha-Adama* and the more specific *Borei Peri Ha-Etz*, relate to foods that grow from the ground. *Birkat Ha-Motzi*, which is said before eating bread and before consuming grain products upon which one established a meal (*kevi’at se’uda*), seems to relate to the “meal,” and not necessarily to the specific food that was eaten. Indeed, *Birkat* *Ha-Mazon*, the blessing recited after a meal, is said after eating a “*se’uda*” before which one says *Ha*-*Motzi*.

In addition, we discussed two other unique blessings. The blessing of *Borei Minei Mezonot* is said before eating foods made from the five grains, which provide sustenance. The *berakha* of *Borei Peri Ha-Gafen* was established to be recited before drinking a special and important beverage – wine.

The Talmud teaches that there is another blessing, *She-Hakol*, which is recited over almost all other foods. This week we will discuss this *berakha* and when it is said and attempt to understand the nature of this specific blessing.

**When is *She-Hakol* Recited?**

We can identify two scenarios in which the blessing of *She-Hakol* is said. On the one hand, the *mishna* says:

Over anything which does not grow from the earth, one says: “*She-Hakol* *Niheyah Bi-Devaro”* (“by whose word all things exist”).

Therefore, one says the *Birkat She-Hakol* before eating meat, fish, eggs, milk, and cheese.

Why isn’t there a specific blessing for these foods, such as “the Creator of the animals” or “the creator of their products”? Some suggest that the specific *berakhot* relate to food that was given to man at the time of the creation of the world. Meat, however, wasn’t intended to be eaten until after the flood, and this “afterthought” is reflected in the blessings, which represent an almost ideal existence.

On the other hand, the Talmud and the *Rishonim* mention other cases in which one recites the blessing of *She-Hakol*, even when eating fruits and vegetables.

For example, when a food loses its “importance” or is not eaten in its optimal state, the blessing of *She-Hakol* is said. Therefore, as we saw last week, Shmuel (*Berakhot* 36a) rules that one should say *She-Hakol* before eating palm-hearts, even though they are part of a palm tree, as “palms are not planted for the sake of the heart.” Similarly, the Talmud (*Berakhot* 36a) discusses the proper blessing to be recited over flour. The Rif (*Berakhot* 25a) rules in accordance with R. Nachman, who rules that one says *She-Hakol*, and explains that “people are not accustomed to eating flour.”

For the same reason, one recites *She-Hakol* before eating a raw fruit that is normally eaten cooked (*Berakhot* 38b). The Shulchan Arukh (205:1; 202:12) rules that when a fruit or vegetable that is not eaten raw, but rather only when cooked, is in fact eaten raw, one says *She-Hakol*; when eaten cooked, one says *Borei Peri* *Ha-Adama* or *Ha-Etz*. If a fruit or vegetable is eaten raw, but is generally not eaten cooked, one recites *Borei Peri Ha-Adama* when it is eaten raw and *She-Hakol* when eaten cooked. (Before a fruit or vegetable that is eaten both when raw and cooked, one always says *Borei Peri Ha-Adama* or *Ha-Etz*.) Similarly, the Talmud (*Berakhot* 38a) teaches that one says *She-Hakol* before eating date honey and the Shulchan Arukh (202:8) rules that one says *She-Hakol* before drinking fruit or vegetable juice (except for the liquid extracts from olives and grapes).

In all of these cases, the fruit or vegetable is eaten in an inferior, non-optimal state, and its original blessing is therefore not recited.

Similarly, the *Rishonim* discuss the proper blessing to be recited before eating a fruit whose original form is no longer distinguishable. Rashi (*Berakhot* 38a, s.v. *trimma*) explains that *Borei Peri Ha-Etz* is still recited on “anything which is crushed a bit and not completely ground.” Rashi implies that if the fruit was completely ground, the proper blessing would not be *Borei Peri Ha-Etz*, but rather *She-Hakol*. Based upon the view of Rashi, R. Yisrael Isserlein (1390–1460) rules in his Terumat Ha-Deshen (1:29) that before eating jam made from cherries, one should say the blessing *She-Hakol*. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 8:4) disagrees, writing: “Nevertheless, when one crushes dates by hand, removes their pits, and makes them into a substance resembling a dough, one should recite the blessing *Borei Peri Ha-Etz*.” The Rambam implies that even if the date has completely lost its form, one still says *Borei Peri Ha-Etz*. The Shulchan Arukh (202:7) rules in accordance with the Rambam. The Rema, however, writes that one should say *She-Hakol* before eating prune jam. The Bayit Chadash (Bach 202) disagrees with both the Shulchan Arukh and the Rema, and rules that before eating crushed fruit, one says *Borei* *Peri Ha-Etz*, but before eating a vegetable that is crushed in a similar matter, one says *She-Hakol*. In this case, since the food has lost its identity, the original *berakha* is no longer recited.

How are we to understand this phenomenon, in which one recites *She*-*Hakol*, and not the original or proper blessings, over foods that are eaten in a different state?

**The Nature of *Birkat She-Hakol***

This question may relate to the nature of *Birkot Ha-Nehenin*, which we discussed last year. What is the nature of these blessings, which are recited before eating food?

One could suggest that there are two aspects of every *birkat* *ha-nehenin*. On the one hand, the *gemara* (*Berakhot* 35a) implies that *birkot ha-nehenin* serve as a “*matir*,” a formula that permits the eating of food:

Our Rabbis have taught: It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits *me’ila* (misuse of sacred property for secular purpose)… R. Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: To enjoy anything of this world without a blessing is like violating *me’ila*, as it says, “The earth and its fullness is the Lord's” (*Tehillim* 24:1). R. Levi contrasted two texts. It is written, “The earth and its fullness is the Lord's,” and it is also written, “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth has He given to the children of men” (*Tehillim* 115:16). There is no contradiction: In the one case, it is before a blessing has been said; in the other case, after. R. Chanina bar Papa said: To enjoy this world without a blessing is like robbing the Holy One, blessed be He, and the community of Israel.

This passage, which equates one who eats food without a blessing and one who misuses sacred property or one who steals from God, implies that a *berakha* permits one to eat food, which otherwise belongs to God.

On the other hand, other sources indicate that a *birkat ha-nehenin* is a *birkat ha-shevach*, a blessing of praise recited before eating food, and possibly even for each specific food. For example, the verse that the *gemara* suggested was the Biblical source for reciting *birkot ha-nehenin*, “the fruit thereof shall be holy, for *giving praise* unto the Lord” (*Vayikra* 19:24), implies that *birkot ha-nehenin* are a “praise unto the Lord.”

We might suggest that when foods are eaten in an inferior state or when they are radically changed from their original form, it no longer makes sense to recite a blessing praising their original, natural state. However, it is still prohibited to eat and to derive benefit from the world without reciting a blessing, and therefore one says the blessing of *She-Hakol*.

This explanation may help us to understand other interesting positions that appear in the *Rishonim*. For example, the Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona (*Berakhot* 27b, s.v. *ani*) suggest that before eating less than a *ke-zayit*, the size of an olive – the minimum amount of food upon which one says a *berakha* *acharona* – one says *She-Hakol*. Although one may view an amount of food smaller than the size of an olive as insignificant and not worthy of a separate blessing praising the specific food, one still may not benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing, and therefore at least the blessing of *She-Hakol* should be recited. (The *halakha* is not in accordance with this view.)

Similarly, the Terumat Ha-Deshen (31) suggests that when eating a food that is “*tafel*,” secondary to another food, and could be exempted by simply recited a blessing over the primary food, one says *She-Hakol*. There too, while a separate blessing praising this specific food may be unnecessary, one must still say a blessing in order not to benefit from this world without a blessing, and therefore one says the *berakha* of *She-Hakol*. (Again, the *halakha* is not in accordance with this view.)

This question may also be relevant to case of doubt. What should one do when in doubt regarding a blessing? Some *Rishonim* (Rif, *Berakhot* 6a; Rambam, *Hilkhot* *Berakhot* 8:12) rule that the principle of “*safek berakhot le-hakel*” applies to *birkot* *ha-nehenin*. Accordingly, if one is not sure whether or not he needs to recite a blessing at all, he should not recite one. Other *Rishonim* (Ri, *Berakhot* 12a, s.v. *lo*; Me’iri, *Berakhot* 35a, s.v. *vekhol ha-neheneh*) disagree and insist that the rule should be “*safek berakhot* *le-chumra*.” Accordingly, when in doubt, one must recite the blessing if one wishes to continue to eat. R. Akiva Eiger (Gilyon Ha-Shas, *Berakhot* 12a) cites the Maharsha (*Pesachim* 102), who explains that while one can still fulfill a *mitzva* even without reciting its blessing, one in is not permitted to eat without first say a *birkat ha-nehenin*; the principle of *safek berakhot le-hakel* should therefore not apply to *birkot ha-nehenin*. In other words, these *berakhot* are not considered to be merely *birkot ha-shevach*, but rather they “*matir*” (permit) one to eat. Thus, in case of doubt, one cannot eat without first saying a blessing. The *halakha* is in accordance with the first view.

At times, one is not sure WHICH blessing to recite. If one accidentally said *She-Hakol* over, bread, grain products, wine, fruits or vegetables, one has fulfilled his obligation. However, ideally, if one is in doubt whether to say *Ha-Etz* or *Ha*-*Adama*, one should say the more general *Ha-Adama* (Shulchan Arukh 206:1). When is doubt regarding whether one should say *She-Hakol* or *Ha-Adama*, one should say *She-Hakol*.

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 35a) teaches that when one does not know which blessing to recite, “He should consult a wise man beforehand, so that he should teach him blessings and he should not violate *me’ila*.” Therefore, if one is able to discern which blessing to recite, one should not simply say *She-Hakol*, but rather ask a Torah scholar (Shulchan Arukh 202:24).

According to what we suggested above, this may not only be in order to encourage the proper and precise observance of *mitzvot*, but also because the blessing of *She-Hakol* may only serve as a *matir*, permitting one to benefit from the world, but may not fulfill the second obligation to praise God for the specific wondrous creation which we receive.

Finally, one might suggest that that which grows from the ground is more readily apparent as a creation of God. There are therefore specific blessings for bread, grain products, and fruits, and vegetables. Animals and their by-products are not necessarily viewed as reflective as a creation of God, and therefore the proper blessing is *She-Hakol*.