YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

**THE LAWS OF THE *BERAKHOT***

For easy printing, go to:

[www.vbm-torah.org/archive/blessings/16berakhot.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/blessings/16berakhot.htm)

**Shiur #16: *Betzi’at Ha-Pat* (1)**

**Rav David Brofsky**

The recitation of the blessing over bread is known as “*betzi’at ha-pat*.” This week, we will discuss the manner in which one should recite the blessing of *ha-motzi* over bread.

**Whole or Broken Loaf**

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 39b) relates a debate regarding whether one should recite the blessing of *ha-motzi* over a whole loaf of bread:

It has been stated: If pieces and whole loaves are set before him, R. Huna says that the benediction can be said over the pieces (*petitin*), and this serves also for the whole loaves (*sheleimin*), whereas R. Yochanan says that the mitzva is better performed if the blessing is said over the whole one (*sheleima mitzva min ha-muvchar*).

R. Yochanan’s position is consistent with the view of the Tosefta (*Berakhot* 4:15). Apparently, since the “*shalem*” is considered to be more “*chashuv*” (important), it is appropriate to recite the blessing over the whole loaf.

How are we to understand the position of R. Huna, who maintains that one may recite the blessing over *petitin*?

Some *Rishonim* explain that although all agree that generally a whole loaf (*shalem*) is preferred, other factors may prevail. For example, the Ramban (*Berakhot* 39b) cites the *Geonim*, who explain that R. Yochanan and R. Huna disagree as to whether the quality of the flour should also play a role. They explain that the *petitin* are made from refined flour (*pat nekiya*) and the whole loaf is made from unrefined flour. R. Yochanan still prefers reciting the blessing over the whole loaf, while R. Huna believes that one should recite the blessing over the superior flour, the *pat nekiya*. If, however, both breads are made from the same flour, one should certainly recite the blessing over the whole loaf.

Rashi (*Berakhot* 39b) offers a different explanation. He explains that according to R. Huna, “If one wishes, he may recite the blessing over the *petitin*, and if the *petitin* are larger than the whole loaf, then one should say the blessing over them.” In other words, while R. Yochanan believes that the wholeness of the bread determines if it is preferred, R.Huna maintains that the size determines. Interestingly, Rabbeinu Tam (*Tosafot* 39b) insists that if both are the same size, even R. Huna would agree that one should recite the blessing over the whole loaf. They only disagree in a case in which the *petitin* are larger than the whole loaf.

The Ra’avad (see Katuv Sham, *Berakhot* 28a; see also Ra’ah, *Berakhot* 39b), however, explains the *gemara* in a completely different manner. He insists that R. Huna believes that the *petitin* may be preferred not because they are made from superior flour or because they are large, but precisely because they are *petitin*: “R. Huna refers specifically to *petitin*, as one enjoys them sooner (*mekarva hana’ataihu*).” They are easier to eat and do not need to be sliced first, and are therefore preferred.

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 39a), in the previous section, cites another view which may be relevant to our discussion:

R. Chiyya bar Ashi said: Over *pat tzenuma be-ka’ara* (a dry crust which has been put in a pot [to soak]), the blessing is *ha-motzi*.

As we shall see in a future *shiur*, some *Rishonim* maintain that this *gemara* teaches that the blessing of *ha-motzi*, as opposed to the blessing of *mezonot*, is recited over these pieces of bread placed in a pot to soak. Other *Rishonim*, however, as we shall see shortly, insist that while all agree that one should recite *ha-motzi* on this dish, R. Chiyya bar Ashi maintains that when given a choice between a whole loaf and these pieces, one may recite the blessing over these pieces. Some *Rishonim* suggest that R. Chiyya bar Ashi rejects the preference for a whole loaf altogether (see Rashba, s.v. *amar*); others explain that R. Chiyya bar Ashi refers to a case in which the pieces are “*chaviv*,” preferred (Tosafot, s.v. *pat*).

***Betzi’at Ha-Pat***

The Talmud implies that the *halakha* is in accordance with those who rule that blessing should be recited over a whole loaf. However, the *gemara* brings two views as to when the blessing should be recited:

R. Chiyya said: The bread should be broken with the conclusion of the blessing. Rava demurred to this. [He said:] What is the reason [that *ha-motzi* should not be said] in the case of dry crust? Because, you say, when the blessing is concluded, it is concluded over a broken piece. But when it is said over a loaf, it finishes over a broken piece! The fact is, said Rava, that the benediction is said first and then the loaf is broken. The Nehardeans acted as prescribed by R. Chiyya, while the Rabbis acted as prescribed by Rava… The law is as laid down by Rava that one says the blessing first and afterwards breaks the loaf.

The *gemara* concludes, in accordance with Rava, that the blessing should be said first “and afterwards he breaks the loaf.” The Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:2) cites this passage, and rules that one should “conclude the blessing and then break the bread.” Tosafot (*Berakhot* 39b, s.v. *ve-hilkhata*) explains that although Rava disagrees with R. Chiyya, who says that one should finish the blessing as one is breaking piece from the loaf, Rava insists that one may only completely break the piece from the loaf after the *berakha* is finished. However, Tosafot adds, it is customary to begin breaking the bread before the blessing, as we are concerned that it may take too long after the blessing, and this will be a distraction (*hesach ha-da’at*).

It is interesting to note that although some *Rishonim* understand the debate between R. Chiyya and Rava as relating to the concern of a *hefsek*, an interruption, between the blessing and the breaking of the bread, some *Rishonim* (see Ra’avya, *Hilkhot Lulav* 691, for example) understand a parallel passage in the Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 6:1) as suggesting that the blessing should be said as the breaking is performed, as in general, *birkot ha-mitzva* should be recited as the *mitzva* is being performed. This is seemingly in contrast to the Talmudic dictum (*Pesachim* 7b) that the *birkat* *ha-mitzva* should be said “*oveir le-asiyatan*” (before its performance). This topic of “*oveir le-asiyatan*” is beyond the scope of this *shiur*.

The Shulchan Arukh (167:1) rules that one should “cut a bit, so that if he holds the piece the entire loaf will remain attached… and then begin to recite the blessing, and after he finishes the blessing, he should separate them, so that the blessing is completed while the loaf is still whole.” Some *Acharonim* (see Arukh Ha-Shulchan 167:5) add that one does not need begin slicing a very soft or thin loaf, which cuts very quickly, before the blessing.

Interestingly, most Rishonim relate to this question as a “halakhic” preference. The Rambam (Hilkhot Berakhot 7:1-2), however, writes:

The Sages of Israel were wont to follow many customs at meals. All these are included in the realm of mannered behavior (*ve-khulan derekh eretz*). Among them: When entering for a meal, the man of greatest stature should wash his hands first. Afterwards, all should enter and sit down, reclining on couches… The host should recite the blessing *ha-motzi*. When he completes the blessing, he should break bread.

The Rambam implies that these practices, including breaking the bread *after* reciting *ha-motzi*, are customary, forms of proper behavior.

**Interrupting Between the Blessing and Eating**

As we saw above, the Shulchan Arukh rules, in accordance with the view of Tosafot, that one should be so careful not to delay between the blessing and the eating; he should beginning breaking the bread before the blessing.

The Shulchan Arukh (167:6) rules that one should eat immediately after reciting the blessing. If one speaks, one must repeat the blessing, unless his speaking relates to the food. Furthermore, one should not delay eating longer than it takes to say “*shalom alekha rabbi.*” However, if one did delay, he need not recite the blessing again.

When the *ba’al ha-bayit* recites the blessing of *ha-motzi* for others, those listening should not eat before the *ba’al ha-bayit*. The Rema (167:15) rules that the *ba’al ha-bayit* may give out pieces of bread before he himself eats, as this is considered part of the meal. The Mishna Berura (79) cites the Taz and other *Acharonim*, who advise the *ba’al ha-bayit* to first taste the bread and then distribute to the guests.

The *Rishonim* disagree regarding whether one who speaks after the *ba’al ha-bayit* has eaten, but before eating himself, must repeat the blessing. Most *Rishonim*, including Tosafot (*Pesachim* 101a, s.v. *ve-Rabbi Yochanan*) and the Rosh (*Pesachim* 10:5), maintain that if he interrupts between answering *amen* and eating, he must repeat the blessing. Others, including the Rema (167:6), rule that once the *ba’al ha-bayit* has eaten, the *berakha* takes effect; even if one interrupts, it is not necessary to repeat the blessing. Although the Mishna Berura (167:43; see *Shemirat Shabat Ke-Hilkhata* 48:6) insists that almost all of the *Acharonim* rule that one must repeat the blessing, the Arukh Ha-Shulchan (167:16) rules that the blessing is valid. The *Acharonim* disagree regarding whether in the opposite scenario, in which the *ba’al ha-bayit* spoke before eating, the others must also repeat the blessing.

Next week we will finish our study of *betzi’at ha-pat*.