**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

This shiur is available in the archives at

[www.vbm-torah.org/archive/blessings/44berakhot.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/blessings/44berakhot.htm)

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This week’s *shiurim* are dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky *zt"l*, whose *yahrzeit* falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the worldwide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of *Eretz Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael*.

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Dedicated to Maya Bernstein & Noam Silverman -   
In honor of the Birth of their daughter, Niva Hallel

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**Shiur #44: *Berakha Acharona***

**The *Shi’ur* for a *Berakha Acharona***

**Introduction**

Last week, we concluded our study of the *birkot ha-nehenin* recited over food. We discussed basic principles of *berakhot*, the laws of *netilat yadayim*, the definition of bread, the blessings of *Ha-Motzi, Mezonot*, *Ha-Etz, Ha-Adama*, and *She-Hakol*, as well as the manner in which blessings are recited over numerous foods, including the principle of *ikkar ve-tafel* and the proper order of the blessings. We also discussed blessings that must be recited during a meal, and we studied the laws of interruptions during *berakhot*, between the *berakha* and eating, and between *netilat yadayim* and eating bread, the extent of “*berakha* coverage,” and the impact of *shinui makom*.

This week, we will begin our study of the *berakha acharona*, the blessings said after eating. We will first question the amount that one must eat and the manner in which it must be eaten in order to become obligated to say a *berakha* *acharona*. We will then discuss the different *berakhot*, *Al Ha-Michya* and *Borei* *Nefashot*, and the manner in which they are recited. Afterwards, God willing, we will move to the laws of *Zimun* and *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

**The *Shi’ur* of Eating for a *Berakha Acharona***

The Talmud (*Sukka* 6a) teaches that “most of its measurements are a *ke-zayit* (the size of an olive).” Indeed, throughout the Talmud, we see that the minimum amount that one must eat in order to fulfill a *mitzva* or for which one is punished is generally a *kezayit*. In this context as well, regarding the *berakha* *acharona*, the Talmud (*Berakhot* 37b) relates:

Moreover, R. Hiyya b. Abba said: I have seen R. Yochanan eat salted olives and say a blessing both before and after… R. Yirmiya asked R. Zeira: How could R. Yochanan make a blessing over a salted olive? Since the stone had been removed, it was less than the minimum size! He replied: Do you think the size we require is that of a large olive? We require only that of a medium sized olive, and that was there, for the one they set before R. Yochanan was a large one, so that even when its stone had been removed, it was still of the requisite size. For so we have learnt: The olive spoken of means neither a small nor a large one, but a medium one.

The Rif (*Berakhot* 27a) derives from this passage that while one must say a blessing before eating even the smallest amount, as it is prohibited to benefit from this world without a blessing (*Berakhot* 35a), one only says a *berakha* *acharona* after eating the equivalent of a *ke-zayit*, the size of an olive. Tosafot (38a *s.v. batzar*), the Rosh (*Berakot* 6:16), and other *Rishonim* arrive at the same conclusion.

Why is a *berakha acharona* only said after eating a *kezayit* of food, unlike a *berakha rishona*, which is said before tasting even the smallest amount?

Rashi (39a, *s.v. batzar*) explains that the obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, the model for every *berakha acharona*, is derived from the verse (*Devarim* 8:10), “And you shall *eat*, and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God.” The minimum amount that is considered to be an act of “eating” is a *ke-zayit*. Thus, only eating a *ke-zayit* is considered to be an act of “eating” that warrants a *berakha acharona*. Alternatively, we might suggest that the Rabbis established that one must say a *berakha acharona* after deriving benefit from a “significant” quantity of food (and not just any benefit). Generally, a *ke-zayit* is viewed as a significant amount. Therefore, one who eats (and derives benefit from) a *ke-zayit* of food must say a *berakha acharona*.

There may be halakhic ramifications to this question.

***Birya* – A Complete and Natural Whole Unit of Food**

The Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 6:1) implies that one must say a *berakha* *acharona* even after eating a “*birya*,” something in its whole, natural form, such as a grape or a pomegranate seed.

Tosafot (ibid.) understand that the Yerushalmi argues with the Talmud Bavli – which, as we saw above, teaches that one says a *berakha acharona* after eating a *ke-zayit* – and the halakha is in accordance with the Bavli. This is the view of the Rif (ibid.) and the Rambam (*Hilkhot Berkahot* 3:12) as well. Other Rishonim (R. Yosef cited by Tosafot above; Rosh ibid.; Rashba 39a; Rabbeinu Yona 27b, et. al.) raise the possibility that the Yerushalmi does not argue with the Bavli; the passage from the Bavli refers to an olive that is not whole. The Rosh even recommends that one refrain from eating a *birya* that is less than a *ke-zayit* due to this debate.

Seemingly, we might suggest that according to Rashi, one should certainly not say a blessing after eating a *birya* smaller than a *kezayit*, as eating less than a *ke-zayit* is not considered to be an act of “eating.” However, if a *berakha* *acharona* is said after benefiting from a “significant” portion of food, then one could argue that although a *birya* lacks size, it has “importance” (as is seen in numerous other *halakhot*; see *Makot* 13a, *Chullin* 100b and 119b), and it is therefore worthy of a *berakha* *acharona*.

The Shulchan Arukh (210:1) rules that one should only say a *berakha* *acharona* after eating a *ke-zayit* of food. He cites the debate above and writes “some express doubt whether one says a blessing after [eating] over something which is a *birya*, such as a single grape or pomegranate seed, even though it is smaller than a *ke-zayit*; therefore, one should be careful not to eat a *birya* which is less than a *ke-zayit*.” If one bites into the *birya* and does need eat it in one bite or one does not eat its pit (such as the pit of a date, an olive, or a cherry), it is not considered to be a *birya* (see Mishna Berura 210:7).

**The *Shi’ur* for *Borei Nefashot***

Interestingly, the *Rishonim* question whether the *shiur* of *ke-zayit* is relevant only to the blessing of *Al Ha-Michya* (and *Birkat Ha-Mazon*), or to *Borei* *Nefashot* as well. Tosafot (ibid.; see also Rosh ibid.) records:

The Ri says: Regarding *Borei Nefashot*, since it is not “an important blessing” (*lav berakha chashuva hi*), even [upon eating] less than the measurement [of a *ke-zayit*], one says *Borei Nefashot*. It seems that since *Borei Nefashot* corresponds to the blessing of *Al Ha-Gefen*, just like the *Al Ha-Gefen* requires a *shi’ur*, so too [*Borei Nefashot*] needs a *shi’ur*.

The Rambam (ibid.) and Rid (ibid.) clearly disagrees and maintain that even the blessing of *Borei Nefashot* is only said after eating (or drinking) a *shiur*.

Here, we may suggest a fundamental difference between *Al Ha-Michya* and *Borei Nefashot*. As Rashi (above) explains, the blessing of *Al Ha-Michya* may depend upon an act of “eating,” which by definition entails eating a *ke-zayit*. However, *Borei Nefashot* doesn’t relate to a specific food, as we can see from the text of the blessing:

Blessed are You … Creator of numerous living beings and their needs, for all the things You have created with which to sustain the soul of every living being. Blessed is He who is the Life of the worlds.

Therefore, we may understand that the blessing of *Borei Nefashot* relates to deriving benefit from food or drink, and there therefore may be no need for a specific amount. The halakha is not in accordance with this view.

**The *Shi’ur Ke-Zayit* and a *Berakha Rishona***

In this context, it is worth noting that almost all *Rishonim* assume that one says a blessing before eating even the smallest amount of food (or drink) so as not to “benefit from this world without a blessing” (*Berakhot* 35a). Some, however, note that the Talmud (*Berakhot* 35a) suggests that the obligation to say a *berakha rishona* may be derived from a *kal ve-chomer* from *Brikat Ha-Mazon*: “One says a blessing when he is satiated; all the more so when he is hungry!” Why, then, were the rabbis stricter regarding a *berakha rishona* than a *berakha acharona*?

The Kesef Mishna (*Hilkhot* *Berakhot* 6:13) explains:

It seems to me that they said that one should say a blessing on a small amount lest he change his mind and eat a *shi’ur* [i.e., a *kezayit*], in which case he needed to have said a blessing beforehand, and now he is unable to fix the matter.

This interpretation implies that theoretically, one should only say a blessing over eating a *ke-zayit*, an “act” of eating, but for technical reasons, the rabbis said one should say a blessing even when eating less.

Interestingly, the Kolbo (24) cites a view that maintains that whenever one eats less than a *ke-zayit*, one should say *She-Hakol*. He further cites R. Achai Gaon (the author of the *She’iltot*) as opining that one who eats less than a *ke-zayit* should not say any blessing.

These intriguing positions, which are not accepted *le-halakha*, seem to maintain that less than a *ke-zayit* is not considered an “act” of eating and one should therefore either say the generic *She-Hakol* blessing, which covers all benefit from eating (as we discussed [previously](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/blessings/33berakhot.htm)), or not at all.

Similarly, the Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona (*Berakhot* 27b, s.v. *ani*) suggest that before eating less than a *ke-zayit* of *mezonot*, 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 at least the blessing of *She-Hakol* should be recited. Again, the halakha is not in accordance with this view.

**The *Shi’ur* of Liquids for a *Berakha Acharona***

The discussion above revolved around the amount of food over which one says a *berakha acharona*. What about liquids? How much must one drink in order to become obligated to a say a *berakha acharona*?

Tosafot (*Yoma* 79a, s.v. *ve-lo*) and the Rosh (*Berakhot* 7:24) maintain that after drinking an amount of liquid corresponding to a *ke-zayit*, one says a *berakha* *acharona*. Elsewhere (*Berakhot* 39a, s.v. *ba-tzar*), Tosafot rule that after drinking a cheek-full, a *melo lugmav*, one says a *berakha acharona*. The Rambam (*Hilkhot* *Berakhot* 3:12) disagrees and rules that one must drink a *revi’it* (a quarter of a *lug*).

Due to this doubt the Shulchan Arukh (210:1) writes that it is preferable to drink either less than a *ke-zayit* or more than a *revi’it* of liquid.

Next week, we will attempt to better define the *shiurim* of a *kezayit* and a *revi’it* and the amount of time within which they must be consumed in order to say a *berakha acharona*.