

Mishnah Berakhot Chapter 6 -- Guiding Questions

Rabbi Pamela Barmash, Washington University in St. Louis

<pbarmash@wustl.edu>

Overall questions:

1. How does saying berakhot (blessings) before and after we eat enhance our spirituality?
2. Rabbinic tradition considers reciting a blessing after the meal to be more significant than reciting blessings before eating. Why is this the case?

Mishnah 1

1. What is the general formula for a berakhah?
2. There is a berakhah for fruit. Why does wine receive a special berakhah?
3. Why does bread have its own berakhah, not the one for ground crops (“fruits of the ground”)?
4. Why is there a disagreement about vegetables?

Mishnah 2

1. Why is it okay to mix up the berakhah for fruit but the berakhah for ground crops?
2. Why not use a general berakhah “for everything exists by God’s word” for all food?

Mishnah 3

1. Why do we use the general berakhah “for everything exists by God’s word” for processed foods? For vinegar? For unripe fruits? For milk, cheese, and eggs? Locusts???
2. Why does Rabbi Yehudah think that (some of) these are cursed species?

Mishnah 4

1. What are the seven species, and why are they singled out? (Hint: Deuteronomy 8:8)
2. Why do Rabbi Yehudah and the other rabbis disagree?

Mishnah 5

1. Why does reciting a berakhah over the wine include all wine for the meal?
2. So if reciting a berakhah on the appetizer covers the dessert, why do we still have to recite a berakhah over the bread?

Mishnah 6

1. When do we recline for a meal, and how does this help us understand why we recite a berakhah together rather than separately? Why does this not apply to wine?
2. What were people in the time of the Mishnah using incense for?

Mishnah 7

1. What do we learn about eating habits in the time of the Mishnah?

Mishnah 8

Please open a siddur or birkon/bentcher and find the types of berakhot recited after the meal.

1. What we call Birkat Hamazon is called in the Mishnah “the three blessings”. Why?
2. What is “one blessing that is the essence of three”?
3. Why recite a berakhah over water, and why is there a disagreement over the wording?
4. Why did Rabbi Akiva think that we should say the three blessings after a meal of vegetables?
5. I wrote a teshuvah (rabbinic paper) on Birkat Hamazon that was approved by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 2016. You can read it:
www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/Birkat%20hamazon%20final%20Oct%202016.pdf