

THE CORRECT BRACHA ON A HAMANTASCH

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As we celebrate Purim Katan in this Adar Rishon, let's take a few moments to examine what the proper *bracha* (blessing) is for a hamantasch. *Chazal* (the Sages) instituted that the *bracha* (blessing) of *borei minei mezonos* be recited upon foods made from the five primary species of grain recognized by halacha, which are wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats. These grains are given the unique *bracha* of *borei minei mezonos*, meaning "Who created varieties of nourishing foods."

When one bakes dough from the flour of any of these five species of grains, the grain is regarded as having reached its full potential. In the language of *Chazal*, this product is now called *pas*. Certain varieties of *pas* are designated as full-fledged *lechem* (bread) and require the *bracha* of *hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*. However, other varieties are classified as *pas haba'a bikisnin* (which will be explained shortly), and the *bracha* is *borei minei mezonos*.

There are three opinions regarding the definition of *pas haba'a bikisnin*. The first opinion is from Rav Hai Gaon (cited by Bais Yosef Orach Chaim 168). He opines that it refers to dry, thin and brittle bread eaten primarily as a snack and not eaten together with the meal. (Crackers and pretzels are examples of this definition.) In Rav Hai Gaon's opinion, the reason this is not considered bread is due to its form.

The second opinion is that of the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 3:9). He says that *pas haba'a bikisnin* refers to dough kneaded with any liquid other than water, or breads with a significant amount of flavoring, such as sugar or herbs and spices. However, there is a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema regarding the

explanation of this opinion. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 168:7) explains that the main criterion is that the taste of these liquids or flavorings are evident in the final product. According to this opinion, the reason it is not considered bread is due to its taste. This is the practice among Sephardim.

The Rema (ibid.), on the other hand, is more stringent, as he requires that the liquids or added flavor be a primary ingredient. The logic of the Rema is the subject of a three-way dispute among the *poskim* (halachic authorities). The first approach is that of the Taz (ibid.:7), who says that the flavor must come primarily from the liquids or flavoring. This opinion is similar to the Shulchan Aruch in that the main criterion is taste; however, there is an additional requirement that it must be the **primary** flavor. This is the ruling of the Mishna Berura (ibid.:33).

The second approach to understanding the Rema is found in the Shelah (Shaar Haosios 2:2). He explains that the primary ingredient must be of other liquids or flavoring, regardless if the taste is noticeable or not. The reason this is not considered bread according to the Shelah is due to the content. This is the ruling of the Maharsham (Da'as Torah Orach Chaim 168:7).

The third approach in explaining the Rema is found in the Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.:22). He explains that from the appearance of the final product it must be apparent that the dough was made with other liquids or flavoring. According to this approach, *pas haba'a bikisnin* is not considered bread due to its appearance.

The third opinion defining *pas haba'a bikisnin* is from Rashi (Brachos 41b s.v. *pas*). He says that it

refers to dough formed into a pocket and filled with fruits, nuts or the like. The Mishna Berura (ibid.:33) requires that the taste be primarily of the filling. However, the Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.:20) is more stringent and requires that the main purpose of eating this food is for its filling. According to both approaches, this opinion understands that the reason it is not considered bread is due to its taste.

The Bais Yosef (ibid.) concludes that since this is a dispute regarding the Rabbinic obligation of making a *bracha* before eating, we follow the leniencies of all three opinions, which means making a *mezonos* and not *hamotzi*. Thus, if a product fits any of these criteria, the *bracha* would be *borei minei mezonos*. However, even if it does not meet these criteria, the *bracha* may still be *mezonos*, as we will discuss in the next paragraph.

There is a dispute among the *poskim*. The Eimek Bracha (*lechem* 2) understands that the aforementioned opinions are absolute and do not change based upon the local culture and custom. However, Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum (author of the Nesivos Hamishpat and Chavas Da'as) in his Haggada Ma'asei Nissim (section on *borei minei mezonos*) argues that the different criteria discussed are mere indications that the product is a snack and not a meal. Therefore, a product which does not meet any of the aforementioned criteria but is typically eaten as a snack would require a *mezonos*. The Sefer Vezos Habracha (Birur Halacha siman 3) records an oral ruling from Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in accordance with the opinion of the Ma'asei Nissim.

Now that we have presented the background of this area of halacha, we can analyze what the proper *bracha* should be for a hamantasch. Rav Hai Gaon's opinion, that the food must be a

brittle in order that it not be considered bread, is usually not applicable to a hamantasch.

However, according to the second opinion of the Rambam that *pas haba'a bikisnin* is dough kneaded with other liquids or flavorings, a hamantasch can often be considered *pas haba'a bikisnin*, as they are often made this way. A hamantasch would also fit into the Shulchan Aruch's approach that the taste of the non-water liquid or flavoring be evident, as one typically can taste the sugar or alternative liquid, such as oil, in a hamantasch; therefore, the *bracha* would be *mezonos*. But according to the Rema, who requires that the alternative liquid or flavoring be the primary ingredient, one would need to judge whether a particular type of hamantasch fulfills this criterion.

According to the third opinion of Rashi that *pas haba'a bikisnin* is not considered bread because of its filling, a hamantasch, which contains filling, would be *pas haba'a bikisnin*. However, according to the Aruch Hashulchan, that the main purpose of eating this food must be for its filling, one can argue that the primary consumption of a hamantasch is not for its filling.

Regardless, according to the ruling of the Maasei Nissim and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, since a hamantasch is typically eaten as a snack, the *bracha* would remain *mezonos*. It is important to note that if one would eat enough hamantaschen to constitute a meal, then the *bracha* would become *hamotzi* (Orach Chaim 168:6). Defining what a "meal" would require according to halacha is beyond the scope of this discussion, and a halachic authority should be consulted for specific cases.

In conclusion, while the subject of *pas haba'a bikisnin* is a rather complex one, one can safely make a *mezonos* on a hamantasch that is being eaten as a snack.