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לעילוי נשמת ר' יצחק מאיר בן אליהו ובריינא בת אברהם ע"ה ור' גדליה בן אברהם מנחם הכהן ומרים בת ישראל ע"ה

The Proper Bracha on Hearts of Palm and Pineapples

Rabbi Aharon Wilen

What is the proper bracha for hearts of palm and pineapple?

What if someone makes the wrong bracha on these questionable items?

The Mishna (Brachos 35a) teaches that one recites a *bracha* of *borei pri ha'eitz* upon the fruit of a tree before eating it, while a *borei pri ha'adama* is recited upon fruits of the ground. Ascertaining what is classified as a "fruit of a tree," however, is not always a simple matter. This article will examine two controversial fruits and the proper *bracha* that should be recited on them.

Hearts of Palm

The Gemara (Brachos 36a) discusses the correct *bracha* to be made upon an item called "*korah*." The Rambam (Hilchos Beachos 8:6) explains this as "the top of the palm tree, which is white wood." This is the item known today as heart of palm.

The Gemara cites two opinions regarding the proper *bracha* for heart of palm. Rav Yehuda says that one should recite *ha'adama*, the *bracha* generally recited on food that grows directly from the ground. Shmuel says one should recite *shehakol*, the *bracha* made on food that doesn't grow from the ground and on foods not normally eaten. The Gemara concludes that the halacha follows Shmuel, since palm trees are not normally planted for hearts of palm. Rashi (s.v. *diklah*) explains that this is because harvesting hearts of palm damages the tree. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 204:1) rules that one makes a *shehakol* on *kora*.

Today, however, realities have changed somewhat. There are several varieties of palm tree cultivated specifically for their hearts. These trees are cut down annually, leaving the roots in the ground. The core of the trunk – the heart – is then removed, pickled and canned. The following year, new shoots grow from the roots, producing the new crop of hearts of palm.

Rabbi Moshe Heinemann, quoted in Star-K's Insights from the Institute [Fall 2011], rules that the *bracha* on modern-day hearts of palm ought to be *ha'eitz*, like any other fruit that grows on a tree. Even though there is no such opinion mentioned in the Gemara, this is due to the fact that the trees discussed by the Gemara were regular date palms that are grown for their fruit, with the heart of palm being a secondary product, thus rendering them a *ha'adama* at most. Commercially produced hearts of palm, however, are the primary product of these palm trees cultivated for this express purpose; therefore, it can be argued that they are like any other tree fruit whose *bracha* is *ha'eitz*.

The consensus of most *poskim*, however, is that the appropriate *bracha* on hearts of palm today is *ha'adamah* (Vezos Habracha

pg. 308). The primary reason for this is that heart of palm is the wood of the tree, not a fruit. The Gemara (ibid.) discusses the proper *bracha* for the edible shoots and leaves of the caper bush and concludes that one recites *ha'adama*. This indicates that if consuming the tree itself, not a fruit of the tree, one recites *ha'adama*. This approach is cited by the Bahag (Brachos 6) as a reason not to make *ha'eitz* on sugar. Sugar is the primary product of sugar cane. Since sugar is an extract of the wood and not a fruit of the tree, the *bracha* is not *ha'eitz*¹. According to this approach, even if someone has mistakenly recited a *ha'eitz* on hearts of palm, it would be considered a *bracha levatala*, a blessing made in vain (Sha'ar Hatziyun 202:42). (For practical halacha as to whether one must recite *ha'adama* after making *ha'eitz* in such a scenario, a halachic authority should be consulted.)

Additionally, even if one were to consider hearts of palm to be a fruit, whether the palm trees grown for their hearts are considered "trees" according to halacha is questionable. The current practice of harvesting hearts of palm involves cutting the entire trunk of the tree, and a new tree grows anew from its roots annually. This may be at odds with the Gemara's halachic definition of a tree, as will be explained.

The Gemara (Berachos 40a) defines a tree as a plant whose "*gavzah*" remains and produces additional fruit after the first fruit has been removed. Rashi (ibid. s.v. *gavzah*) defines *gavzah* as the branches of the tree, meaning that if the branches of the plant do not endure from year to year and produce new fruit, it is not a tree. The Rosh (Brachos 6:23), however, understands the Gemara as referring to the body of the tree. According to the Rosh, therefore, any plant which regenerates from its roots and does not need to be replanted yearly can be classified as a tree. The Rosh adds an additional criterion, that the tree's leaves emerge from its branches. A plant whose leaves come out of its roots is not a tree.

In light of these two opinions, the methods used for modern heart of palm production would seem to create a dispute as to the halachic status of these trees. According to the Rosh, since the roots remain in the ground from year to year and produce new shoots annually, the palm would be classified as a tree and

¹ Practically speaking, a *shehakol* is recited on the processed sugar available today. The discussion as to why a *shehakol* is recited, not *ha'adama*, is beyond the scope of this article.

its primary fruit would potentially be *ha'eitz*. However, since the branches or body of the tree do not last, it would not be a tree, and the *bracha* on its fruit would be *ha'adama*. It can be argued, however, that the status of a tree should be judged by its natural progression as opposed to agricultural practice, in which case even according to Rashi it would be classified as a tree.

Despite the possibility that hearts of palm are considered a fruit of a tree, the *bracha* should be *ha'adama*. This is based on a Mishna in Brachos (40a) that states that any food of the ground whose halachic status as a tree fruit is unclear gets the blessing of *ha'adama*; this is, in fact, the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 106:1). The reason for this is because the *bracha* of *ha'adama* suffices if recited over a tree fruit (ibid.). Although the Sages instituted a more specific blessing of *ha'eitz* for tree fruit, the blessing of *ha'adama*, which refers to fruit of the ground, ultimately includes tree fruit as well, as they also grow from the ground.

Pineapple

Another fruit that whose proper *bracha* is questionable is pineapple. Pineapple is a perennial herb with long stiff leaves in a circular cluster. A fruit grows from a stem that emerges out from the center of the cluster. After that, the plant sends out tendrils that grow into new plants; the new plants remain connected to the parent plant. These new plants grow their own fruits, as well, and eventually send out their own shoots which grow into new plants. Left alone, this would continue indefinitely. However, as these side shoots continue to perpetuate, their fruit get smaller due to overcrowding of plants, making it inefficient to maintain. Modern commercial pineapple growers uproot the entire field and replant it every three years.

The first consideration is that the stem upon which the fruit grows does not last from year to year. As discussed above, the Rosh rules that only the roots need to last. Rashi, however, says that if the branches do not produce new fruit, it is not classified as a tree. In the case of pineapple, the body of the plant lasts, but the stem that the fruit actually grows from does not. Whether this unusual reality of the plant lasting but the fruit-bearing branch not producing again would be considered a tree according to Rashi is the subject of a dispute (see Tehilah Lidovid 203:1). One major point of debate is whether Rashi requires the actual branch to produce new fruits or whether a trunk that can produce new fruits is sufficient.

There are several other points discussed by the *poskim* regarding pineapple. The common theme for all of these considerations is based upon the essential difference between fruit of a tree and fruit of the ground. A plant which is not classified as a tree is seen, in halacha, as serving merely as a conduit for the nutrition that enables the growth of the fruit, and it does not have its own significance. Trees, however, are significant entities. We therefore

view the tree as the primary source of the fruit, albeit aided by the ground. In order for a tree to be considered significant enough to qualify as the source, it must meet certain criteria, the first and foremost being that which the Gemara states, that it remain from year to year.

The Nishmas Adam (51:7) says that a tree must be strong and woody. Anything soft and flexible is not considered a tree.

The Radvaz (3:966) posits that a plant that bears fruit in its first year is not a tree. The reason for this is that if the fruit is produced so early in the plant's development, before the plant is fully mature, it's indicative that the plant is not a significant contributor to the growth of the fruit. In such a case, the plant is not considered a tree, and the primary source of these fruit is the ground.

The Birchei Yosef (Yoreh De'ah 294:4) says that if the fruits decline in quality from year to year early in its life, the plant is not a tree. Both of these qualities are also based on the idea that a tree must be a significant entity to be considered the primary source of the fruit. A plant that naturally lacks the vitality to produce quality fruit year after year is not significant enough to be considered a tree.

The Chazon Ish (Orlah 12:3) rules that a plant that does not last for three years is not a tree. Here, again, a short-lived tree does not have the independent significance to be regarded as a tree according to halacha.

Trees that only survive year to year in the tropics but would not survive a winter are not durable enough to be considered trees (Kodesh Hilulim pg. 224). The criterion for survival is based upon the tree's ability to survive a winter in Eretz Yisrael.

Many of these criteria are lacking in the pineapple plant. The fruit grow in the first year and get smaller year to year. The plants are not kept for more than three years, and they don't survive winters outside of the tropics.

Many of the aforementioned criteria are subject to dispute. Additionally, as mentioned above, it is questionable if trees should be judged by their natural growth patterns or by modern cultivation methods, thus making the three-year issue questionable. Nonetheless, the general rule remains that when there is a question whether the appropriate *bracha* is *ha'eitz* or *ha'adama*, *ha'adama* is recited, as it is more inclusive. Based on these criteria, the appropriate *bracha* on pineapple is *ha'adama* (Megilas Sefer 21: 5).

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a) teaches that one who wishes to be pious needs to learn the laws of *brachos*. These laws can be complex and require focus and expertise to ensure that one is making the proper *bracha*. This article will hopefully shed light on some of the principles of these laws, opening the door for further study.

Points to Ponder:

What is the proper bracha on "fruits" such as bananas, blackberries, blueberries, cranberries, papaya, raspberries and strawberries?

Why do some say that one should ha'eitz on a piece of chocolate?

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Please consult with a qualified halachic authority for all practical questions of halacha

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