



What is the *Beracha* on Cheesecake?

There is a custom to eat dairy foods on Shavuot (Rema 494:3). Some believe that dairy serves as a parable to Torah (Mishan Berura *se'if katan* 11), since the Torah is likened to milk, as it says “honey and milk under your tongue” (Shir HaShirim 4:11), metaphorically referring to the sweetness of Torah in one’s mouth. Some believe that since the people of Israel received the laws of *kashrut* for the first time at *Matan Torah*, they could not immediately eat meat and kasher their utensils, so they ate milk.

Many eat cheesecake on Shavuot; but what *beracha* should one say? In baked cheesecake, there is pastry (*mezonot*) and cheese (*shehakol*). Similar mixtures of different distinct ingredients in one dish exist in many foods today, for example, the Israeli *krembo*. Let’s think about the different possibilities for the *beracha*:

Maybe we say a *shehakol*, because the cheese or cream is *shehakol*, and it seems this is the *ikkar*, the most important part of the cake.

Maybe two blessings are recited: *mezonot* on the pastry or cake section and *shehakol* on the cheese or whipped cream.

Could it be that we recite only *mezonot*?

The Mishnah (Berachot 44a) states:

“This is the rule: whenever there is an essential food and a secondary food [within a mixture], we say a *beracha* on the essential and exempt the secondary.”

The Gemara (Berachot 36b) teaches us another rule: when there is a mixture of foods which include *shehakol* ingredients and *mezonot* ingredients, the **flour is considered primary, even**

if it is less important (unless we really do not enjoy its taste or cannot taste it). The reason for this is that the five kinds of grain are of special importance, since bread is usually made from them, so even if they are in a relatively small (but noticeable) amount, they are considered the main ingredient. In the language of the Gemara:

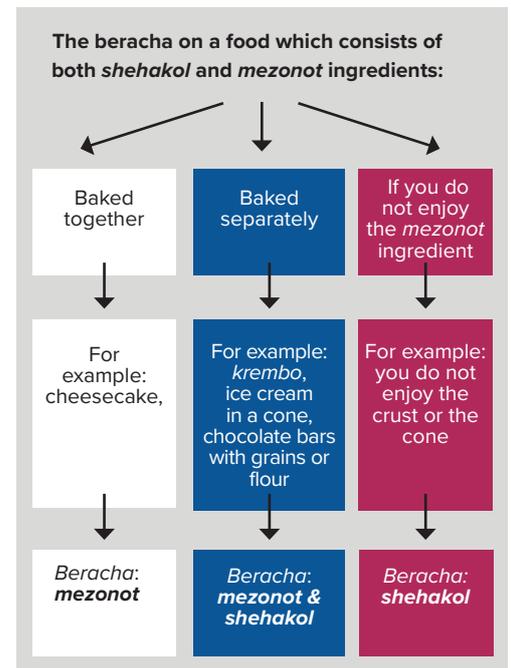
“Anything which contains one of the five kinds of grain – its *beracha* is *borei minei mezonot*.”

Therefore, the *beracha* on baked cheesecake is only *mezonot*. Although the cheese is most important to us, the **bottom of the cake, which is *mezonot*, is considered primary**. So too with chocolate bars which include *mezonot* ingredients (like the Israeli *kif-kef*, *pesek zman*, etc.): although the chocolate is more important to us, the *mezonot* part is primary, since we taste that part and enjoy it as well.

However, one of our most important *poskim*, the Mishna Berura (168, *se'if katan* 45), clarified that only when the two ingredients are **baked together** should one say *mezonot* alone. However, **when the two things are separate, and only laid together, like ice cream in a cone**, such that a person enjoys both the ice cream and the cone, he should say two *berachot*: ***mezonot* (on the cone) and *shehakol* (on the ice cream)**. Therefore, on a *krembo*, one should say two *berachot*, **because it includes two separate ingredients not baked together**.

If someone does not like the *mezonot* in the cake at all (or ice cream cone), **and the foods are used only as a ‘container’ to hold the cake or ice cream, one should not say *mezonot* at all, only *shehakol***.

The following diagram summarizes:



On Shavuot, we try to raise ourselves up a level, to be filled with the desire to fulfill G-d’s will in the world, to be ready to receive the Torah.

We hope that we will prepare properly and not only hear the *ba’al koreh* reading *Aseret HaDibrot*, but hear G-d’s very voice emanating from within the words. As the Kedushat Levi writes:

“Thus a person merits that on every Shavuot he hears the voice announcing *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*. We find that a person must greatly prepare himself to merit hearing the words of G-d.”

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Shir HaMaalot: Marveling at Yerushalayim

Upon the 15 steps leading up to the *beit HaMikdash* were they Leviim stood and sang the 15 *Shir HaMaalot* in Tehillim. Chapter 122 of Tehillim, שיר המעלות לדוד, which we customarily read on Yom Yerushalayim, speaks of the Holy City, expressing the joy, wonder, and excitement of those going up to Yerushalayim: שִׁמְחֵתִי בְּאִמְרֵיהֶם לֵי בֵּית ה' נִלְךְ

The chapter is written from the point of view of a Jew going up to Yerushalayim who is filled with wonder at the sight of the city before him: עֲמִדוֹת הָיוּ רַגְלֵינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיהָ... יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְּנוּיָה. He marvels at the beautiful buildings which glorify Yerushalayim and the vastly different neighborhoods within one great city.

He does not only admire the physical aspect of the city, but marvels at the building of the Jewish people and their unity around Yerushalayim: כְּעִיר שֶׁחִבְרָה לָהּ יְהוָה: שֵׁשׁ עָלָיו שְׁבָטִים. Although the people of Israel are made up of different tribes and ethnic groups, all have a part in Yerushalayim. Yerushalayim is on the border between the tribe of Yehudah and the tribe of Binyamin, thus uniting all the parts of the nation. A Jew sees all parts of the nation gathering together in Yerushalayim, is overcome with wonder, and blesses Yerushalayim: שְׁאֵלוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם... יְהִי שְׁלוֹם בְּחִילָךְ שְׁלוֹהָ... אֲדַבְרָה בְּךָ שְׁלוֹם. *Shalom* and *shalva* repeat themselves numerous times in these verses, and their sound is similar to the word “Yerushalayim,” so much so it is understood that Yerushalayim is thus named because it is the city of peace and wholeness. The Jew wishes Yerushalayim peace with its external enemies, and inner peace, between the different parts of

the people. Peace with external enemies depends on inner peace. The foundation of unity is within Yerushalayim. Indeed, David HaMelech succeeded in conquering Yerushalayim only after uniting all the people under his kingdom, and as in the days of David so too today; the conquest of Yerushalayim and the unification of the two halves of the city was successful only in the Six Day War, when there was a special unity among the nation.

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The Jew blesses Yerushalayim that its inner essence will be expressed, that the city will indeed be יְחֻדָּה לָהּ יְהוָה, “connected together,” uniting all of Israel.

The Jew continues to look at his brethren coming to Yerushalayim, which deepens his view of the purpose of the gathering in Yerushalayim: Yerushalayim is the spiritual center for all Jews, (and in the future will be a spiritual center for all nations). David’s choice of Yerushalayim was not accidental, but because **Yerushalayim has an intrinsic Divine foundation:** the *even hashetiya* from which the whole world was founded is in Yerushalayim and the binding of Yitzchak took place here. That is why Yerushalayim is the most suitable city for

the inspiration of the Divine within the Jewish people. The spiritual dimension of the city of Yerushalayim gives it a unique facet, which does not exist in other capital cities: the deep connection between *Yerushalayim shel mata*, “Yerushalayim of below” and *Yerushalayim shel maalah*, “Yerushalayim of above.” The fact that Yerushalayim is the sanctified city is the deep reason why the Jewish people unite around it: from the belief in one G-d, who unites all forces, comes the foundation of the unity of all reality, and the unity of the tribes of Israel.

After the Jew admired the unity and holiness expressed in Yerushalayim, he continues to observe and admire another element expressed in this special city: כִּי שָׁמָּה יָשְׁבוּ כְּסֻאוֹת לְמִשְׁפַּט. David HaMelech made Yerushalayim **the eternal city, within which his holy kingdom is united.** One of the important roles of the king is to do justice, and therefore, Yerushalayim, as the city of the kingdom, is supposed to be the city of justice. G-d’s expectation from the people of Israel is not only expressed on the ritual and spiritual level. G-d also expects and demands a high level of moral norms.

Yerushalayim is the city that represents all of these values: the connection to G-d, justice and unity.

Standing at the gates of Yerushalayim and seeing at the glory and greatness of all its aspects – physical, intellectual, social and national – the Jew would sing and bless the city that its inner essence will grow and be a blessing for the people of Israel and the world:

אֲדַבְרָה נָא שְׁלוֹם בְּךָ... אֲבַקֶּשֶׁה טוֹב לְךָ!

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