

Could You Pass the Conversion Test - Section #1 - Weekday Living:

Section #1 - Weekday Living - Class #19 Brocha Acharona - Part 2

Birchas Hamazon:

1. If your meal included **bread**, then (assuming you ate a *kezayit* quickly enough) you are obligated to say **Grace After Meals**. This is called Birchas Hamazon (Hebrew for "the food blessing"), and is commonly referred to as ***bentching*** -- which means "blessing" in Yiddish.
2. Birchas Hamazon is a Torah-level obligation, based on Deuteronomy 8:10: "You shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless." It is comprised of four brachot:
 - **The first blessing** acknowledges the food that we ate. It was formulated by Moshe when the manna fell in the desert.
 - **The second blessing** expresses our thanks for being given the Land of Israel. It was formulated by Joshua when he led the Jewish people into Israel.
 - **The third blessing** expresses our yearning to rebuild the holy city of Jerusalem. It was formulated by King David when he inaugurated Jerusalem as the capital of Israel 3,000 years ago, and when his son King Solomon built the Holy Temple.
 - **The fourth blessing** declares how God bestows His goodness to all creatures. It was instituted during the Second Temple period, when permission was given to bury millions of Jews who had been slaughtered by the Romans.
3. Additionally, we should recite one chapter of Psalms before beginning Birchas Hamazon: On weekdays, Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon..." On Shabbat and holidays, Psalm 126: "Shir HaMa'alot..."
4. As is true with other after-*brachot*, Birchas Hamazon is only recited when you have minimally eaten the volume of a ***kezayit***. This is estimated to be approximately:

TYPE OF BREAD:	SIZE OF SLICE:
white bread	one-third of a slice (8 grams)
rye bread	half a center slice (10 grams)
bagel	10% of an average size bagel (13 grams)
matzah	slightly less than half of a standard machine matzah(15 grams)

5. On a Torah level, the obligation to *bentch* is only when you are satiated; on the rabbinic level, it applies even when a *kezayit* of bread is consumed.
6. In order to obligate a *bracha achrona*, the *kezayit* has to be consumed within the time period of ***kiday achilat pras***, which is within 3-4 minutes.
7. If you have **not** eaten a *kezayit* of bread within the time period of *kiday achilat pras*, but you do feel **full and satisfied** from your meal (having eaten many other food along with the bread), you should specifically try to eat a *kezayit* of bread within 3 minutes in order to obligate yourself to *bentch*.
8. However, if you really can't stomach it. or there is no more bread around, then you do **not** say Birchas Hamazon, even if you are satiated. Of course, if you did eat a *kezayit* of a combination of other foods within *kiday achilat pras*, then you would say the appropriate *bracha achrona* (e.g. *Borei Nefashot*) for the combination.

What Foods Are Covered with Birchas Hamazon ?

1. Normally speaking, Birchas Hamazon **covers all foods** eaten in the course of a bread meal, even foods upon which you said a separate *bracha rishona*.
2. If you ate the food (e.g. grapefruit) as an **appetizer** before Hamotzee specifically to whet your appetite for the bread meal, then you **do not** say a separate *bracha achrona*. However, it's best to avoid such a situation, either by eating less than a *kezayit* of the apple, or taking longer than *kiday achilat pras*.

3. On Shabbat, when you say Kiddush on **wine** before eating bread, you **do not** say a separate *Al Ha'gefen*.
4. If you've been eating an **apple**, and then sit down to your bread meal, you **will** need to say a *bracha achrona* **before** saying Hamotzee, because -- unlike the grapefruit or Kiddush wine which was a precursor to the meal itself -- the apple was not eaten at all in conjunction with the meal.
5. However, if you plan to eat more fruit (whether apples or any other fruit) during the meal -- to the extent that when you said the *bracha rishona* on your apple you also "had in mind" the "during-meal fruits," then the "before-meal fruit" has been "**connected to the meal**." As such, it will be covered by Birkat Hamazon, without the need for a separate *bracha achrona*.
6. If you are eating some **pretzels** before a meal, you do **not** say a *bracha achrona* before Hamotzee, because *Pat Haba B'Kisnin* (baked mezonot foods) are related to the "bread family" and thus automatically considered "joined" to the main meal. However, there is one condition: At the time you said the *bracha rishona* on the pretzels, you were already planning to soon eat a meal.
7. We have already learned that when you eat *Pat Haba B'Kisnin*, the baked mezonot foods, in a small quantity as a **snack**, their *bracha rishona* is "*borei minei mezonot*" and their *bracha achrona* is *Al Ha'michya*. However, when eaten in a **large quantity** (*shiur keviyat seudah*), we treat them like bread -- we wash, say *Netilat Yadayim* and Hamotzee. And when we finish eating, we say Birkat Hamazon.
8. What happens if you **initially had in mind** to eat a *shiur keviyat seudah* of cookies, so you washed and said Hamotzee. However, you soon lost your appetite and ended up eating **less than** a *shiur keviyat seudah*, but **more than** a *kezayit* (within *kiday achilat pras*)? In this case you should say *Al Ha'michya* rather than Birkat Hamazon.
9. In the **converse** -- you wanted to eat a small amount of cookies, so you said *Borei Minei Mezonot*. Then your appetite improved and you ended up eating a *shiur keviyat seudah*. In this case, you should say Birkat Hamazon, and not *Al Ha'michya*.
10. If you ate a *kezayit* of bread and still feel **satiated** from the meal, and you cannot recall whether or not you *bentched*, you are required to *bentch*.
11. If you cannot recall if you *bentched* and you do **not feel satiated** from the meal (or are uncertain whether you are satiated), then you should not *bentch*.
12. However, the best solution is to remove yourself from the doubtful situation by either saying Hamotzee again and eating another *kezayit* of bread within *kiday achilat pras*, or asking someone, who has a certain obligation to *bentch*, to exempt you by saying the entire Birkat Hamazon out loud, while having you in mind.

Mayim Achronim:

1. Before *benching*, there is a special mitzvah to wash one's fingers; this is called *Mayim Achronim* (literally, "after-waters"). According to most authorities, women are equally obliged in this mitzvah as men are.
2. This washing differs in its details from *Netilat Yadayim* done at the beginning of a bread meal:
 - There is no *bracha* said on *Mayim Achronim*.
 - Unlike *Netilat Yadayim* which must be poured from a vessel, *Mayim Achronim* can be done at a faucet.
 - Unlike *Netilat Yadayim* which covers the entire hand, *Mayim Achronim* is sufficient to wash just until where the fingers join the palm of your hand.
3. Once you have washed *Mayim Achronim*, you should not speak or make any other interruption; rather begin *benching* right away -- within about 15 seconds.
4. Before starting to *bench*, a minority have a custom to either remove from the table or cover the used *Mayim Achronim* water. Most opinions say that you are not required to remove or cover the *Mayim Achronim*.