ואף אם מחליף המפת ניילון, נראה שנחשב הדבר לסילוק שלחן. ומכל מקום עדיף שיברך ברכת המזון תחילה, ואחר כך יחליף המפה הזו, ויברך על הפירות ברכה ראשונה ואחרונה.

If the table had been covered with a plastic disposable tablecloth, once that tablecloth is removed it is considered as if the table had been removed. Nevertheless, it is recommended to first recite *Birkat Hamazon* and then remove the tablecloth. After that, one may eat fruit or any other dessert, reciting blessings before and after eating it.[62]

Letziyon (*Halikhot Olam* Vol. II, page 37) countered that this is incorrect and runs against the grain of the halakha.

Wedding meals

Nowadays it is common at weddings for the waiters to remove the tables after the main course has been served and eaten to make room for dancing. The desserts and snacks are then served on buffet tables on the side. In this case, it should be necessary to recite blessings both before and after eating the snacks. This is in fact the ruling of the *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, page 104), Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (cited in *Vezot Haberakha* chapter 8) and the *Halakha Berura* (page 189). Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach and Harav Hayim Pinehas Scheinberg (both cited in *Vezot Haberakha*), however, ruled that since the tables are not moved to mark the end of the meal, this is not considered a case of the Talmud's "removal of the table." In any case, this debate is whether blessings are necessary when eating fruit or ice cream at the end of the wedding. If eating cake, kugel or meats at the end of the wedding, certainly no separate blessings are necessary, as will be explained in the following halakha.

Placing bread on the second table

The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (177:14) suggested avoiding all doubt by placing bread on the new table after the first table is removed. In that way, the people demonstrate that they have not ended their meal even though the table has been removed. This suggestion is taken from the *Levush* (177:2).

The *Hesed La'alafim* (177:3) stated that it will not help to place bread on the second table if the truth is that the people have no intention of eating any more bread. Perhaps this is the reason that the *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Naso* halakha 10) states that a God-fearing person will make sure to eat a bit of the bread just before performing *mayim aharonim*, thus establishing that he has not ended his meal until now.

Removing the tablecloth

The *sefer Nehar Mitzrayim* (page 13b) stated that once the tablecloth used for the meal has been removed, even though the people intend to continue eating fruits as dessert it is as if the table has been removed and it is necessary to recite separate blessings before eating the fruit and afterward. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Halikhot Olam* Vol. II, page 37) concurred with this ruling, but the *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, footnote on page 104) insisted that we cannot equate the removal of the tablecloth with the Talmud's removal of the table. Therefore he ruled that it is not necessary to recite a separate blessing after eating the fruit. Maran the Rishon Letziyon countered that just as removing the table demonstrates that one has ended the meal, removing the tablecloth accomplishes the same.

62. Removing a disposable tablecloth

The *Halakha Berura* (page 188) ruled that although we consider the removal of the tablecloth to be equal to removing the table, that is only when the cloth cover is removed leaving the table bare. Nowadays, it is common to set a table by spreading a tablecloth made of material on it and then covering that cloth with a clear plastic disposable tablecloth. This protects the material tablecloth from spills and stains. If people eat a meal and then remove the plastic table cover before dessert is served and before reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, it is not necessary to recite separate blessings after the dessert is eaten. Removing the disposable table cover does not signify the end of the meal as long as the real tablecloth remains on the table. If the table was covered with the disposable cover only, then when it is removed it is considered as if the table has been removed.

Upon researching this topic, however, it seems difficult to agree with this ruling. The Talmud's rule has nothing to do with tablecloths; it deals with the removal of the table itself. The *Nehar Mitzrayim*, cited in the previous footnote, decided that if someone removes the tablecloth, that act symbolizes the end of the meal just as much as removing the table does, and therefore it is equal to it in the eyes of halakha. If so, then the act of removing a disposable plastic tablecloth also symbolizes the end of the meal even if the cloth table cover is kept on the table. It makes more sense, therefore, to apply the ruling of the *Nehar Mitzrayim* to disposable tablecloths as well.

It may be that the *Halakha Berura* described the halakha for people who customarily remove the cloth cover from the table after the meal is over. For them, removing the

יט. האוכל אחר עקירת שלחן בשר או דגים או דייסא, לא יברך עליהם לא לפניהם ולא לאחריהם, דספק ברכות להקל. ולכתחילה לא יאכל דברים אלו אחר עקירת שלחן, כדי שלא יכניס עצמו למחלוקת הפוסקים. [ראה ביאור הלכה ד"ה שאין]

Foods eaten after table is removed

19) If someone eats meat, fish or porridge after the table has been removed, it is not necessary to recite any blessing on the food, not before eating it and certainly not afterward. It is recommended, however, that once the table has been removed, one refrain from eating these foods until after reciting *Birkat Hamazon*.[63]

disposable table cover does not signify the end of the meal. For people who leave the material tablecloth on the table even when no one is planning to eat, it is likely that the removal of the disposable cover does signify the end of the meal.

Nevertheless, it is best to avoid getting into situations where the halakha is in doubt. Even regarding the halakha of removing a regular tablecloth, the *Nehar Mitzrayim* recommended reciting *Birkat Hamazon* before removing the cloth from the table, and that certainly is recommended in this case.

63. The *Mishna Berura* (*Bi'ur Halakha*) cited the Rashba ruling that even after the table is removed no separate blessings are necessary when eating meat, fish or porridge since these foods are the main course of the meal. Rabbenu Hanan'el, however, ruled that separate blessings are necessary when eating meat or fish, but none are necessary when eating porridge. Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh* seems to rule that, after the table has been removed, separate blessings are necessary for all foods.

Following the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*, the *Halakha Berura* (page 191) ruled that in practice we would not follow the ruling of Maran, but if someone insists on reciting blessings in this case he may since Maran ruled that they are necessary. The *Birkat Hashem* (Vol. III) ruled that one must recite separate blessings on all foods in this case, but the *Halakha Berura* disagreed with that ruling.

Cooked chick peas

The *Halakha Berura* (page 193) ruled that if someone wishes to eat cooked chick peas after the table has been removed, he must recite separate blessings before eating and afterward. This is because this food is not usually served as part of a meal; it is usually a snack food or dessert. If the table and tablecloth have not been removed, it is necessary to recite a separate blessing before eating them but not afterward.

Beverages

The *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, footnote on page 103) states that even after the table has been removed, no separate blessings are necessary to drink a beverage. This is because people normally expect to continue drinking until they finally recite *Birkat Hamazon*. The *sefer Vezot Haberakha* (chapter 8) disagreed with this reasoning, arguing that once people have ended their meal by removing the bread and the table used for the meal, they have automatically ended their consumption of all subordinate foods and beverages. If someone wishes to drink something after removing the table, he must recite separate blessings.

Cakes

The *Or Letziyon*, citing Harav Akiva Eiger, ruled that no separate blessings are necessary to eat cake after the table has been removed.