**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

**Shiur #53: *Zimun* (2)**

[Last week](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-52-zimun-1), we discussed the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, which is recited before the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. When three people eat together, they become obligated to say the *Birkat Ha-Zimun* (*mishna*, *Berakhot* 45a). We noted that when there is a *zimun*, the leader is meant to say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for all members of the group. Nowadays, it is not customary for the leader to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for the entire group, but the leader should say at least the entire *zimun* out loud, and the participants should preferably say the words of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* along with the leader, ending each blessing slightly before the leader in order to answer “*amen*” (Shulchan Arukh 183:7 and Mishna Berura 27-28).

When three people eat bread together, not only do they become obligated to say the *zimun*, but they are also not permitted to separate. Similarly, if there are ten people, they should say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* with the special *zimun* of ten, which mentions the name of God (see *Berakhot* 50a), and they may not separate from the ten.

There are, however, times in which a person wishes to separate from the group and leave the meal early. This week we will discuss when, and how, one may leave a *zimun*.

**Separating from or Avoiding a *Zimun***

The *Acharonim* discuss whether one who eats with others may leave before participating in the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*.

Some *Acharonim* note that if one is unable to participate in the *zimun* of ten, during which the *Shem HaShem* is mentioned, he is permitted to break into a group of three and say the regular *zimun*. They base this ruling on a passage in the Talmud (*Berakhot* 50a):

Rava said: When we take a meal at the house of the Exilarch, we say grace in groups of three. Why not in groups of ten? Because the Exilarch might hear them and be angry. But could not the grace of the Exilarch suffice for them? Since everyone would respond loudly, they would not hear the one who says grace.

Accordingly, the Shulchan Arukh (193:1) rules that if one fears that he will not hear the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, and by assembling ten men in order to say the proper *Birkat Ha-Zimun* he will disrupt the meal and anger the host, he may form a smaller *zimun* and forgo the *zimun* of ten.

The Mishna Berurua (193:16) adds that even if one must leave early in order to perform a mitzvah he may form a smaller *zimun*. Similarly, the Arukh Ha-Shulchan (193:9) writes that even if one wishes to leave early (*kasha lahem ha-yeshiva*), and certainly if he must leave in order to fulfill a *mitzva*, and he is unable to gather a group of ten for a *zimun*, he may participate in a *zimun* of three and then leave. Furthermore, the Taz (200:3) insists that one who finishes early is certainly permitted to form a *zimun* of three, and the Talmud referred to a case in which everyone finished eating together.

What if he is unable to gather even three for a *zimun*? The Arukh Ha- Shulchan (ibid.) suggests that if he is leaving in order to perform a *mitzva*, he may be exempt due to the principle of *osek be-mitzva patur min ha-mitzva* (one who is engaged in the performance of one *mitzva* is exempt from another). He concludes, however, that in this case, he is not exempt and that he must stay for the *zimun*.

Some suggest that in this scenario, one should avoid becoming obligated at all in the *zimun*. As we mentioned last week, the *Rishonim* discuss the circumstances in which the people who eat together are considered to be a group that becomes obligated in the *zimun*. The Tur cites a debate between Rabbeinu Yona and the Tur’s father, the Rosh. Rabbeinu Yona (*Berakhot* 31a, s.v. *ve-omer*) implies that only when a group of people begin eating together do they incur the obligation of *zimun*; if they did not begin their meal together, they say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* separately. The Rosh (7:29) writes that as long as they ate part of the meal together, they become obligated in the *Birkat Ha-Zimun* and may not separate. The Shulchan Arukh (193:2) rules that as long as the people finish eating together, they become obligated to say the *zimun*. Accordingly, the Mishna Berura (19) rules that if one begins to eat after the others and finishes first, he does not become obligated in the *zimun*, and he may say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* before the others finish. If so, we might suggest that one who plans on leaving early should avoid beginning or ending the meal with others.

Some *Acharonim* suggest that although one who eats with others becomes obligated to participate in the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, if one has explicit intention when eating not to “join” together with the others, he is not obligated in the *zimun* and he may say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* alone. The Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav, OC 168:18), for example, writes that people are permitted to “sit together with the intention of not joining together.”

Similarly, R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, OC 1:56) writes:

In my humble opinion, there is a simple solution for those who do not wish to wait until the end of the meal and the *Sheva Berakhot*. They should say explicitly before they sit down to ear that they do not intend on joining with the other people who are eating, and then, although they are sitting at one table, they are not obligated in the *zimun*.

R. Feinstein proves this from an interested comment in the Rema (193:3), who writes that it is not customary for those who eat in the house of a non-Jew to say the *zimun*. He explains that although they sit down to eat, it is as if they did not eat together. Similarly, the Magen Avraham (492:9) explains that even when three people eat together for the *Se’uda Ha-Mafseket* before *Tish’a Be-Av*, they should not say the *zimun*, as they clearly did not have in mind to join together, since it is customary not to eat with others at the final meal before the *Tish’a Be-Av* fast. However, R. Avraham David b. Asher Anshel Wahrman (1770–1840), in his Eshel Avraham (Buczacz), rules that having intention not to join others for the meal does not exempt one from becoming obligated in the *zimun*.

Despite the difficulties with the above suggestions, many authorities state simply that in extenuating circumstances, one may leave early even at the cost of missing the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*. For example, R. Yosef Hahn (Frankfurt am Main, 1570-1637) writes in his Yosef Ometz (159):

Although three or ten [who ate together] are not permitted to separate, it seems to me that at large meals which last a long time, and some find the length difficult due to health, or due to the waste of time, or their fear that they will be unable to wait up the next morning for learning or prayer, they have permission to say the blessing (i.e. *Birkat Ha-Mazon*) without a *zimun*… And I have relied upon this numerous times. However, if my friends and acquaintances are sitting with me, I say the *zimun* with then.

He bases his practice on the passage cited above (*Berakhot* 50a), in which three may break away from a group of more than ten in order to make a *zimun*. He argues that similarly, when necessary, one may forgo the *zimun* of three as well (see Arukh Ha-Shulchan above, who disagrees). The Minchat Yitzchak (2:43) concurs that one may leave and even skip the *zimun* altogether in extenuating circumstances.

The *Acharonim* also discuss, in addition to the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, whether one who participates in a wedding meal is obligated to stay for *Birkat Ha-Mazon* in order to hear the *Sheva Berakhot*. While some believe that the participants of the meal are obligated to hear the *Sheva Berakhot* (see Iggerot Moshe, AE 87), others claim that the only those who participate in the *zimun* at the end of the meal are obligated (see Minchat Yitzchak 2:43 and Tzitz Eliezer 11:84). Some even suggest that the obligation of *Sheva Berakhot* does not fall upon the participants; rather, there is an obligation that the meal itself must conclude with *Sheva Berakhot*, regardless of whether everyone participates in the *Zimun*.

Next week, we will discuss who is including in the *zimun* and who is obligated in this blessing.