**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

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**Shiur #59: *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (1)**

**Introduction**

This week, we begin our study of the laws of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Torah teaches: “And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you (*Devarim* 8:10). The Talmud (*Berakhot* 48b) derives from this verse that there is a Biblical commandment to recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon* after eating. The *Rishonim* (Rambam, Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, positive commandment 19; Sefer Ha-Chinukh 430) count *Birkat Ha-Mazon* as one of the 613 *mitzvot*.

It is important to note the uniqueness of this blessing. Seemingly, this is the only blessing of Biblical origin (see, however, the Ramban’s comments to the Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, mitzva 15, regarding *Birkot Ha-Torah*). This point raises numerous questions. Beyond determining which foods, and what quantity of them, generate an obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, what are the characteristics of the Biiblical mitzva and how did one fulfill this mitzva before the Rabbis formulated the text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*? In the upcoming *shiurim*, we will attempt to relate to these questions.

**Over Which Foods Does One Say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*?**

The Talmud cites a difference of opinion regarding whether *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, referred to by the *mishna* as the “three blessings” (see below), is said after eating bread or other foods. The *mishna* teaches:

If one has eaten grapes, figs, or pomegranates, he says a grace of three blessings (*Birkat Ha-Mazon*) after them; so says Rabban Gamliel. The *Chakhamim*, however, say: One blessing which includes three (*Al Ha-Michya*). R. Akiva says: If one ate only boiled vegetables, and that is his meal, he says after it *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

While Rabban Gamliel maintains that *Birkat Ha-Mazon* should be said after eating any of the seven species (see *Berakhot* 37b) and R. Akiva believes that it should be said after any “meal,” regardless of its content, the *Chakhamim* rule that *Birkat Ha-Mazon* should only be said after eating bread.

This debate may highlight the nature of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. According to Rabban Gamliel, *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is said after eating “the seven species with which the land of Israel is praised.” The *gemara* (ibid.) explains:

What is the reason of Rabban Gamliel? Because it is written, “A land of wheat and barley…” (*Devarim* 8:8), and it is also written, “A land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness” (ibid. 8:9), and it is written, “And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God” (ibid. 8:10).

Rabban Gamliel apparently maintains that the blessing referred to in verse 10 modifies the previous two verses, which speak of the seven species with which the Land of Israel was blessed. Indeed, the verse continues that the blessing is recited “for the good land which He has given you.” Although one might suggest that R. Akiva and the *Chakhamim* view *Birkat Ha-Mazon* as a blessing said upon eating a meal (of bread or other foods), this verse, the text of the second and third blessings, as well as certain *halakhot* related to *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (see *Berakhot* 48b regarding mentioning the land of Israel and Yerushalayim; see also Rashi, *Berakhot* 20b, s.v. *o derabannan*) indicate that *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is fundamentally a blessing over the Land of Israel..

The halakha is in accordance with the view of the *Chakhamim*. As the Rambam writes (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 3:11; see also Yerushalmi, *Berakhot* 6:1): “Upon whatever one says the blessing of *Ha-Motzi* before [eating], one says afterwards *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.”

**The Quantity and Time for *Birkat Ha-Mazon***

Although the Talmud assumes, based upon the verse cited above (*Devarim* 8:10), that *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is of Biblical origin, the *gemara* teaches that one becomes obligated only under certain conditions.

The *mishna* (*Berakhot* 45a) cites a debate regarding the amount that one must each in order to incur an obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon*:

How much [must one have eaten] to count? As much as an olive (*ke-zayit*). R. Yehuda says: As much as an egg (*ke-beitza*).

The Talmud explains:

This would seem to show that R. Meir's standard is an olive and R. Yehuda's an egg … R. Meir holds that “you shall eat” refers to eating and “you shall be satisfied” to drinking, and the standard of eating is an olive. R. Yehuda holds that “and you shall eat and be satisfied” signifies an eating that gives satisfaction, and this must be as much as an egg.

R. Meir maintains that if one has “eaten,” which is define as having eaten the equivalent of the size of an olive, one must say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, whereas according to R. Yehuda, one must also be “satisfied,” which we can assume occurs after eating an egg-size quantity of bread.

The *Rishonim* point out that the Talmud implies elsewhere (*Berakhot* 20b) that the *shiurim* of *ke-beitza* and *ke-zayit* are Rabbinic:

R. Avira discoursed – sometimes in the name of R. Ammi, and sometimes in the name of R. Assi – as follows: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, it is written in your law, “Who does not regard persons and does not take bribes” (*Devarim* 10:17). But do you not regard the people of Israel? As it says, “The Lord lift up His countenance upon you” (*Bamidbar* 6:26). He replied to them: Should I not lift up My countenance for Israel. For I wrote for them in the Torah, “And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God” (*Devarim* 8:10), and they are particular [to say the grace] if the quantity is but an olive or an egg!

This source implies that one becomes obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* only after eating a large quantity, which “satisfies.” The Jewish People, however, choose to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* after eating even smaller quantities of a *ke-zayit* or a *ke-beitza*.

How, then, are we to understand the debate in the *mishna*?

Some *Rishonim* (Tosafot 49b, s.v. *rabbi*; Rosh 7:24; see also Rambam 1:1) explain that one incurs a Biblical obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* only after eating enough food to be fully satiated. The debate cited above refers to the Rabbinic obligation, which one incurs after eating either a *ke-zayit* or a *ke-beitza*. In contrast, the Ra’avad (Hasagot to Rif 12a; see also comments to Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 5:15) and Ramban (Milchamot Hashem 12a) explain that R, Yehuda and R. Meir debate the Biblical obligation of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, while the other gemara (*Berakhot* 20b) is not accepted by these opinions.

This debate is crucial to understanding two other Talmudic passages.

In one place (*Berakhot* 48a), the gemara cites R. Yochanan, who rules that one who eats even a *kezayit* of bread can say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for others. This is somewhat perplexing in light of another passage (*Berakhot* 20b) that states that one who is obligated in a *mitzva mi-derabannan* may not fulfill the obligation of one who is obligated *mi-de’oraita*.

Tosafot, the Rosh, and Rabbeinu Yona (*Berakhot* 35b, s.v. *u-veha*) explain that as long as a person may theoretically incur a Biblical obligation, he may fulfill the obligation of another person even if technically his obligation is only *mi-derabannan*, such as the man who ate only a *kezayit* of bread. However, one who can only be obligated *mi-derabannan*, such as a child and possibly a woman (see below), may not fulfill the obligation of another who is obligated *mi-de’oraita*.

The Ra’avad and Ramban disagree and explain that this passage is in accordance with the view of R. Meir, who believes that one who eats a *kezayit* of bread is Biblically obligated to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. Similarly, they derive from another passage (*Berakhot* 20b), which says that a woman may say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for her husband, that women are Biblically obligated to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (see below).

The Shulchan Arukh (186:2), following the view of Tosafot, rules that one who eats only a *ke-zayit* of bread is Rabbinically obligated to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Rema cites the Mordekhai (*Berakhot* 177), who maintains that one who did not drink is also only obligated *mi-derabannan*, and therefore one who says *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for other should drink as well.

The Shulchan Arukh (184:4) adds that therefore, if one is in doubt if he said *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, he should say it, as this constitutes a *safek de’oraita*., a doubt regarding a Biblical commandment. The Mishna Berura (15) notes that this is true only if one is “satiated,” as if one ate a smaller amount, the obligation is only Rabbinic, and *safek derabannan le-kula*.

The Talmud teaches in numerous contexts that in order to violate certain prohibitions or in order to fulfill certain *mitzvot* that require “*akhila*” (eating), one must eat a specific amount (*shi’ur*), most often a *ke-zayit* (the size of an olive), in a certain amount of time. This amount of time is generally referred to “*kedei akhilat peras*,” the amount of time it takes to eat half a loaf of bread. This amount of time is relevant in the context of eating prohibited foods (see *Keritut* 12b), as well as when fulfilling *mitzvot*, such as *matza* (*Berakhot* 37b) and *marror* (*Pesachim* 114b). This amount of time is also relevant in the context of eating of Yom Kippur (see Tosefta, *Yoma* 4:3), although the *shi’ur* of eating on Yom Kippur is a *ka-kotevet* (the size of a date).

The *Acharonim* (see, for example, Magen Avraham 210:1; Panim Me’irot 2:27) question whether this *shi’ur* applies to *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. Some suggest that since *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is dependent upon “satisfaction” (*sevi’a*), as the verse states, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you” (*Devarim* 8:10), and not “eating,” even one who eats the minimum amount over a longer period than *kedei akhilat peras* should be required to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. This is not the accepted view.

[Elsewhere](http://etzion.org.il/en/summary-halakhot-berakha-acharona), we discussed the measurements of a *ke-zayit* and *ke-baitza*, as well as the time period known as *bi-kidei akhilat peras*.

**Women and *Birkat Ha-Mazon***

The *gemara* (*Berakhot* 20b) asks whether a woman’s obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is *mi-de’oraita* or *mi-derabannan*. The *Rishonim* discuss this question and the conclusion of the *gemara*.

Why might one believe that women would not be obligated *mi-de’oraita* in *Birkat Ha-Mazon*? *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is not a *mitzvat asei she’ha-zeman gerama*, a time-bound mitzva,from which women are generally exempt. Rashi (s.v. *de-rabannan*) explains, based upon the verse “for the good land which He has given you,” that since the land is not divided among women, they are exempt from *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. Tosafot (s.v. *nashim*) disagrees and notes that the land of Israel is also not distributed to *kohanim*! Rather, since one must mention “*berit ve-Torah*” in *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, and women are technically exempt from both, they are not Biblically obligated.

Regarding the conclusion of the *gemara*, the Rif (see Rambam 12a), as well as the Ra’avad and Rashba (s.v. *ela*) rule that women are equally obligated in *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 5:1) writes that the *gemara*’s question was left unresolved.

The Shulchan Arukh (186:1) rules:

Women are obligated in *Birkat Ha-Mazon.* There is a doubt as to whether they are obligated Biblically and therefore exempt men, or if they are only obligated Rabinically and only exempt others who are only obligated Rabinically.

Based on our discussion above, what should a woman, who ate enough to be satiated, but is unsure whether she said *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, do? The Acharonim discuss this question at length (see, for example, Sha;are Teshuva 186:6 and Mishna Berura 199:3), as it touches upon broader legal principle as well, including the definition of “*sefeik sefeika*” (a ‘double doubt’, here being whether the woman is obligated in *Birkat Ha-Mazon* from the Torah, and whether or not she said *Birkat Ha-Mazon*). This question remains unresolved, as some (see, for example, Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 44:11) rule that she should not repeat the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, and some (see Sha’ar Efraim 11, Chayyei Adam 47:2) insist that she should say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Mishna Berura (ibid.) concludes that one who wishes to rely upon the Sha’ar Efraim may do so.

We mentioned [previously](http://etzion.org.il./en/shiur-54-zimun-3-women-and-zimun) that the Sefer Ha-Michtam (*Berakhot* 45a) and R. Yehonatan of Luneil (Hilkhot He-Rif, *Berakhot* 45a) claim that this is why men and women cannot join together to form a *zimun*, as they may bear different levels of obligation. Other *Rishonim* offer different explanations.

Next week, we will discuss the text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.