**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

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**Shiur #60: *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (2)**

**Introduction**

[Last week](http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-59-birkat-ha-mazon-1), we began 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.

We discussed the debate cited by the Talmud regarding which foods generate an obligation of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, the amount of food and time within one must eat in order to be obligated to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, and whether women are Biblically or Rabbinically obligated in this mitzva.

This week, we will discuss the text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* and the relationship between the Biblical mitzva and the established text.

**The Text of the Blessings**

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 48b) brings two seemingly contradictory passages regarding the origins of the text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. On the one hand, the *gemara* relates:

R. Nachman said: Moshe instituted for Israel the blessing *Ha-Zan* [the first blessing] at the time when manna descended for them. Yehoshua instituted for them the benediction of the *Ha-Aretz* [the second blessing] when they entered the land [of Israel]. David and Shlomo instituted the blessing which closes *Boneh Yerushalayim* [the third blessing]. David instituted the words, “For Israel Your people and for Jerusalem Your city” (*al Yisrael amekha ve-al Yerushalayim irekha*) and Shlomo instituted the words, “For the great and holy house” (*ha-bayit ha-gadol ve-ka-kadosh*). The blessing *Ha-Tov Ve-Hameitiv* was instituted [by the Sages] in Yavneh with reference to those who were slain in Betar [the final battle of the Bar Kochba revolt]. For R. Mattena said: On the day on which permission was granted to bury those slain in Betar, they ordained in Yavneh that “Who is good and bestows good” should be said. “Who is good,” because they [the bodies] did not putrefy, and “Who bestows good,” because they were allowed to be buried.

This passage clearly states that although *Birkat Ha-Mazon* may be a Biblical obligation, the text of its blessings was composed later, by Moshe, Yehoshua, David, Shlomo, and in the great academy of Yavneh.

On the other hand, another passage states:

Our Rabbis taught: Where is *Birkat Ha-Mazon* intimated in the Torah? In the verse, “And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless” (*Devarim* 8:10) – this signifies the blessing of *Ha-Zan*. “The Lord Your God” – this signifies the benediction of *zimun*. “For the land” – this signifies the blessing of *Ha-Aretz*. “The good” – this signifies *Boneh Yerushalayim*. And similarly it says This good mountain and Lebanon (*Devarim* 3:25). “Which He has given you” – this signifies the blessing of *Hu Heitiv Hu Meitiv*.

This passage implies that the blessings themselves are alluded to by the Biblical verses.

The *Rishonim* disagree as to if, and how, to reconcile this apparent contradiction. The Rif (35b) and Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 2:1) cite only the first passage, which describes how the blessings were authored by Moshe, Yehoshua, David, and Shlomo. In fact, the Rambam (Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, *Shoresh* 1) writes that before the specific blessings were instituted, “We were commanded to bless after eating, each person according to his ability (*kol echad lefi da’ato*).”

Other *Rishonim* disagree. For example, the Ritva (*Berakhot* 48b, s.v. *ha-tov*; see also Ra’ah, s.v. *ha-tov*) argues that if the text of the blessings were completely authored by later figures, *Birkat Ha-Mazon* would be considered a Rabbinic commandment, like prayer. Rather, he explains:

Part of the formula of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is of Biblical origin, as one is obligated to mention and bless [God] for his food and to mention the land and Yerushalayim… Therefore, the entire *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is considered to be *mi-de’oraita*, as its text and formula are as mentioned. However, if he were to say it in a different manner, he would have fulfilled his obligation.

Other *Rishonim* (see Tosafot 16a, s.v *ve-chotam*; Rosh 6:22) also imply that aspects of the text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* may be *mi-de’oraita*. Some *Rishonim* even imply that the number of blessings may also be a Biblical obligation (see Tosafot ibid.; see Bach 188).

The Mishna Berura (194:13) cites a debate whether the three Biblical blessings “*me’akvin zeh et zeh*,” that is, whether they are three parts of one mitzva or if there is value in saying even one blessing. If one finds himself without a *siddur* and only knows one or two of the blessings by heart, can and should he say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*? The Mishna Berura suggests that if one ate enough to incur a biblical obligation to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (*kedei sevi’a*) and he only knows one or two of the blessings, he should say those blessings. If, however, he ate less than this amount, he should not say the blessings.

Alternatively, some suggest that in such a case, one should say *Al Ha-Michya* if possible (see Piskei Teshuvot 187:2). Moreover, as we discussed previously, although most *Acharonim* (see, for example, Shulchan Arukh 202:11 and Mishna Berura 202:55) maintain that *Borei Nefashot* is not a “general” blessing and cannot be said after eating foods that require a different blessing, such as *Birkat Ha-Mazon* or *Al Ha-Michya,* some (see Kaf Ha-Chaim 202:79) maintain that *be-di’avad*, one who says *Borei Nefashot* after even a food that requires *Al Ha-Michya* fulfills his obligation. Accordingly, R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, OC 1:74) suggests that if one does not have a *siddur* and does not know *Al Ha-Michya* or even the first blessing of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* by heart, he should say *Borei Nefashot* instead.

**Other Themes of *Birkat Ha-Mazon***

The Talmud (49a) mentions additional themes that should be mentioned in *Birkat Ha-Mazon*:

It has been taught: If one does not say the words “a desirable, good, and extensive land” (*eretz chemda tova u-rechava*) in the blessing of *Ha-Aretz* and does not mention the kingdom of the house of David (*malkhut beit David*) in the blessing *Boneh Yerushalayim*, he has not performed his obligation. Nachum the Elder says: He must mention the covenant (*berit*)in it [the second blessing]. R. Yose says: He must mention in it the Torah.

The *gemara* seemingly describes two categories of themes that must be mentioned. Regarding those which relate to the land and the Kingdom of David, if one does not mention them one has not fulfilled his obligation. However, regarding “*berit*” (*ve-al beritkha*) and Torah (*ve-al Toratkha*), the *gemara* only says that one “must” mention them. Indeed, the Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 2:3) cites the passage from Nachum the Elder.

However, elsewhere (*Berakhot* 49a) the *gemara* teaches:

And whoever does not mention the covenant (*berit*) and the Torah in the blessing of *Ha-Aretz* and the kingdom of the house of David (*malkhut beit David*) in *Boneh Yerushalayim* has not performed his obligation.

This passage implies that we do not distinguish between the themes; they are all an integral part of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. This appears to be the view of Tosafot (20b, s.v. *nashim*), who explain that women are Biblically exempt from *Birkat Ha-Mazon* because they are not obligated in *berit* and Torah. The Rashba (20b, s.v. *rav*) disagrees and insists that the themes of *berit* and Torah are only *mi-derabannan*.

Finally, the *Rishonim* also disagree as to whether one must repeat the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* if one accidentally omits these themes. The Tur (187) cites his brother, R. Yechiel, who is inclined to rule that one has fulfilled his obligation, while the Tur disagrees and rules that one must repeat *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

The Shulchan Arukh (187:3-4) rules that one who omits *berit*, Torah, or *malkhut beit David* must repeat *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Bi’ur Halakha (s.v. *machzirin*) rules that since there is a debate, if one is unsure if he omitted these passages, he should not go back and repeat the blessing. He adds that since nowadays *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is well known by all, it is highly unlikely that someone would omit these specific phrases.

Interestingly, the Magen Avraham (182) cites an abridged version of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, which includes the themes mentioned above. Some *Acharonim* (see Mishna Berura 187:4) suggest that at times, one may educate a child to say this abridged version.

All agree that the fourth blessing, *Ha-Tov Ve-HaMeitiv*, is only *mi-derabannan*, and it is therefore customary to answer “*amen”* after one’s own blessing after the third blessing, *Boneh Yerushalayim* (Shulchan Arukh 188:1).

**Singing *Tzur MiShelo* During the Shabbat Meal**

According to the *Rishonim* cited above, it appears that if one were to thank God for the food that he ate, and certainly if he were to include the themes mentioned above, he might fulfill his biblical obligation of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, derived from and “you should bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you” (*Devarim* 8:10).

Indeed, the *Acharonim* discussion a similar idea in the context of *Kiddush*, in which one may fulfill the Biblical commandment of “*zakhor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadsho*” through the Friday night *Shemoneh Esrei* (see, for example, Rashba, Responsa 4:95, Magen Avraham 271, and Hagahot R. Akiva Eiger ibid.), or the Biblical mitzva of *tefilla* by saying blessings and supplications.

This concern apparently lead R. Chaim of Volozhin, as recorded by his student R. Asher Ha-Kohen in his Keter Rosh (94), a collection of R. Chaim of Volozhin’s halakhic and spiritual practices, to refrain from singing *Tzur Mi-Shelo* on Shabbat. *Tzur Mi-Shelo* is a *zemer* modeled after the blessings of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. Some *Acharonim* explain that according to the view that maintains that *mitzvot einan tzerikhot kavanna* (one can fulfill a mitzva without intention), regarding which the Shulchan Aukh (OC 60:4) does not rule definitively, one who sings *Tzur Mi-Shelo* is in essence fulfilling the Biblical obligation of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

Seemingly, this question may depend upon a number of halakhic debates.

First, even according to those who maintain that *mitzvot einan tzerikhot* *kavanna*, some maintain that if one clearly has in mind NOT to fulfill the mitzva, then the mitzva is not fulfilled (see Ritva, *Rosh Ha-Shana* 28a; see also Rabbeinu Shmuel as cited by the Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona, *Berakhot* 6a, who disagrees).

Second, as mentioned above, one who omits certain themes, such as *berit* and Torah (OC 187:3), *malkhut beit David* (ibid. 4), and the *Retzei* addition added on Shabbat (188:6), may not fulfill the obligation of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. These themes are not mentioned in *Tzur Mi-Shelo*.

Finally, it is worth noting that the *Acharonim* discuss whether when the Rabbis defined how a mitzva should be fulfilled, they undermined and uprooted the Biblical fulfillment of the commandment. This discussion arises regarding the statement of Beit Shamai (*Sukka* 28a) regarding one who sits in a *sukka* that is invalid according to a Rabbinic *gezeira*: “You did not fulfill the mitzva in your lifetime” (see Tosafot, *Sukka* 3a, s.v. *de-amar*). Similarly, the *Acharonim* discuss the scope of the Talmudic dictum that “the Rabbis have the authority to uproot a mitzva from the Torah” (*Yevamot* 90b). For example, does one who blows the shofar on Shabbat, despite the Rabbinic prohibition to do so, fulfill the Biblical mitzva? In our context, we might suggest that once the Rabbis established the set text of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, it may not be fulfilled in any other manner.

It is customary to sing *Tzur Mi-Shelo* and not to be concerned with the opinion of R. Chaim of Volozhin.

Next week, we will continue our discussion of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.