**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

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This week’s *shiurim* are dedicated in memory of   
Lillian Grossman *z”l* – Devorah Leah bat Shlomo Ha-Levi   
by Larry and Maureen Eisenberg

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Dedicated *le-zekher nishmot* Amelia Ray and Morris Ray   
on the occasion of their eighth *yahrtzeits*   
by their children Patti Ray and Allen Ray

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**Shiur #52: *Zimun* (1)**

[Last week](http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-51-kos-shel-birkat-ha-mazon), we discussed the *kos shel Birkat Ha-Mazon*. We noted that the *Rishonim* disagree as to whether one must say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over wine. Some (Ba’al Ha-Ma’or, *Pesachim* 39a, for example) insist that one must say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over wine. Tosafot (*Pesachim* 105b, s.v. *shma mina berakha*; see also Hagahot Maimoniot, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:60) records that while the Rashbam and Rabbeinu Yechiel of Paris maintain that even an individual must say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over a cup of wine, it was customary to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over wine only when said with a *zimun*. Other *Rishonim* disagree, including the Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:15), who writes explicitly that *Birkat Ha-Mazon* need not be said over wine.

The Shulchan Arukh (182:1) cites all of the opinions. The Rema adds “It is still a *mitzva min ha-muvchar* to say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over a cup [of wine].” The Mishna Berura (182:4, 17) relates that it is customary to be lenient, although if one has wine in one’s house, “it is certainly a *mitzva min ha-muvchar* and all agree that one should say the blessing over the cup [of wine].” He adds that it is customary for an individual, even one who has wine in his home, not to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* over wine.

We also related to halakhic ramifications of this question. For example, may one drink from the cup of wine used for *Birkat Ha-Mazon* after dark? When saying *Sheva Berakhot* at *Se'udah Shelishit* after dark, may one drink from the wine?

This week, we will discuss the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, which is recited before the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

***Birkat Ha-Zimun* – Source and Definition**

There are two aspects of the original practice of the *zimun*.

First, when three people eat together, they become obligated to say the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*: “If three people have eaten together, it is their duty to invite [one another to say grace]” (*Mishna*, *Berakhot* 45a). The *gemara* asks:

From where is this derived? R. Assi says: Because Scripture says, “Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together” (*Tehillim* 34:4). R. Abbahu derives it from here: “When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe [plural] greatness unto our God” (*Devarim* 32:3).

Similarly, the Talmud (*Berakhot* 48b) teaches:

Our Rabbis taught: Where is the recitation of *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 benediction of “*Ha-Zan*” (“He who feeds”); “the Lord your God” – this signifies the benediction of *zimun*. (See Tosefta 6:1 and Hagahot Ha-Gra).

Although both passages seem to refer to the source of the *zimun*, Rashi (ibid. 45a s.v. *mena*) explains that the second source teaches that there is an obligation of *zimun*, while the first source teaches that a *zimun* is said with three people.

The Ra’avad (Rif, *Berakhot* 44b) assumes that the *zimun* is a Biblical obligation. Most other *Rishonim* (see, for example, Ra’ah, s.v. *mena*, and Ritva, s.v. *de-khtiv*; see also Rashba 50a, s.v. *ve-levarkhu*) insist that *zimun* is only a Rabbinic obligation.

What is the nature of this *Birkat Ha-Zimun*? The Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 5:2) implies that the *zimun* is merely an additional blessing said before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* in the company of three or more people. When three people eat together, they become obligated to recite five blessings instead of four. Rashi (*Berakhot* 45b, s.v. *ve-amar*) offers a different understanding. He explains that when three eat together, “they combine their blessings together in the plural language, such as ‘and we bless.’” Rashi implies that the *zimun* in not an additional blessing; rather, the three or more people who eat join together to offer one blessing on behalf of the group.

This brings us to the second aspect of the *zimun*. The original practice of the *zimun* entailed the leader reciting the entire *Birkat Ha-Mazon* on behalf of the other participants. Indeed, Rashi (ibid. 45b, s.v. *ve-amar*) further implies that although one person may say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for another and fulfill his obligation through the mechanism of *shome’a ke-oneh*, when three people ate together, the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* said by the leader of the *zimun* is actually the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* of the entire group. The Rambam may also have adopted this understanding of the mechanism of the *zimun*, in addition to his understanding of the obligation of the *zimun* (see *Shiurim Le-Zekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, p. 105). Although nowadays it is not customary for the leader to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for the entire group, the leader should say at least the entire *zimun* (see below) out loud, and the participants should preferably say the words 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).

The *Rishonim* discuss the definition of the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*. The *zimun* traditionally begins when the leader says “*Rabbotai nevarekh*.” Based upon different understandings of a Talmudic discussion (*Berakhot* 46a, “*ad heikhan birkat ha-zimun*”), the *Rishonim* debate the length of the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 5:2) and Rif (*Berakhot* 34b) rule that the *Birkat Ha-Zimun* includes only the *zimun* itself, until “*barukh she-akhalnu mi-shelo*.” Other *Rishonim*, including Tosafot (ibid. 46a, s.v. *le-heikhan*), the Rosh (ibid, 7:12) and the Tur (200), rule that the first blessing, *Ha-Zan*, is part of the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*. Therefore, one who stops eating in order to listen to the *zimun* of his friend should not resume eating until after the blessing of *Ha-Zan*. The Shulchan Arukh (200:2) rules in accordance with the Rif and Rambam, while the Rema rules like the Tosafot, Rosh, and Tur. Once again, the *Rishonim* seem to debate whether the *Birkat Ha-Zimun* is an additional, introductory blessing, or whether it integrates into the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, transforming an individual’s blessing into a group blessing.

**Saying *Birkat Ha-Mazon* Without a *Zimun***

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 45b) teaches:

Abaye said: We have a tradition that if two people have eaten together, it is their duty to separate. It has been taught similarly: If two people have eaten together, it is their duty to separate.

The *gemara* first rules that when two people have eaten together, they should recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon* separately; one should not recite it for the other. Interestingly, the Rosh (*Berakhot* 7:6) notes that although Rashi (s.v. *mitzva*) explains that preferably one should not even say the *Birkat Ha-Motzi* for another person, it is not customary to act in this manner, and even Rashi apparently did not insist that one person not say the *Birkat Ha-Motzi* for another.

In any case, the *gemara* qualifies this statement:

When is this case? When they are both educated men. But if one is educated and the other illiterate, the educated one says the benedictions and this exempts the illiterate one.

If one is not able to recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for himself, another may say it on his behalf, employing the principle of “*shome’a ke-oneh*.”

In this context, the *Rishonim* disagree as to whether one may fulfill the obligation for another even if he does not understand Hebrew. Historically, this question often referred to women, who were generally not educated and did not understand Hebrew. Tosafot (*Berakhot* 45b), as well as the Rosh (*Berakhot* 7:6), ask whether a man may recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for a woman who does not understand Hebrew.  They cite Rashi, who proves from the *gemara* (*Megilla* 17a) that just as someone who does not understand Hebrew fulfills his obligation of *Kriat Megilla* through hearing it read in Hebrew, even one who does not understand Hebrew may fulfill his obligation of *berakhot* and *tefilla* through hearing the recitation of another. Tosafot refute this comparison, explaining that since *pirsumei nisa* is the central element of *Kriat Megilla*, one can fulfill his obligation even without understanding; the same is not true in the case of *berakhot*.

The Shulchan Arukh (193:1) rules that one may only recite *Birkat Ha-Mazon* for another person if that person understands Hebrew. R. Moshe Isserlis (*Darkhei Moshe* 193, *Rema* 199:7), however, notes that the custom follows the position of Rashi, who rules that one may fulfill an obligation through listening to another recite a Hebrew text even without understanding the meaning. The Mishna Berura (193:5) concurs, pointing out that common custom is for one to fulfill the obligation for another, regardless of whether the second person understands Hebrew.

Incidentally, the Shulchan Arukh (183:7) writes that nowadays, each person recites *Birkat Ha-Mazon* to himself, even in the presence of a *zimun*, as it is difficult to listen and concentrate for the entire *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. The Mishna Berura, citing the Magen Avraham (193:2), adds that similarly, those who do not understand Hebrew should preferably repeat the text, even of *Kiddush*, word for word after the reader, as it is difficult to concentrate and listen to someone else’s recitation.

***Birkat Ha-Mazon* with a *Zimun***

Under certain circumstances, when three people eat bread together, they become obligated to say the *zimun*. In other cases, they may pursue a *zimun*, although it is not obligatory. Regarding three people who ate together, the Talmud (ibid.) states:

If three people have eaten together, it is their duty to invite one another [to say *Birkat Ha-Mazon*], and they are not permitted to separate.

The *gemara* rules that when three people eat together, they must say the *Birkat Ha-Zimun* and they may not separate. If there are six or more people, they may divide into groups of three. However, 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).

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*. Therefore, 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. We will return to this point next week.

As we have learned, when three people eat together, they may not separate and say the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* without participating in *zimun*. However, the *gemara* (*Berakhot* 45b) teaches that if two people need to leave, the third should interrupt his meal and answer the *zimun* of the other two. In contrast, two of the people are not obligated to stop their meal so that the third may say *Birkat* *Ha-Mazon* (see Shulchan Arukh 200). Furthermore, if two groups of more than three ate, but not together, since the individuals from each group became obligated in the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, they may join together with members of the other group who have become obligated to say a *zimun* in order to say the *zimun* together. If, however, the members of the original groups have already said the *zimum*, those members of the group who did not participate in that *zimun* are now exempt and cannot group together with others in order to say the *zimun* (see Shulchan Arukh 193:5-6).

As mentioned above, although someone who did not eat bread with others is technically not obligated in the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, it is meritorious to join other people in order to say the *zimun*. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 48a) even states:

R. Yehuda the son of R. Shmuel b. Shilat said in the name of Rav: If nine people have eaten… and another [eats] vegetables, they may combine. R. Zeira said: I asked R. Yehuda: What of eight, what of seven? And he replied: It makes no difference. Certainly if six [were eating] I did not need to ask. Said R. Yirmiyahu to him: You were quite right not to ask. What was the reason there [in the first case]? Because there is a majority; here too there is a majority. He, however, thought that perhaps an easily recognizable majority is required.

Although the *gemara* states that as long as six people at bread together, another three may join in order to say the *zimun* even if they only ate a vegetable, the *Rishonim* discuss whether this applies to a *zimun* of three as well, and which foods the minority must eat. The *Rishonim* cite those who believe that only if the third has bread may a *zimun* be said. They add that some believe that even if the third drank or ate other foods, he made join the *zimun*. The Shulchan Arukh (197:3) rules that even if the third person has a drink, he may join together with the other two for a *zimun*.

Next week, we will discuss whether one may separate and not participate in a *zimun* in extenuating circumstances.