The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן קפ"ב סעיף א'-ב'

Overview

Reciting birkas hamazon with a cup of wine

Shulchan Aruch Siman 182 Seif 1
יש אומרים שברכת המזון טעונה כוס
Some authorities maintain that birkas hamazon requires a cup of wine

Shulchan Aruch (סעי' א) records three opinions as to whether one is obligated to hold a cup of wine for birkas hamazon. According to the first opinion it is obligatory even when one recites birkas hamazon by himself. This opinion maintains that one should not eat if one does not presently have a cup of wine if it is possible that one will obtain a cup of wine later. The second opinion maintains that a cup of wine for birkas hamazon is not necessary unless there are three people who ate together. The third opinion contends that there is no obligation to hold a cup of wine when reciting birkas hamazon even if three people are reciting birkas hamazon together. Rema adds that even according to the third and most lenient opinion, it is still preferable to recite birkas hamazon while holding a cup of wine. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ד) explains that this applies only when one has wine in his home but if one does not have wine in his home he is not obligated to obtain wine for birkas hamazon.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (שו"ת אג"מ יו"ד ח"ג סי' נ"ב אות ג') writes that the reason people are not careful to have a cup of wine for birkas hamazon even when there are ten people who eat together is that for hundreds of years people were not in the habit of holding a cup of wine for birkas hamazon. Although it is possible that they did not use a cup of wine because wine was not readily available, nevertheless, it is considered as though the practice is in force even though our circumstances have changed. Sefer Seder Hayom (כוונת קידוש ד"ה ובעוד) writes that even one who is not particular to have a cup of wine for birkas hamazon during the week, nevertheless, an extra effort should be made to recite birkas hamazon with a cup of wine on Shabbos in order to increase the number of berachos that one will recite on Shabbos.

Stories to Share

Mitzvah Wine

ש"ע, ס' קפ"ב, ב': "כוס ברכת המזון אינו אלא של יין ..."

On today's amud we find that one should lead the bentching with a cup of wine.

In earlier times, wine had no official hechsher. People often made their own and many towns had Jewish and non-Jewish vintners and taverns. Some of the less learned sometimes bought wine from non-Jewish neighbors despite the halachah that such wine may not be drunk.

There was a man who made a vow never to drink wine when unsure of the exact source. Although halachically one may rely on one witness regarding the forbidden, he didn't want to take any chances.

Once he was invited to a simchah where the baalei simchah had asked him to lead the bentching in the past. Since they made their zimun over a cup of wine, this obviously presented some difficulty. He couldn't check where the wine was from since his host was not known to be especially careful about his wine. He wondered whether he may bentch for them if he would pass the cup to another person to drink.

The author of Yehudah Ya'aleh responded to this, "Although I hold that a nazir may give the wine from the zimun to another, as implied on Nazir 4 where the gemara only discusses wine of kiddush and havadalah but not wine of bircas hamazon, your case is different. There the wine is good wine but the nazir may not drink it because of his vow. You made a vow not to drink because of a possible prohibition; how can you give it to someone else?

The Yehudah Ya'aleh concluded, "Since from a halachic standpoint we trust the householder's word that the wine is kosher, you may drink the wine. When you made the vow this did not include wine of a mitzvah!"

שו"ת יהודה יעלה

Halacha Highlight

Siman 182 Seif 1:

Some maintain that birkas hamazon requires a kos even when one recites birkas hamazon by himself and one must obtain a kos. One may not eat if he does not have a kos but anticipates that he may have a kos later even though this means that the time for eating will pass. Accordingly, if two people are eating together each one requires a separate kos for birkas hamazon. According to some a kos is required only when three people eat together and yet according to others a kos is not required even when three people eat together. The preferred way to recite birkas hamazon is with a kos.

- Chazal enacted for the majority of berachos that they should be recited with a kos since this honors and gives praise to Hashem. (M.B. 1)
- Magen Avrohom disagrees and contends that one need not skip a meal in the absence of a kos. (M.B. 2)
- When two people eat together each one must recite birkas hamazon for himself so each one requires his own kos. (M.B. 3)
- In other words, there is no obligation but it is the preferred manner in which to perform the mitzvah if one has wine in his home. Common custom is in accordance with the third opinion that one need not pursue a kos unless one has wine or chamar medinah in his home and then it is preferable to recite birkas hamazon with a kos. (M.B. 4)

Siman 182 Seif 2:

The contents of the kos for birkas hamazon must be wine rather than other beverages even if one used other beverages during the meal. If wine is not available in that place and beer or other beverages, other than water, that are chamar medinah are available one should recite the beracha upon them. The custom in these countries to use beer does not warrant protest since there are opinions that maintain that a kos is not required altogether. Additionally, the primary beverage that qualifies as chamar medinah is beer since people use that during the meal. Although wine is available in the city it is not considered available for this purpose since it is expensive and one cannot purchase wine for each meal. It is, however, preferred to recite the beracha on wine. Some are particular when reciting birkas hamazon by themselves with wine not to hold the kos in their hand; rather it rests on the table in front of them and this custom is correct according to Kabbalah.

- Even if wine is available but is not readily available and as a result most people drink beer or some other beverage one may recite birkas hamazon on beer. Bach writes that although one need not purchase wine from a shopkeeper for birkas hamazon, if one has wine in his home it should be used for birkas hamazon. (M.B. 7)
- If two beverages are available one should recite the beracha on the one that is preferable to him. If the one that is preferable is not a chamar medinah it should not be used. (M.B. 9)
- When it comes to kiddush and havdalah Rema implies that one must make an effort to obtain wine if it is available even if expensive. (M.B. 13)
- If one has wine in his home he must use it for birkas hamazon. If he only has enough wine for kiddush and havdalah one need not use that wine for birkas hamazon. (M.B. 14)
- Even those who require a kos do not require that one hold it in his hand. (M.B. 15)