The Chicago Center
Mishna Berura Digest
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן קצ"א סעיף א'-ג'

Overview

Siman 191 Seif 1:

Employees doing work for their employer shorten birkas hamazon so that they should not miss working for their employer. How do they do this? They recite the first beracha as usual, the second beracha should begin with ברכת הארץ, include בונה ירושלים and conclude with ברכת הארץ. The beracha of hatov hameitiv is not recited altogether. This applies if they are paid money in additional to eating a meal but if their only salary is the meal that they eat, they recite all four berachos as usual. Similarly, if their employer eats with them they recite all four berachos even if they receive a salary in addition to the meal.

- Biblically it is sufficient to mention all three concepts in a single beracha and Chazal enacted a separate beracha for each topic. (M.B. 1)
- There is a dispute whether employees make a zimun. If an employee was eating with others and he finished before them it seems that he should not wait for them to make a zimun if they do not want to join him when he is ready to recite birkas hamazon. (M.B. 2)

Siman 191 Seif 2:

Nowadays all employees recite all four berachos since it is not common for people to be particular about this and it is assumed that when the employee was hired it was with the understanding that he would recite all four berachos.

Siman 191 Seif 3:

One may not engage in any activity while reciting birkas hamazon (this was also mentioned above at the end of siman 183).

- It appears as though one is reciting birkas hamazon casually and it goes without saying that one should not engage in an activity that requires one's attention. The same restriction applies to tefila or the recitation of any other beracha and is included in the warning (Vayikra 26:21) against serving Hashem in a casual manner. (M.B. 5)

Halacha Highlight

Performing other activities during birkas hamazon

Shulchan Aruch Siman 191 Seif 3
אסור לעשות מלאכה בעודו מברך
It is prohibited to engage in work while reciting birkas hamazon

Shulchan Aruch (סע' ג') writes that it is prohibited to do any work while reciting birkas hamazon. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ה) explains that doing work while reciting birkas hamazon gives the impression that birkas hamazon is a casual activity. For that reason one may not even perform an easy task, and certainly a task that requires attention and focus may not be performed while reciting birkas hamazon. Taz asserts that one may not even look into Torah related matters while reciting birkas hamazon since it gives the impression that one's birkas hamazon is only a casual activity. In the event one was performing work while reciting birkas hamazon one has, b'dieved, fulfilled his obligation (ביה"ל ד"ה בעודו מברך).

Taz also writes that this ruling is not unique to birkas hamazon and one may not engage in work during the recitation of any tefila or beracha. Pri Megadim (משב"ז סק"א) questions Taz's ruling. Shulchan Aruch (סי' ס"ג סע' ז') rules that the requirement to stop working is limited to the recitation of the first paragraph of shema. It is permitted for one to engage in work during the recitation of the other two paragraphs of shema. Why then does Taz rule stringently that one may not engage in work during the recitation of any tefila or beracha? Even if one were to suggest that we are stringent for the first paragraph of shema since it is a Biblical obligation the question still remains why is the Rabbinic obligation to read the second and third paragraphs of shema any worse than any other beracha that is also Rabbinic and yet Taz rules that it is prohibited to engage in another activity during their recitation. Pri Megadim answers that krias shema is considered an act of Torah study rather than a beracha or tefila and as such there is no prohibition to engage in other activities while studying Torah.