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

Overview

Siman 193 Seif 1:

When two people eat together, even though one may recite the beracha of hamotzi for the other, it is a mitzvah for each one to recite birkas hamazon for himself. This is true when both of them know how to recite birkas hamazon. If one knows and the other doesn't the one who knows how should recite the beracha and the other will fulfill his obligation assuming he understands lashon kodesh but doesn't know how to recite birkas hamazon. He must listen to each word that is recited. The one reciting the beracha must have in mind to discharge his friend's obligation. **If he does not understand he does not fulfill his obligation by listening. When three people eat together they may not separate and when two people eat together it is a mitzvah for them to search for a third to join their zimun. When four or five people eat together they may not separate since they are all obligated to make a zimuun. When the group is comprised of six they may separate since each group will make its own zimun and this is true until the group reaches ten. Once the group contains between ten and twenty people they may not separate until there are twenty since they will mention Hashem's Name** and then each group could divide if they want. It seems to me that even when there are six they are not obligated to separate; it is just that they may separate if they choose. **It is a mitzvah to search for ten people but when there are many people eating together and will not be able to hear birkas hazimun from the leader and cannot separate into groups of ten since this will require them to recite birkas hamazon out loud and the ba'al habayis will be angry, they may separate into groups of three and recite birkas hamazon quietly so that the ba'al habayis should not hear. This is preferred over not fulfilling their obligation of birkas hazimun since they will not be able to hear the leader.**

- At the beginning of the meal their intent is to eat together but at the end of the meal their intent is to separate and that is the reason each one must recite birkas hamazon for himself. Additionally, since birkas hamazon is a Biblical obligation it is treated more stringently. (M.B. 2)
- The listener must have in mind to fulfill his obligation as well. (M.B. 4)
- There are Poskim who maintain that one fulfills his obligation if he hears the beracha in lashon kodesh even though he does not understand. However, it is preferred that those who don't understand repeat each word from the one reciting the beracha since the mitzvah will be fulfilled according to all Poskim in this case. Additionally, it is always appropriate to do this since it is hard to concentrate and listen to another person's beracha. (M.B. 5)
- There is a dispute whether a zimun is required when eating food from the seven species. (M.B. 6)
- If there is someone in the house it is a mitzvah to give him some food so that he could join them for a zimun. (M.B. 7)
- Even though a mezuman will remain the one who leaves will not fulfill his obligation to be part of a zimun. (M.B. 9)
- Darkei Moshe maintains that it is a mitzvah not to divide whether there are 20 or 6 people due to the principle of b'rov am hadras melech. The point is that it is not prohibited to divide in such a case. Others disagree with Darkei Moshe. (M.B. 11)
- Later authorities write that even when there are seven people it is a mitzvah to find another three to join them. (M.B. 12)
- If they could at least hear birkas hazimun they would not be permitted to separate even though they cannot hear the rest of birkas hamazon. Rather they should listen to birkas hazimun and then each person will recite birkas hamazon for himself. (M.B. 13)
- There is a disagreement whether this ruling applies when people need to leave to perform a mitzvah and Chaye Adam contends that it is certainly prohibited if a minyan will not be left behind. If, however, it involves a Biblical mitzvah one may be lenient. (M.B. 16)
- Later authorities disagree and maintain that if the listeners will not be able to also hear the leader recite the first beracha they may form a zimun of three rather than ten than to not fulfill their obligation altogether. At a large meal one with a loud voice should lead birkas hamazon so that those present will be able to hear. (M.B. 17)

Halacha Highlight

Joining a zimun at a wedding or dinner

Shulchan Aruch Siman 193 Seif 1
אבל שלשה שאכלו אינם רשאים לחלק
But three who ate together may not separate

Shulchan Aruch writes that when three people eat together they may not separate for birkas hamazon and are obligated to form a zimun. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ו) explains that once they formed a group to eat together they are obligated to recite birkas hazimun and may not separate and recite birkas hamazon as individuals. Even when two people eat together, it is a mitzvah for them to find a third person to join their meal so that they could form a zimun.

A common circumstance where this matter comes up is at a wedding or other dinner. For many people it is difficult to stay until the end of the meal so that they could join the zimun but at the same time it seems that it is prohibited for them to leave before birkas hamazon. Rav Moshe Feinstein (או"ח ח"א סי' נ"ו) writes that one may declare before he begins eating that he does not intend to eat with the other people at the meal and by doing so he is exempt from joining a zimun. He adds that this approach may be utilized practically – halacha l'ma'aseh – when there is a need for one to leave early, e.g. one must wake up early in the morning for work. Sefer Orchos Rabbeinu (ח"ג עמ' ר"כ) relates that Chazon Ish instructed Rav Chaim Kanievski when he was studying in Yeshiva and wanted to finish the meal quickly so that he could resume learning that he should have in mind when he washes that he does not want to join a group of ten only a group of three. When Rav Chaim Kanievski was asked why the same approach could not be utilized for exempting one's self from a zimun altogether, he responded that it is not worthwhile to forgo a zimun of three. Teshuvas Or L'Tzion (ח"ב פי"ג תשובה י) agrees that one could have intent not to eat with others and adds that one could avoid the obligation to participate in a zimun if he begins before or after the others and finishes before they do.