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Digest
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סימן ר"א סעיף א'

Halacha Highlight

The beracha for the host

Shulchan Aruch Siman 201 Seif 1

כדי שיברך לבעל הבית

In order that he should bless the host

Shulchan Aruch writes that although, generally, one should honor a Torah scholar with leading birkas hamazon, if a guest is present, one should honor the guest with leading birkas hamazon. The reason that the guest is given precedence is so that he should be able to recite a beracha for his host. Aruch HaShulchan (סעי' ג') suggests that nowadays this halacha is no longer relevant. Since everyone recites birkas hamazon for themselves any guest who is present will certainly bless the host when he recites birkas hamazon so there is no need to specifically give that honor to a guest. Sha'ar HaTzion (ס"ק י"ד) expresses a similar idea with regards to the curse one receives for not leading birkas hamazon when asked. He speculates that it is no longer applicable since the guest will say הרחמן הוא יברך את בעל הבית וכו'. In fact, Sefer Shulchan HaTahor suggests that the reason we do not say the beracha that is recorded in Shulchan Aruch is that we have a section of הרחמן prayers that includes a beracha for the host rendering the beracha mentioned in Shulchan Aruch superfluous. In the time of Chazal they did not recite the הרחמן prayers and as such composed a special prayer for the host (חיי משה).

There is a disagreement regarding the correct placement for this beracha. Machzor Vitry (סי' פ"ג) writes that it should be recited after the הרחמן section. In other words it should be added after the words בברכה שלמה ונאמר אמן. In his siddur Rav Yaakov Emden placed it after the הרחמן that one says for the host. The Brisker Rov (ליקוטי הגריי"ז ח"ב עמ' י"ג) inferred from the wording of Rambam that the beracha for the host should be incorporated into the fourth beracha. In other words, after one reads לעולם אל יחסרנו, one immediately begins the beracha for the host and one should not even answer אמן to the fourth beracha when one will say the beracha for the host.

Overview

Siman 201 Seif 1:

The most prominent person leads birkas hamazon even if he shows up at the end but if he wants he may allow someone less prominent to lead. These rules apply when there is no guest but if there is a guest he should lead birkas hamazon even if the host is greater than him so that he should be able to bless the host. What is that beracha?

יהי רצון שלא יבוש ולא יכלם בעל הבית הזה לא בעולם הזה ולא בעולם הבא ויצליח בכל נכסיו ויהיו נכסיו מצלחים וקרובים לעיר ולא ישלוט שטן במעשי ידיו ואל יזדקק לפניו שום דבר חטא והרהור עוון מעתה ועד עולם.

If the host wants to forgo on the beracha and lead birkas hamazon by himself, he may do so. He may also ask anyone he wants to lead birkas hamazon.

- This refers to one who possesses the greatest wisdom from amongst those who are assembled. Even though nowadays the custom is that everyone recites birkas hamazon by himself it is still proper etiquette to honor the most prominent person. This ruling refers to where everyone is eating their own food. Some places have the custom that a mourner leads birkas hamazon but this practice is limited to where everyone is eating their own food. (M.B. 1)
- It is logical that if he is eating slowly they are not required to wait for him to finish eating so that he could lead birkas hamazon. (M.B. 2)
- Lechem Chamudos wonders why the wording of the beracha we recite for the host is different from the wording recorded in the Gemara. (M.B. 5)