sure to wear a suit jacket when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, just like they do during the daily prayers. This is a commendable practice, especially when there is *zimun*. When someone puts on his suit jacket in honor of the mitzvah he becomes infused with a measure of fear for God. He will not grow haughty although he has eaten a full meal.

The *Be'er Hetev* as well wrote that this practice applies every time one recites *Birkat Hamazon*. The *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* Ganzfried (46:6) wrote that "one must not sit in a haughty manner. Instead, one must sit while wearing a suit jacket and hat, to induce the fear of God and so that one will recite *Birkat Hamazon* with full concentration and in awe of the Creator. The *Hesed La'alafim* wrote likewise.

The *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, page 110) commented that although the *Magen Avraham* mentioned the practice of wearing a suit jacket only when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine [meaning when there are at least three people forming a *zimun*], one should wear a suit jacket even when reciting it alone, following the instructions of the *Shene Luhot Haberit*. One should wear a hat as well, not only a yarmulke, besides a suit jacket to recite it. Nevertheless, this is the recommended practice but it is not an absolute obligation.

Between *ituf* and *itur*

The *Mishna Berura* (183:11) wrote: "Anyone who possesses the fear of Heaven will wear a hat. Some people have the custom of wearing a suit jacket as well to fulfill the halakha of *ituf*." Notice that he drew a line between these two practices, unlike the *Bayit Hadash* and *Magen Avraham* who equated the two halakhot.

Harav Zalman wrote: "*Ituf* means, according to some, to wrap oneself in a *tallit*. Others interpreted it as wearing a headdress. We do not observe the halakha of *ituf*, but anyone who possesses the fear of Heaven will make sure not to recite *Birkat Hamazon* without donning a hat. Some people wear a suit jacket as well. There are those who claim that the halakha of *ituf* applies only in the Land of Yisrael in honor of God's Presence." This likewise demonstrates a difference in attitude between donning a hat and donning a jacket. There is apparently more significance in wearing a hat than in wearing a suit jacket.

The *Arukh Hashulhan* (183:4) sheds some light on this, writing that the custom is to wear a hat while reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, following the *Magen Avraham*. He then added that some people have the custom of wearing a suit jacket, but this custom is not practiced at all.

Apparently, the halakha of *ituf* means covering the head with a headdress or hat, but the practice of wearing a suit jacket is simply a way to display honor for the mitzvah. It is not part of the halakha of *ituf*. Therefore, both Harav Zalman and the *Mishna Berura* referred to it separately, not as part of the halakha of *ituf*.

Furthermore, all these *Poskim* mentioned these practices in reference to reciting *Birkat Hamazon* with a cup of wine. When reciting it without a cup of wine, there is no obligation. Nevertheless, the *Mishna Berura* concluded that the custom nowadays is to always don a hat to recite *Birkat Hamazon*. Apparently, this custom is based on the halakha of *ituf*, which applies to covering the head, not the body.

The *sefer Orhot Rabbenu* (page 83) testifies that Harav Yaakov Yisrael Kanyevski always donned his hat to recite *Birkat Hamazon*, but he did not always wear his suit jacket. He once saw his brother-in-law, the *Hazon Ish*, reciting *Birkat Hamazon* while wearing a large yarmulke but without a hat. He questioned the *Hazon Ish* about this, and the latter explained that he deduced from the Talmud that it is unnecessary to wear a hat. Harav Hayim Kanyevski commented that he has no doubt that the *Hazon Ish* held that one must always wear a hat to recite *Birkat Hamazon*. In that instance, however, he was wearing an oversized yarmulke and he felt that such a yarmulke was sufficient regarding reciting *Birkat Hamazon*.

Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach, cited in *sefer Veten Berakha* (page 12), ruled that the halakha is more stringent about wearing a hat but the common custom is to always wear a suit jacket as well, even when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* without a cup of wine. See *sefer Dole Umashke* (page 111).

Pajamas and robes

The *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, page 110) highly recommended that no one recite *Birkat Hamazon* while wearing pajamas, just as one should not pray without befitting garments. One should get fully dressed to recite *Birkat Hamazon*.

Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halikhot Shelomo*, Unit *Tefilla* page 18, footnote 73) wrote as well that one should get dressed for *Birkat Hamazon* and not recite it while wearing a bathrobe unless one is sick and bedridden. In that case, one should put a robe over one's pajamas and then recite it.

At the beach

The *Or Letziyon* added that when people go for a day at the beach, they must be dressed in regular clothes when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, not their bathing suits. In fact, this applies even when reciting the blessing of *me'en shalosh* since some *Poskim* ruled that this is also a Torah obligation. The *Halikhot Shelomo* ruled likewise.

The blessing of *me'en shalosh*

The responsa *Salmat Hayim* (#178) was asked whether the rules of dress recommended by the *Be'er Hetev* apply only to *Birkat Hamazon* or to other blessings as well. He replied that whenever possible one should don a hat to recite a blessing, but it is an absolute obligation when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*.

This reply reflects the author's pious attitude but it is not the halakha. Even when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* one is not actually obligated to wear a hat; it is the recommended practice for those who possess the fear of Heaven. Certainly, the intention of the *Salmat Hayim* was to say that wearing a hat for *Birkat Hamazon* is an obligation in comparison to wearing one for other blessings.

וראוי להקפיד בשעת קריאת שמע ותפלה, וכל שכן בברכת המזון, לחבוש כובע, או לכל הפחות כיפה המכסה את רוב הראש. [יחו"ד ח"ד סי' א]

יז. משנתנו לו כוס של ברכה לברך לא ישיח המברך [ש"ע ס"ין] עד לאחר שתייתו לאחר גמר ברכת המזון. [משנ"ב ס"ק כא]. אבל המסובים שיוצאים ידי חובה מהמברך, אין להם להשיח אלא משהתחיל המברך בברכת המזון, אבל קודם לכן רשאין להשיח אף שכבר נטל המברך הכוס בידו. [דעת מרן בש"ע שם]. ויש מחמירים אף במסובים שלא יסיחו משנטל המברך הכוס לברך. [משנ"ב ס"ק כב, כה"ח ס"ק לב]

It is highly recommended to make sure to wear a hat or at least a yarmulke large enough to cover most of one's head[186] when reciting the *Shema* or when praying, and certainly when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*.

Refrain from speaking

17) Once the cup of wine has been handed to the leader of the *zimun* he must not converse at all until after he drinks the wine at the conclusion of *Birkat Hamazon*. Those who participated in the meal and are reciting *Birkat Hamazon* with him may speak even after he has taken the cup in his hands until the *zimun* begins. Some *Poskim* ruled that everyone must cease conversing once the cup has been handed to the leader of the *zimun*.[187]

The *sefer Orhot Rabbenu* (Vol. I, page 84) testifies that Harav Yaakov Yisrael Kanyevski had the practice of wearing a hat whenever he recited the blessing of *me'en shalosh*. Harav Hayim Kanyevski (*sefer Dole Umashke* page 120) also recommended following this practice. The *Or Letziyon* wrote that since some *Poskim* ruled that the blessing of *me'en shalosh* is a Torah obligation, one should make sure to be fully dressed when reciting it. He did not write that one must wear a hat, only that one be fully dressed. Furthermore, he extended the halakha to the blessing of *me'en shalosh* but not to other blessings. Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach, cited in *sefer Veten Berakha*, page 12), taught that the common custom is not to bother wearing a hat and suit jacket when reciting the blessing of *me'en shalosh*, nor is it common to bother reading it from a prayer book. The *Hiddushe Batra* wrote likewise that it is unnecessary to wear a hat when reciting the blessing of *me'en shalosh*.

186. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yehave Da'at* Vol. IV, #1) ruled that one must always wear a yarmulke large enough to be visible from all angles. When praying, and certainly when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, one should wear a hat or at least a yarmulke that covers most of one's head. He explained that it is most important to wear a hat when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* since the Talmud (*Berakhot* 51a) and the holy *Zohar* taught that *ituf* is necessary, and this is cited in the *Bet Yosef* in *Siman* 183.

This ruling is difficult for although Maran cited these passages he did not rule that *ituf* is necessary for *Birkat Hamazon*, even when reciting it over a cup of wine. Even the *Bayit Hadash*, who ruled that *ituf* is necessary, agreed that this is only when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine. He did not bother to cite all the *Aharonim* listed in the previous footnote who did recommend wearing a hat whenever reciting it because he assumed that whoever wishes to research this issue will find them.

187. The *Arba'a Turim* and the *Shulhan Arukh* ruled that the others may continue to converse after the cup has been handed to the leader, but Rabbenu Yona and Rabbenu Yeruham ruled that they must all cease conversing at that point. Many *Aharonim* ruled stringently, but technically the halakha follows the opinion of Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh*. Of course, anyone who has already performed the mitzvah of *mayim aharonim* may no longer speak until after he recites *Birkat Hamazon*.

ועכ"פ אין למסובים לשוחח עד שיברך המזמן את ברכת הגפן שעל הכוס. ויש להם לשתוק עד סיום ברכת הגפן והשתיה, כיון שגם השתייה שייכת למצות הכוס. [אור לציון עמ' שג ובהערה. וכ"ה בכה"ח סי' קפט ס"ק יד]

יח. מי שנותנין לו כוס של ברכת המזון, ואינו מברך, מקצרין ימיו. [ש"ע סי' רא ס"ג]. והיינו דוקא באורח, וכשנותנים לו כוס של ברכת המזון. [מג"א סק"ד]. ובזמן הזה שנהגו בכל תפוצות ישראל שכל אחד יברך ברכת המזון לעצמו, ואינו יוצא ידי חובה בברכה שמברך בעל הכוס, אין בזה חשש הנזכר, שהרי כל אחד מברך בעצמו, וממילא כל אחד ואחד יברך גם כן לבעל הבית, ויתקיים בו ואברכה מברכך, ובטל טעם של מקצרין. אך ודאי צריך לרדוף אחר מצוה זו גם בזמן הזה, כי יקרה היא מאוד. [באו"ח פ' שלח הכ"ד. וכ"כ במשנ"ב סי' רא ס"ק יד. וע"ע בכה"ח שם ס"ק כו]

After the participants finish reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, they must remain silent until the leader recites the blessing of *bore peri hagefen* and drinks the wine. This is because the act of drinking is part of the mitzvah of *kos shel berakha*.[188]

Refusing to lead the *zimun*

18) Our Sages taught that if someone is offered the *kos shel berakha* to lead the *zimun* and he refuses to perform this mitzvah, he is liable to be punished by losing years of his life.[189] This applies to a guest who is offered the mitzvah by his host, and it applied only in the era when the leader of the *zimun* recited *Birkat Hamazon* out loud on behalf of everyone else, while they listened and fulfilled their obligation through his reciting. [Since a guest adds a blessing for the host at the end of *Birkat Hamazon*, he insults the host if he refuses to lead the *zimun*.]

Nowadays, when everyone recites *Birkat Hamazon* for himself, and each guest blesses the host whether or not he leads the *zimun*, no one becomes liable for such a terrible punishment if he refuses to serve as the leader of the *zimun*. On the contrary, each guest is blessed from Heaven in return for blessing the host as the verse states (*Bereshit* 12:3), "I will bless those who bless you." Despite this, everyone should seek the opportunity to lead a *zimun* even in our times since it is a precious mitzvah.

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188. This is the ruling of the *Or Letziyon* (footnote on page 303) based on the *Shulḥan Arukh* (183:6). The only debate is about what point it becomes forbidden for the participants to speak. All the *Rishonim* agreed that it remains forbidden for them to speak until the leader drinks the *kos shel berakha*. This is likewise the ruling of the *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (189:14).

The *Ḥiddushe Batra* (page 78) added that at a wedding meal it is forbidden for the participants to speak throughout the time that the blessings are recited until the leader drinks the *kos shel berakha*. Nevertheless, it is permissible to sing *Asher bara* in chorus since this is not an extraneous conversation. Above in the footnote to halakha 8 there is a discussion whether or not, after a wedding meal, the leader must continue to hold the cup aloft until after all the seven blessings have been recited.

The *Mishna Berura* (*Sha'ar Hatziyun* 174:53) recommended that the leader of the *zimun* wait until the participants have completed *Birkat Hamazon* in its entirety before reciting the blessing of *bore peri hagefen*.

189. Rashi explained that whoever led the *zimun* and recited *Birkat Hamazon* also recited a blessing for the host. By refusing to lead the *zimun*, he has refused to bless a fellow Jew, a descendant of Avraham Avinu. Instead of being blessed from Heaven in return, the opposite will occur.

The *Magen Avraham* deduced from Rashi that this applies when one person is the guest of the other, but not when each has eaten his own food. The *Aḥaronim* added that since nowadays everyone recites *Birkat Hamazon* for himself and does not depend on the leader of the *zimun*, there is no fear for such a punishment. Even so, one should seek the opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah with enthusiasm.