סימן קפב

דין ברכת המזון על הכוס

א. מעיקר הדין אין ברכת המזון טעונה כוס. [ראה ש"ע סי' קפב ס"א, ובכה"ח ס"ק א]. ומכל מקום מצוה מן המובחר לברך על הכוס. [רמ"א שם]

Siman 182

Cup of Wine Used for *Birkat Hamazon*

Day 2

Importance of using wine for *Birkat Hamazon*

1) Technically, the mitzvah of reciting *Birkat Hamazon* can be fulfilled without using a cup of wine, but the best way to perform the mitzvah is to use one. According to the Arizal and the kabbalists, whenever three people have eaten together they should try their best to recite *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun* and with a cup of wine. When someone recites *Birkat Hamazon* alone, however, he should not use a cup of wine.[154] It is recommended to follow these instructions. Therefore, when three people

154. Our Sages taught (*Pesahim* 105b): If someone comes home at Shabbat's conclusion and finds that he has only one cupful of wine, he should postpone reciting *havdala* and drinking it until after he recites *Birkat Hamazon*. The Talmud deduces from this that it is necessary to use a cup of wine when fulfilling the mitzvah of *Birkat Hamazon*. The Tosafot commented that it appears from this passage that the person came home and he is alone. If so, it must be that even when someone recites *Birkat Hamazon* by himself he still needs to use a cup of wine. This is how Rabbenu Shmuel and Rabbenu Yehi'el ruled in practice, and the *Midrash Shohar Tov* (*Tehillim* 3:8) supports this ruling. However, Tosafot testified that this is definitely not the practice of most people. They use a cup of wine only if at least three people recite *Birkat Hamazon* together with a *zimun*.

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* cited Rabbenu Yona, Rabbenu Yeruham and the author of *Arba'a Turim*, all of whom concurred with the stringent ruling of Rabbenu Shmuel. The *Hagahot Maimoniyot* (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:60), on the other hand, cited Rabbenu Yitzhak and Rabbenu Elhanan ruling that a cup of wine is necessary only when at least three people recite *Birkat Hamazon* together, concurring with the common practice.

Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:15) ruled that there is never an obligation to use a cup of wine while reciting *Birkat Hamazon*; it is strictly voluntary. Rabbenu Nissim brought proof for this ruling from a passage in *Pesahim* 117b. Nevertheless, Rabbenu Nissim stated emphatically that the proper manner in which to fulfill the mitzvah of *Birkat Hamazon* is to use a cup of wine, since our Sages accorded this practice many symbols of honor. He concluded that it appears that Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi concurred with Rambam's ruling.

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* demonstrated that Rabbenu Mano'ah (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:15) and the Rashba (commentary to *Berakhot* 52a) both concurred with Rambam's ruling. The Rashba suggested that although the passage in *Pesahim* seems to disagree with this ruling, the halakha discounts that passage. Maran suggested a way to reconcile the passage in *Pesahim* and Rambam's ruling, however. It may be that the words, "it is necessary to use a cup of wine when fulfilling the mitzvah of *Birkat Hamazon*," do not mean that it is an obligation, only that it is the recommended manner of fulfilling the mitzvah.

The holy *Zohar*

Maran then cited a passage from *Midrash Rut Hane'elam* (*Zohar Hadash* page 47a) stating that when three people recite *Birkat Hamazon* together they need a cup of wine, but there are less than three people it is not necessary. Maran testified that he witnessed people who were stringent in this matter and always used a cup of wine, even when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* alone. However, in deference to the *Zohar* they did not hold the cup aloft while reciting it; they simply placed it on the table in front of them.

ולדעת האר"י והמקובלים, אם יש שנים עמו ישתדל לברך על הכוס, שאז יש להם זימון, אבל יחידי לא יברך על הכוס. [משנ"ב ס"ק ד, באו"ח פי שלח הלכה טז, כה"ח ס"ק א]

recite *Birkat Hamazon* together, even on a weekday, they should try to use a cup of wine. This is especially so if they were drinking wine during the meal.[155] If it is Shabbat or a

***Shulhan Arukh's* ruling**

Maran cited all three opinions in the *Shulhan Arukh*. He first cited the opinion that a cup is necessary even when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* alone, and that one must try to obtain wine for this mitzvah even if one has none at this time. It is no different than other mitzvot; if someone does not have the necessary items to fulfill it he must do his best to obtain them. This is the opinion of Rabbenu Shmuel, Rabbenu Yehi'el, Rabbenu Yeruham, Rabbenu Yona and Rabbenu Yaakov, author of *Arba'a Turim*.

Then, Maran cited the opinion that when three people recite *Birkat Hamazon* together a cup of wine is necessary, but not when someone recites it alone. This is the ruling according to the *Zohar* and Rabbenu Elhanan. Finally, he cited the opinion that there is never an obligation to use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, even when three people recite it together. This is the opinion of Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi and Rambam. Rama added that even according to this opinion it is commendable to use a cup of wine, citing Rabbenu Nissim. He also mentioned the practice of filling a cup with wine and setting it on the table without holding it when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* alone, explaining that this is commendable according to the Kabbalah.

According to the system formulated by Maran for his *Shulhan Arukh*, he ruled according to the third opinion, probably because both Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi and Rambam, the pillars of halakha, issued this ruling. Harav Hayim Palachi (*Ru'ah Hayim* 182:1) explained Maran's position in this manner, as did the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (182:1). Harav Shelomo Luria and the *Bayit Hadash*, however, ruled according to the first opinion that a cup of wine is always necessary when reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, even when reciting it alone.

The Arizal and the kabbalists

The kabbalists, following the instructions of the holy *Zohar* and the Arizal in *Sha'ar Hakavanot*, ruled that when someone recites *Birkat Hamazon* alone he should not use a cup of wine. In fact, Harav Meir Papirash, cited in the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer, insisted that it is forbidden to use a cup of wine when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* alone. Regarding three people reciting *Birkat Hamazon*, the kabbalists ruled that it is commendable to use a cup of wine, but it is not an absolute obligation. If someone does not have wine, therefore, it would not be necessary for him to go out to obtain some. This is why the words of the *Sha'ar Hakavanot* (*parashat Ekev*) are, "if he has wine." On the other hand, when wine is available, the Arizal's instructions are that it must be used for *Birkat Hamazon* and it is not a matter of choice.

In practice

As stated in the previous paragraphs, there are three different opinions regarding this mitzvah: that of Maran, that of Harav Shelomo Luria and the *Bayit Hadash*, and that of the Arizal and the kabbalists. The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (182:2) decided in favor of the kabbalists and ruled that as long as there is wine readily available and three people are reciting *Birkat Hamazon* together a cup of wine must be used. An individual, however, must not use a cup of wine. The *Mishna Berura* (182:3), citing Harav Zalman, ruled basically the same. He also cited the Arizal in the *Sha'ar Hatziyun*. The *Ben Ish Hai* put it in a nutshell: "When there are three people, they should try to recite *Birkat Hamazon* with a cup of wine." This implies that if there is no wine readily available, it is not necessary to go out and get it. The *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, chapter 46:20) copied these words.

The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (182:15) explained that according to the *Zohar* and the Arizal no cup of wine should be used when someone recites *Birkat Hamazon* alone. Thus, he overruled the practice explained in the *Bet Yosef* and Rama's gloss, that an individual pours a cup of wine and sets it down on the table without holding it. The *Mishna Berura* (182:16) also commented that the custom is not to follow that practice.

People who do not enjoy drinking wine

The *Ben Ish Hai* (preface to *parashat Naso*) listed the ways in which our Sages demonstrated the exalted status of wine. One thing is that our Sages ruled that it is necessary to drink a cup of wine as part of the ceremony of kiddush for Shabbat and *Yom Tov*, for *havdala*, for *Birkat Hamazon*, for reciting the wedding blessings, for circumcisions and for the *Pesah Seder*. Another thing is that one must use a cup of wine for these occasions even if one does not enjoy drinking it. This is not an excuse to refrain from using wine.

155. The common custom

According to the discussion in the previous footnote, when three people are reciting *Birkat Hamazon* together and there is wine available, they should use a cup of wine for this

ויש לנהוג כדעה זו, שאם הם שלשה שאכלו, ישתדלו לברך על הכוס, אף ביום חול. ובפרט אם שתה יין בתוך הסעודה, שיש לו ליזהר יותר לברך על הכוס. [ראה רוח חיים אות א]. ובשבת ויום טוב יש יותר עדיפות לברך על הכוס, מפני כבוד היום, וכדי להרבות בברכות כדי להשלים מאה ברכות. [כמ"ש בסדר היום, סדר קידוש שבת]. ויחיד לא יברך על הכוס כלל בכל אופן, וכאמור.

Yom Tov, it is even more important to use a cup of wine and thereby honor the special day. Using a cup of wine also helps people fulfill the mitzvah of reciting one hundred blessings on these days. An individual who recites *Birkat Hamazon* alone, however, should never use a cup of wine on any day.

mitzvah whether it is Shabbat or a regular weekday. The *Eshel Avraham* Butchatch (*Siman* 182), however, wrote that the common custom is never to use a cup of wine, even when three people recite *Birkat Hamazon* together. The *Arukh Hashulhan* (182:1 and 3) likewise testified that in his country no one used a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, explaining that wine is an expensive item and therefore people have come to rely on the opinion that one is never obligated to use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*. He admitted, however, that some people do use a cup of wine on Shabbat and *Yom Tov* if there is a *zimun* and if wine is available. He explained that it appears from the Talmud that everyone always used a cup of wine, but that is because wine was inexpensive in their society. If someone lives in a country where wine is inexpensive even today, he concluded, it is definitely proper for the God-fearing to use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*.

The responsa *Igrot Moshe* (*Y.D.* Vol. III, #52) also wrote that the common custom came to be because it was difficult to obtain wine, and he added that this was the situation for many centuries. It became necessary to rely on the opinion of Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi and Rambam that there is no obligation to use a cup of wine at any time. Therefore, even if someone comes to a country where wine is plentiful and inexpensive there is no reason to change customs. We have established ourselves as following the opinion that there is never an obligation to use a cup of wine. It is a commendable practice, he wrote, and he knew of people who fulfilled it, but he knew of no Torah scholars who did.

The *sefer Orhot Rabbenu* (Vol. I, page 83) testified that the author of *Hazon Ish* and Harav Yaakov Yisrael Kanyevski never used a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, even on Shabbat and even when there were three people reciting *Birkat Hamazon* together. The *Piske Teshuvot* (page 574) testified that the custom of Ashkenazic Jews is to use a cup of wine only on Shabbat, *Yom Tov* or after meals celebrating a mitzvah.

Sefardic Jews should follow the instructions of the *Ben Ish Hai* and the *Or Letziyon* and use a cup of wine whenever reciting *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun* and wine is available. This is especially true in our times since wine is plentiful. This is the ruling of the *Halakha Berura* (page 307). Especially when people drink wine during the meal, it is doubly important to use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*. As mentioned before, the *Ru'ah Hayim* Palachi stated that it would be considered terribly sinful if people drink wine for their own pleasure but do not bother to drink a cup of wine in honor of God. The *Yalkut Yosef* (Vol. III, page 258) states that the contemporary custom is not to use a cup of wine even when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun*, but that those who take the effort to observe this halakha will receive a special blessing from Heaven. In light of the above, this ruling is incorrect.

The *Ru'ah Hayim* Palachi

Here are the inspiring words of the *Ru'ah Hayim*: "If someone finds that wine is injurious to his health and therefore never drinks it during his meals, he may rely on the *Rishonim* who ruled that there is no obligation to use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, especially since this is the opinion of Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh*. People who are not injured by drinking wine and enjoy it during their meals but do not use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, however, are guilty of a terrible sin. In all probability God will tell him, 'For your personal pleasure you drank wine, but to honor Me while reciting *Birkat Hamazon* you were too lazy to use a cup of wine.'

Besides the logic of this argument, there is another factor to consider here. Our Sages interpreted the verse (*Mishle* 3:9), 'Honor God with your assets,' to mean to honor Him with one's throat – with what one places in one's throat. Here we have an opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah by drinking a cup of wine in honor of *Birkat Hamazon*. Just as we fulfill the mitzvah of eating the meat of the *korban Pesah* when we are already full, here also we can fulfill the mitzvah of drinking another cup of wine when we are

ב. נשים מברכות על הכוס, אפילו כשמזמנות לעצמן. [פתה"ד סי' קפב אות ב]. אלא שלא ראינו נוהגין כן. [יפה ללב הובא בכה"ח סי' קצט ס"ק יט, וע"ע כה"ח כאן ס"ק ב]

Women's *zimun*

2) If three women recite *Birkat Hamazon* together with a *zimun*, they should use a cup of wine for this mitzvah. In practice, however, this is unheard of.[156]

already full from our meal. It is no different than eating the third Shabbat meal when we are still full from the previous meal, or eating the fourth meal on Saturday night. We eat them in order to fulfill the mitzvah even though we do not feel at all hungry."

Shabbat and weekdays

As cited above, the *Arukh Hashulḥan* (182:1) stated that some people use a cup of wine after eating Shabbat meals and *Yom Tov* meals if they can obtain wine for it. The *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (182:1) states that the Arizal and the kabbalists made no distinction between Shabbat and weekdays regarding this mitzvah, unlike the *Poskim* who ruled that on Shabbat a cup of wine should be used even by someone who recites *Birkat Hamazon* by himself.

According to the *Seder Hayom* (Unit *Kiddush shel Shabbat*), however, a person should fulfill this mitzvah on Shabbat even if he does not fulfill it on weekdays. By dong so, one displays honor for the sacred day of Shabbat. Furthermore, it gives the person more opportunities to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting one hundred blessings during Shabbat. The *Yalkut Yosef* (Vol. III, footnote on page 260) wrote the same arguments, but without mentioning the *Seder Hayom*.

The responsa *Rivevot Efrayim* (Vol. I, #150) also pondered why it seems that people fulfill this mitzvah on Shabbat but not on weekdays. He cited Harav Izak Ausband explaining that since it is not obligatory to use a cup of wine, people put forth the extra effort to fulfill this mitzvah on Shabbat, on *Yom Tov* and for meals celebrating mitzvot when people are at leisure. During ordinary weekday meals people are usually in a rush to go on with their business and they forfeit this mitzvah since it is a bit time-consuming. Rav Ausband testified that in his circles people used a cup of wine only if there were at least ten people reciting *Birkat Hamazon* together, but the author stated that there is no reliable source for this distinction.

Two adults and a child

The *Or Letziyon* (Vol. II, chapter 46, footnote #20) states that if two adult men and one boy ate together and recite *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun*, they should not use a cup of wine. He reasoned that there are *Poskim* who ruled that a child cannot count as the third member of a *zimun*. Since there is some question whether this is a valid *zimun* and the kabbalists taught that it is forbidden to use a cup of wine unless there is a *zimun*, we must refrain from using one in this case.

This reasoning should apply to another case as well. If two people have eaten bread together and a third person joins them, the *Shulḥan Arukh* (199:3) ruled that it is best to persuade the third person to eat bread so that they will be able to recite *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun*. If the third person is willing to eat vegetables but not bread, we can rely on the *Poskim* who ruled that he may still be counted as a member of the *zimun*. There are *Poskim* who ruled that the third person cannot be counted as a member of a *zimun*, however. If so, it follows that in this case they must not use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*. This is the ruling of responsa *Yosef Da'at* Yazdi (page 127).

156. The *Petaḥ Hadevir* (182:2, cited in the *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer 199:19) demonstrated that according to the *Pene Yehoshua*, the *Ture Zahav* and the holy *Zohar* (*parashat Ki Tisa*), men and women are equally obligated to recite *Birkat Hamazon* using a cup of wine. The *Yafe Lalev* (199:1) also cited this passage of the *Zohar*, but he stated that in practice this is unheard of. The *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (182:2) commented that according to the teachings of the holy *Zohar* (*parashat Teruma* and *parashat Ekev*) women should not use a cup of wine even when they form a *zimun* of women. This is direct contradiction to the passage cited by the *Petaḥ Hadevir* and the *Yafe Lalev*, however. Since it is clear that the *Pene Yehoshua* and the *Ture Zahav* ruled that women can use a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*, the *Halakha Berura* (page 308) states that the halakha should follow this opinion. Nevertheless, it is unheard of in practice, as the *Yafe Lalev* testified.