Preface The Cup Used for *Birkat Hamazon*

Our Sages taught (*Berakhot* 51a) that there are ten halakhot regarding the mitzvah of using a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon*. They are:

1) The inside of the cup must be first rinsed out. (halakha 1)

2) The outside of the cup must be first rinsed off. (halakha 1)

3) The wine poured in the cup must be *hai* (alive). (halakha 2)

The *Rishonim* offered several interpretations for this halakha. Rashi's first interpretation is that it must be poured into the cup before it is diluted with water. Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi added that it is to be diluted while recited the second blessing of *Birkat Hamazon*. See the comments of Rabbenu Asher and Rabbenu Yona.

Rashi's second interpretation is that the wine must be used immediately after pouring it from the barrel, while it is still "alive" and has lost none of its fresh color and flavor (halakha 4). A third interpretation is that the cup must not be cracked or chipped. A fourth is that the wine must be raw and not cooked (Tosefot Rabbenu Yehuda Hehassid).

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Shelah* halakha 18) cited the first three interpretations and ruled that each one must be observed.

4) The cup must be filled to its rim. (halakha 5)

5) The cup must be "crowned." The Talmud relates that Rav Yehuda fulfilled this halakha by seating his disciples in a circle around him while he led the *zimun* and recited *Birkat Hamazon*. Rav Hasda fulfilled it by setting up a circle of cups around the one he held in his hand. Others interpreted this to mean filling the cup but not quite up to the rim, so that the cup's rim served as a crown around the wine. See the footnote to halakha 5.

6) The person reciting *Birkat Hamazon* wraps himself in his *tallit*. (halakha 16)

7) The person reciting *Birkat Hamazon* receives the cup with both hands (halakha 8)

8) and transfers it to his right hand. (halakhot 8-10)

9) He lifts it a *tefah* higher than the ground. (halakha 13)

10) He keeps his eyes on the cup (halakha 14). Others say that it is to send the cup to one's family members (specifically one's wife) after tasting it. (halakha 15)

Mahara''l of Prague (*sefer Netivot Olam*, Unit *Ha'avoda* chapter 18) stated that these ten halakhot correspond to the blessing that our forefather Yitzhak bestowed on his son Yaakov. He demonstrated how each halakha correlates to some part of those blessings.

The Talmud concludes: Ribbi Yohanan said, ''We observe four of these halakhot: that the cup be rinsed, inside and outside, that the wine is *hai* and that the cup is filled to its rim.'' This is also the opinion of the holy *Zohar* (*Tikunim* page 85a). The *sefer Rikanati* (commentary to *Devarim* 8:10) explained that Ribbi Yohanan saw that the extent and the affects of our exile precluded the enormous blessings that result from fulfilling the mitzvah of *kos shel berakha* (reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine). The majority of the channels bringing bounty from Heaven had been shut; only four remain open.

The *Rishonim's* Gleaning From the Talmud

The *Ge'onim* ruled that all ten halakhot regarding this cup of wine are obligatory even nowadays. They proved this since the Talmud relates how Rav Papa and Rav Ashi fulfilled the halakha of *ituf*, wrapping themselves in a *tallit*. According to Ribbi Yohanan, this should not have been necessary. Once we have shown that the position of Ribbi Yohanan was rejected, all ten halakhot are obligatory. The *Arba'a Turim* cites all ten halakhot without comment, and apparently he followed this opinion.

Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 7:15), however, ruled according to Ribbi Yohanan's position, requiring the four halakhot he listed only. The Tosafot (cited by Rabbenu Asher) interpreted Ribbi Yohanan's position to exclude the rules of ''crowning'' and being wrapped in one's *tallit*, but that he requires the rules of handing the cup to the leader with two hands, receiving it with two hands and transferring to the right, raising the cup a *tefah* above the ground and keeping one's eyes on the cup. They testified that in their communities the practice followed this ruling and added the practice of wrapping in one's *tallit*. According to this, nine of the ten halakhot are practiced, excluding only the halakha of ''crowning.'' On the other end of the spectrum, the *Shibole Haleket* (#156) cited Rabbenu Shelomo (Rashi) stating that none of the ten halakhot are observed except for that of covering oneself with a *tallit*. This is based on the Talmud's testimony about Rav Papa and Rav Ashi.

In practice, some *Aharonim* ruled that it is necessary to enwrap oneself in a *tallit*, as explained below in halakha 16, but no one requires ''crowning.'' Harav HIDA (*Mahazik Berakha* 183:1) cited the *Aharonim*, including Harav Menahem Azarya of Pano, ruling that only the basic four halakhot (that the cup be rinsed, inside and outside, that the wine is *hai* and that the cup is filled to its rim) must be observed, while the other six are recommended on a voluntary basis.

The Spiritual Qualities of the *Kos shel Berakha*

Although the importance of using a cup of wine for *Birkat Hamazon* was discussed in the preface to *Siman* 182, there is much more to say about it. Our Sages taught (*Berakhot* 51a): Ribbi Yohanan said, ''Anyone who recites *Birkat Hamazon* over a full cup of wine will be granted endless bounty.'' Ribbi Yose bar Hanina said, ''He is privileged to acquire two worlds – this world and the World to Come.''

The holy *Zohar* (*parashat Teruma*) teaches that the verse, ''You will rejoice in God's Presence,'' refers to the *kos shel berakha*, for when reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine one must be happy and he must display happiness and show no sign of depression. When someone picks up the cup, the Blessed Holy One stands over him. Therefore, he must wrap his head in his *tallit* with great joy and recite *Birkat Hamazon* while seated in a group of three. The *kos shel berakha* becomes blessed as the person blesses the Blessed Holy One. This is the ''secret of the faith.'' It must be well-protected since it displays the King's importance and it is for His sake that the table becomes blessed while *Birkat Hamazon* is recited.

Harav Aharon Roth (*sefer Shulhan Hatahor*, page 231b) explained that through fulfilling the ten halakhot regarding *kos shel berakha* one brings God enormous joy and satisfaction. One causes great positive changes in Heaven, things that can be understood through the wisdom of Kabbalah only. The *kos shel berakha* directs Heaven's bounty toward this world, and when one fulfills this mitzvah with joy it enhances this bounty. The four basic halakhot – rinsing the cup inside and out, using wine that is not diluted and filling the cup to its rim – are ***h****adaha*, ***sh****etifa*, ***h****ai* and ***m****ale*. The initial letters of those halakhot spell the word *simha*, joy.

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Naso*) explains that there are fifteen words in the blessing that the *kohanim* bestow on the people in the synagogue. There are fourteen segments in a person's five fingers, corresponding to fourteen of those words of blessing. Our Sages instituted the mitzvah of reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine so that the cup will correspond to the fifteenth word – *shalom*.

Likewise, one eats fourteen meals in the course of a week, two each day. [By reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over a cup of wine after each of these meals, we