BIRCHAS HAMOZON – SELECTED HALACHOS

Birchas hamozon (or bentching) encompasses many halachos. Many people avoid bread because they do not want to bentch. This issue will deal with many issues, such as who is obligated in bentching? Should one use a siddur? Is one required to wear a hat and jacket? What is the proper nusach of bentching?

The Source – Reason

The posuk in Eikev\(^1\) says that one who eats and is satisfied is mevorech. If he is not satisfied, then his obligation is of Rabbinic origin.\(^2\) The Chinuch\(^3\) offers this reason for bentching after we eat bread. Hashem created everything good, and He wants us to have

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1. 8:10. See Meseches Berachos 48b. Refer to Bal Haturim, Rambam 8:10.
3. Mitzvah 430.
good as well. By recognizing Hashem as the source of all blessings, we merit to receive those blessings.

Reward

The Chinuch\(^4\) says, “I have a tradition from my rabbeim, that those who are careful with bentching will receive their mezonos (i.e. parnasa) in an honorable fashion all of their days.” The poskim note that there is no Hebrew letter “pei” in the entire bentching. This is because one who bentches properly merits that no anger will fall on him from Hashem.\(^5\) (The terms for anger, af and ketzef, end with a pei).

Women

There is an obligation for women to bentch, but there is an uncertainty if this obligation is d’oraisa or d’rabbanan in nature.\(^6\) This is based on the Torah’s statement that we, “bentch Hashem for the good land which He gave you.” This statement cannot apply to women who generally do not inherit land.\(^7\) Those women who are lenient and do not bentch are acting incorrectly.\(^8\)

Based on this uncertainty, a woman who was satisfied but is not sure if she bentched does not have to bentch, but may do so if she desires.\(^9\)

Children

A parent should be mechanech his children in bentching.\(^10\) This applies even if a child only at a kezayis.\(^11\) The age for chinuch depends on the intelligence of the child.\(^12\)

The Mishnah Berurah\(^13\) says that one should train his children to say a shorter version of bentching a little at a time until he is ready to say the entire bentching.\(^14\)

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\(^4\) Ibid. Refer to Ateres Zekanim 185:1, Elya Rabbah 185:1, Mishnah Berurah 184:1, Aruch Hashulchan 189:7.

\(^5\) Be’er Heitiv 185:1, Elya Rabbah 185:1, Aruch Hashulchan 189:7.

\(^6\) Refer to Meseches Berochos 20b, Rashi “noshim, Tosfas “noshim,” Shulchan Aruch 186:1, Magen Avraham 1, Taz 1, Levush 1, Shulchan Aruch Harav 1, Chinuch mitzvah 430, Chayei Adam 47:2, Mishnah Berurah 2, Aruch Hashulchan 3, Kaf Hachaim 3, Yechaveh Daas 6:10.

\(^7\) Rashi Meseches Berochos ibid “oy.”

\(^8\) Ben Ish Chai Chukas 1:11.

\(^9\) Mishnah Berurah 3, Biur Halacha “eleh.” See Aruch Hashulchan 184:9. Others say she should hear bentching from someone else (Piskei Teshuvos 186:2).


\(^11\) Mishnah Berurah 4.

\(^12\) Chanoch L’nar 15:1. See V’sein Beracha page 288:footnote 23.

\(^13\) 187:4.

\(^14\) Refer to Halichos Shlomo Tefillah 1:8, Chinuch Yisroel 1:2:10.
A child who claims that he bentched is believed and one does not have to make sure he bentches again.\\textsuperscript{15}

**How Much?**

In order for one to be obligated in bentching min haTorah one has to eat a shiur which is satisfying, but if one eats a kezayis he is obligated m’d’rabbanan.\\textsuperscript{16} This is not equal to all people since everyone has different eating habits.\\textsuperscript{17} One who ate a kezayis and is in doubt if he bentched does not bentch because it is sofek on a d’rabbanan.\\textsuperscript{18} It is preferable to eat the shiur of a kezayis or more within four minutes.\\textsuperscript{19}

**Which Language?**

The opinion of some poskim is that bentching can be recited in any language.\\textsuperscript{20} However, loshon kodesh is the most preferred language.\\textsuperscript{21} One is yotzei bentching even if he does not understand what he is saying only if he recites it in loshon kodesh.\\textsuperscript{22} It is worthwhile to invest time to understand the words of bentching.\\textsuperscript{23}

**Using a Siddur**

The poskim say that one should be careful and bentch from a siddur.\\textsuperscript{24} It is noted that Harav Moshe Feinstein zt”l would use a siddur if it was readily available, but bentched by heart when it was not.\\textsuperscript{25}

**Hearing What You Say**

Before reciting birchas hamazon, one should have in mind that he is fulfilling a mitzvah d’oraisa and say it with great simcha.\\textsuperscript{26} L’chatchilah, all berachos should be recited loud enough to hear. B’deieved one is yotzei as long as he actually said the words.\\textsuperscript{27} However,

\\textsuperscript{15} Rivevos Ephraim 5:172:2.


\\textsuperscript{17} Mishnah Berurah 184:22. See Biur Halacha “kezayis.”

\\textsuperscript{18} Aruch Hashulchan 184:4, Yechaveh Daas 6:10, see Tzitz Eliezer 11:13.

\\textsuperscript{19} Opinion of Harav Elyashiv Shlita quoted in Vezos Ha’beracha page 141. See Igros Moshe O.C. 4:41.

\\textsuperscript{20} Rambam Hilchos Berochos 6:1, Shulchan Aruch 185:1, Levush 1. See Aruch Hashulchan 185:1.

\\textsuperscript{21} Mishnah Berurah 185:1.

\\textsuperscript{22} Aruch Hashulchan 185:4. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 185:1.

\\textsuperscript{23} Birchos Habayis 41:43.

\\textsuperscript{24} Be’er Heitiv 185:1, Mishnah Berurah 185:1, Vezos Ha’beracha page 140:3.

\\textsuperscript{25} As related by Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita. See Rivevos Ephraim 6:120:2.

\\textsuperscript{26} Ben Ish Chai Chukas 1:2.

\\textsuperscript{27} Rambam Hilchos Berochos 1:7, Shulchan Aruch 185:2, Levush 2, Aruch Hashulchan 9, Yabea Omer O.C. 4:18.
many poskim say that he is not yotzei. 28 The Biur Halacha 29 explains that the stringent view does not mean that one is not yotzei, but that it is not the preferred method.

Merely thinking of the berachos is not permitted for a healthy person. 30 If one is in a noisy place, some say that it is not necessary to raise his voice until he hears the beracha. 31 However, if possible, one should try to say the beracha loud enough that someone next to him will be able to answer amen. 32

**Out Loud**

It is a good idea to bentch out loud, because this arouses concentration, and one will not forget the various additions to bentching, such as ya’ale v’yavo. 33 The Chayei Adom 34 says that one should bentch with fear, concentration and simcha.

**Bentching is Comparable to Shemonei Esrei**

When one bentches he should be in the same mind set as when he davens shemonei esrei. 35

Many poskim say that one cannot answer amen or other devarim sh’bekedusha during bentching. 36 One may not make finger motions during bentching. 37 These rules do not apply after the fourth beracha of hatov v’hameitiv. 38 Others say that one should avoid any hefsek until after he has finished bentching if possible. 39 The Chazzon Ish zt”l 40 was of the

Refer to Pischei Halacha (Berochos) 1:footnote 21, see Piskei Teshuvos 185:footnote 18.

28. Sharei Teshuva 1, Birchei Yosef 2, Levush 2. The Ben Ish Chai Chulas 1:7 says if one bentched without hearing what he said he should eat more and bentch again while hearing the words.

29. 62:3 “v’im lav,” see Shulchan Hatohar 185:1 in zer zahav. Refer to Yabea Omer ibid.

30. Magen Avraham 1, Elya Rabbah 2, Machtzis Ha’shekel 1, Be’er Heitiv 1, Aruch Hashulchan 10. The Mishnah Berurah 185:2 says one is not yotzei entirely.

31. Halichos Shlomo Tefillah 22:4, Sharei Ha’beracha 10:footnote 20 quoting this as being the opinion of Harav Wosner Shlita.

32. Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita, see Machtzis Hashekel 6:9, Rivevos Ephraim 1:39:2, Be’er Moshe 3:1 Tzitz Eliezer 11:2.

33. Mishnah Berurah 185:3.

34. 47:13.

35. Shulchan Aruch 183:8, Levush 8, Rav Akiva Eiger 1, Mishnah Berurah 30. Some say it is not exactly like shemonei esrei (opinion of Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l quoted in V’sein Beracha page 311:footnote 27, see Shulchan Aruch Harav 185:5).


37. Aruch Hashulchan 183:8


opinion that one may answer to kedusha and borchu in middle of a beracha, and amen is permitted in between berochos. However, the custom follows the stringent opinion.41

When someone is bentching, his neighbor should be careful not to disturb him. Therefore, one should avoid conversing with another while someone else is bentching close by.42

One should be properly dressed while reciting bentching.43 Wearing a bathrobe is unacceptable.44 Some say that it is proper to wear a hat and jacket.45 The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch46 says that doing so brings one to fear of Hashem and will increase concentration during bentching. The Chazzon Ish zt”l only wore a big yarmulke and did not wear a hat for bentching. The Stiepler zt”l only wore a hat without a jacket.47

Standing vs. Sitting

One should sit during bentching.48 The Levush49 says that this aids concentration. One who bentched while standing, walking, or with kalos rosh was yotzei,50 but it is not a good thing to do.51 One should sit for the fourth beracha even though it is d’rabbanan, in order not to treat the beracha with disrespect.52

The Nusach of Bentching

In the context of bentching, the Torah mentions, food, the land, and good. The three berochos correspond to these three things. Moshe composed the first beracha of bentching,

41. Refer to Rivevos Ephraim 1:148, Yabea Omer O.C. 1:11.
42. V’sein Beracha page 310.
45. See Meseches Berochos 51b, Bach 183, Magen Avraham 5, Elya Rabbah 16, Machtzis Ha’shekel 5, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 44:6, Mishnah Berurah 11, Salmas Chaim 181:page 51, Ohr L’tzyion 2:13:3. The Halichos Shlomo Tefillah 2:73 is lenient for a cholah not to put the jacket on all the way, rather over the shoulders is fine. Refer to Vezos Ha’beracha page 140:4, who quotes from the Chazzon Ish zt”l that the jacket may be worn on the shoulders even not for a cholah, see Orchos Rabbeinu 3:page 207:7. The Aruch Hashulchan 183:4 holds there is no need for a jacket, see Tzitz Eliezer 13:13. Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita says not wearing a hat and jacket while bentching is something that one should grow out of as he matures (Refer to Doleh U’mashka page 111).
46. 44:6.
49. 183:9.
52. Mishnah Berurah 183:31, see Shar Ha’tzyion 37 who seems to be unsure about this point.
and Yehoshua composed the second beracha. The third beracha was composed by Dovid and Shlomo Hamelech. The fourth beracha of hatov v’hametiv is not a d’oraisa. The end of the fourth beracha is al yechasreinu. Although we do not generally answer amen after our own berochos, amen is recited after the beracha of boneh to separate between berochos which are d’oraisa and d’rabbanan.

The harachaman’s that are recited after the fourth beracha are tachnunim, just like we say tachnunim after shemonei esrei. Although we do not ask for personal needs on Shabbos, the custom is to recite the harachaman’s even on Shabbos.

Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l is of the opinion that one may skip from the end of the fourth beracha until the end of bentching. However, why would one want to decline all those berochos?

Migdol and Magdil

The widespread custom is that on Shabbos (and Yom Tov, Rosh Chodesh, Motzei Shabbos, Chol Hamoed and Chanukah) we say migdol, and during the week (and on

55. Tur 189, Shulchan Aruch 189:1, Kaf Hachaim 189:1. Refer to Aruch Hashulchan why there is a fourth beracha in bentching. See Prisha 189:1.
57. Shulchan Aruch 188:1, Mishnah Berurah 188:2, see Pri Megadim M.Z. 51.2.
58. Aruch Hashulchan 189:7. See Tur 189 who questions the recital of the harachaman’s.
59. Refer to Shulchan Aruch 306.
61. V’sein Beracha page 304:footnote 5. See Lekutei Maharich page 246 (new) who says if one has an o’nes he does not have to say the harachaman’s.
63. Taamei Haminhagim (Shabbos) 377:page 174.
64. See Tzohar 9:page 489.
67. Lekutei Maharich page 249 (new).
Purim, and at a siyum where bread is served we say magdil. However, the Boruch Sh’omar says that the whole concept is a mistake. One posuk is from Tehillimi (magdil), and one posuk is in Shmuel Bais (migdol). The letters bais shin bais were printed (before migdol) in the margin of the siddur, which stands for Shmuel Bais. However, people misunderstood it to mean that migdol is only recited on Shabbos. In essence, however, there is only one nusach, and magdil is never recited. Others disagree with this. It is not a simple matter to say that all the poskim who discuss the difference between the weekday and Shabbos bentching with reference to migdol and magdil were in error.

Using a Cup (of Wine etc) for Bentching

There is a discussion in the poskim if one needs to bentch on a cup of wine. The accepted custom is to use a cup. However, it depends on how many people are present. The Shulchan Aruch maintains that if one bentches alone he should bentch with a cup, while others only require it for a zimun (at least three people bentching). Although it may be a preferred mitzvah to bentch with a cup even while alone, the custom of many is to use a cup when bentching with at least with three people. However, this is not an obligation. The purpose of the wine is to honor the mitzvah.
The *Aruch Hashulchan*\(^8^5\) says that in his days they did not use a cup since wine was expensive. However, today this reason is not valid.\(^8^6\)

Some people are *makpid* to *bentch* with a cup on *Shabbos*, and not during the week. One reason is that one is in a rush during the week, as opposed to *Shabbos*.\(^8^7\)

**Vomited**

There is a discussion in the *poskim* whether one is required to *bentch* if he vomited. One who forgot to *bentch* and threw up much later should still *bentch*.\(^8^8\)

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85. 182:1.

86. Refer to *Piskei Teshuvos* 182:footnote 8.


Halachically Speaking is a monthly publication compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits, a former chaver kollel of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and a musmach of Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita. Rabbi Lebovits currently works as the Rabbinical Administrator for the KOF-K Kosher Supervision.

Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary halacha with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant shittos on each topic, as well as the psak of Harav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita on current issues.

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