

PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS OF ZIMUN

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

You will eat and you will be satisfied and bless Hashem...(8:10)

Rabbi Yishmael said, "And you shall bless" refers to Birkas ha-Zimun... (Yerushalmi Berachos 7:7)

QUESTION: In order for the obligation of zimun to be in force, how many people have to be eating?

DISCUSSION: Three men who ate a meal together are Rabbinically(1) required to recite Birkas ha-Mazon together(2). One of them recites the zimun and the first blessing of Birkas ha-Mazon aloud, so that the others can hear him clearly. For this reason, when there is a big crowd, a man with a powerful voice should be chosen for the honor(3).

If two people sit down to a meal which includes bread, and a third person wants to join them, they should ask him to eat bread along with them so that they can recite zimun. If he refuses to eat bread, then even if he eats a k'zayis' worth of any food (approx. 1 fl. oz.), zimun is recited(4).

If the third person drank wine or any natural fruit juice, zimun may definitely be said(5). Many poskim rule that coffee or tea is also sufficient to require zimun(6). Some poskim allow even soda or lemonade(7), while others do not(8). If the third person drank water only, no zimun is said(9).

A minimum of seven people can get together for a meal including bread, and join with three other men who did not eat bread in order to recite the name of Hashem [Elokeinu] when reciting zimun, provided that the three men ate or drank something, as stated above(10).

QUESTION: What are the rules of zimun when five men eat together?

DISCUSSION: Five men who eat together must recite Birkas ha-Mazon together. They may not separate before the zimun is recited(11).

If one or two need to leave early, they should ask the other three to join them in the zimun. If only one of the other three joins them, the remaining two may not join with the one who joined previously, even if they all eat again together(12). If, however, there were six(13) or more men eating together and two of them finished early, the one who joins them for zimun may join the next two when they are finished(14).

QUESTION: May two groups of five people, sitting in a yeshiva dining room at two separate tables, join together for a zimun of ten and recite Elokeinu?

DISCUSSION: Zimun can only be said in one of the following two cases(15): a) by those who sat together at one table, even though each is eating his own meal; b) by members of one household, even though they are seated at separate tables. Therefore:

If the two groups consider themselves as members of one household - in other words, they would have liked to sit together but could not do so because there was no room for all of them at one table - then they may join together for a zimun of ten(16). The tables should be in close proximity to each other(17).

If, however [as is frequently the case], the groups are split according to classes or cliques, and each group wants to sit separately, then they may not join together for a zimun of ten, unless the two groups had the specific intention at the start of the meal to join together(18).

FOOTNOTES

1. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 197:16; 199:19, according to most Rishonim. See, however, Chazon Ish O.C. 31:1, who maintains that zimun is min ha-Torah.
2. O.C. 192:1.
3. Mishnah Berurah 193:17. A microphone should not be used.
4. O.C. 197:3 and Mishnah Berurah 22.
5. O.C. 197:2 and Mishnah Berurah 20. L'chatchilah, a revi'is (3.3 fl. oz.) should be drunk. B'dieved 1.7 fl. oz. is sufficient; Beiur Halachah, ibid.
6. Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:183; Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 130.
7. Aruch ha-Shulchan 197:5.
8. Harav Y.Y. Fisher (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, ibid.).
9. Ruling of the Mishnah Berurah 197:12. Shulchan Aruch Harav and Chayei Adam rule that zimun may be said over water.
10. O.C. 197:2.
11. O.C. 193:1.
12. Mishnah Berurah 200:9. Aruch ha-Shulchan 200:5 and Chazon Ish 31:5, however, hold that if they

eat together again they can recite zimun.

13. Mishnah Berurah, quoting the Magen Avraham, says: seven or eight men, but Levushei Serad and Shoneh Halachos say six or more.

14. Mishnah Berurah 200:9.

15. Mishnah Berurah 193:18.

16. Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah pg. 133). This is the reason why guests at a wedding may join together for a zimun even when there are not ten people at their table. See also Sova Semachos, pg. 111.

17. Beiur Halachah 167:11.

18. Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav C.P. Scheinberg (Vezos ha-Berachah, ibid.). There are other poskim who hold that yeshiva students can join together at any time, see Minchas Yitzchak 8:8 and Beis Baruch 48:24. Harav Elyashiv recommends that to avoid any questions and doubts, it is best that the groups clearly intend not to join together, as the Igros Moshe O.C. 1:56 suggests to a guest who cannot stay late at a wedding.

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