

BIRKAS HA-MAZON

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

I had some cake and meant to say Al ha-michyah but mistakenly I bentched instead. Do I still need to recite Al ha-michyah?

No, you do not. B'diavad, you have fulfilled your obligation of Al ha-michyah through bentsching. This holds true even if you said only the first bracha of bentsching (until hazan es hakol); you do not continue the rest of bentsching nor do you recite Al ha-michyah.

What about the reverse: I washed and ate bread, and by mistake I said Al ha-michyah. Do I still need to bentch?

The poskim debate this question extensively, and since no clear consensus emerges, one should be extra careful not to make such a mistake. If, however, this mishap occurs, the proper thing to do is to wash again and eat another k'zayis of bread and then recite the full bentsching. If for some reason one cannot do so, he may rely on the lenient views and not bentsch.

Am I required to recite Birkas ha-mazon in the exact spot where I ate or may I bentsch anywhere in the room?

Many poskim hold that even l'chatchilah one may recite Birkas ha-mazon anywhere in the room in which he ate, even if the room is so large that he cannot see the spot where he ate from where he presently is. The halachah follows this view. Still, a minority opinion holds that whenever possible, one should bentsch in the exact place where he ate. This halachah applies to a meal eaten indoors. If, however, a meal is eaten outdoors, e.g., a picnic, birkas ha-mazon must be recited at the exact spot where the meal was eaten or, when necessary, within four amos of that place.

If one finished eating, forgot to bentch, and left the premises, must he return to where he ate in order to recite birkas ha-mazon? If, by the time he remembers to bentsch, the food has already started to become digested, i.e., he no longer feels full, he can no longer recite birkas ha-mazon. [Although many poskim mention seventy-two minutes as the time when digestion begins, in reality, this time frame depends on each individual's digestive system and on the amount of food that he ate. Thus, a better method to determine the onset of digestion is when one no longer feels full from the previous meal and is ready to eat again.] But one who remembers to bentsch before the food has begun to be digested is obligated to bentch even though he is no longer at the premises where he ate. The Rishonim, however, disagree on whether or not the halachah requires him to return to where he ate in order to bentsch, or whether he may bentsch at his present location. Whenever

possible, therefore, one should make every effort to quickly return to the place where he ate and bentsch. But under extenuating circumstances one may rely on the lenient opinions and bentsch wherever he finds herself at the time he remembered to bentsch. There are two exceptions to the above rule: 1) If by the time he will return to the place where he ate, more than seventy-two minutes will have passed from the time he finished eating, he should bentsch immediately and not go back. 2) If there is bread available at the place where he presently finds herself, he need not return to the place where he ate originally. Instead, he should wash her hands (without reciting al netilas yadayim), recite ha-motzi, eat (at least) a small amount of bread (even less than a k'zayis) and then recite birkas ha-mazon.

If one finished eating mezonos, wine or the fruits of shiv'as ha-minim, and then forgot to recite the appropriate bracha acharonah (Al ha-michyah, etc.) and left the premises, must he return to where he ate in order to recite the brachah acharonah?

If he can return to where he ate without undue delay, he should do so. Otherwise, he may be lenient and recite the appropriate blessing in her present location.

However, when one eats foods whose bracha acharona is borei nefashos, he need not return to where he ate if he left without reciting a bracha acharona (But l'chatchilah he should not leave the location where he ate until after reciting borei nefashos); instead, he recites borei nefashos at her present location.

Are women obligated in the mitzvah of zimun?

If a woman ate a meal together with at least three other men, she is obligated to join in the zimun together with them. She may not leave the table until the zimun takes place, and if, for some reason, she must leave temporarily, the men should wait for her to return to the table in order to proceed with the zimun.

Three or more women who ate a meal together may recite the zimun for themselves if they wish, but they are under no obligation to do so. [Ten or more women who join together for a meal may be recite the zimun for themselves if they wish, but they are not permitted to recite the word "Elokeinu" during the zimun.] For undetermined reasons, this optional zimun is not practiced today among the Ashkenazim

In all other cases, such as two women and a man, or two men and a woman eating together (or nine men and a woman eating together who would like to recite the zimun with Elokeinu), it is forbidden to recite the zimun.

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