

Rabbi Pamela Barmash
S.A., O.H. 184:4

Birkat Hamazon and Zimmun For Meals that Do Not Include Bread From the Five Species of Grain

This teshuvah was approved on November 1, 2016 by a vote of ten in favor, five against, and four abstaining (10 - 5 - 4). Voting in favor: Rabbis Pamela Barmash, David Booth, Elliot Dorff, Jeremy Kalmanosky, Gail Labovitz, Amy Levin, Daniel Nevins, Micah Peltz, Jay Stein, Iscah Waldman. Voting against: Rabbis Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Reuven Hammer, David Hoffman, Paul Plotkin, and Avram Reisner Abstaining: Rabbis Susan Grossman, Joshua Heller, Jonathan Lubliner, and David Schuck.

שאלה

Do those who have eaten a main meal that includes bread not made from the traditional five species of grain recite Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals)? Do those who have eaten a main meal that does not include bread of any kind recite Birkat Hamazon?

Which berakhah is recited before eating non-gluten bread?

May those who are refraining from eating gluten products be counted in the quorum needed for zimmun (the communal invitation to Birkat Hamazon)? May they lead zimmun?

תשובה

“By framing the physical act of eating with blessings, eating becomes a religious act that brings physical craving for nourishment into the realm of the spiritual. By acknowledging God in a moment of physical need, we transcend those needs and, ideally, develop a sense of control over the desires and cravings that motivate so much of human activity.”¹

A meal is more than the food alone, and this teshuvah addresses a number of the halakhic aspects of the spiritual side of eating. This teshuvah was originally inspired by questions about Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals) and zimmun (the communal invitation to grace after meals) for non-gluten bread, bread not made from the five species of grain, traditionally identified as wheat, oats, barley, spelt, and rye. But given changing trends in eating patterns and the shifts in

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

¹ Rabbi Karen G. Reiss Medwed, “Prayer,” *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), p. 53.

the types of food that have become popular, the scope of the questions addressed has been broadened to include meals without any form of bread.

In recent years, there has been a greater awareness of gluten allergy and intolerance, physiological reactions to food products containing gluten.² Gluten allergy may be manifested in celiac disease or in non-celiac gluten allergy. In addition, a number of people have been diagnosed with gluten intolerance, and others have noticed an increased sense of good health when they have refrained from eating foods containing gluten, even though they have not received a medical diagnosis of gluten allergy or intolerance.

At the same time, eating in Western societies appears to be changing from a typical diet of two or three main meals per day with bread as an item always included. Many people select from a wider array of food than was traditional or simply do not or rarely eat bread. A significant minority of people have adopted no-carbohydrate diets. Other people find themselves no longer eating three main meals per day but rather are “grazing,” eating a number of smaller meals throughout the day, and others are eating grain-based foods that are not bread, such as wraps or cereal, as the basis of a main meal.

These shifts in eating patterns have had an impact on our liturgical practice. There are three variations on the blessing recited after meals: Birkat Hamazon,³ berakhah aḥaronah,⁴ and the berakhah borei nefashot.⁵ Those who cannot eat products containing gluten are not reciting Birkat Hamazon at all since they cannot consume bread made from the five species of grain. Those who refrain from eating products containing gluten may recite Birkat Hamazon on Shabbat and festivals only if they consume ḥallah made from the five species of grain, modifying their regular

²For information about celiac disease, gluten allergy, and gluten intolerance, see <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/celiac-disease/basics/definition/con-20030410>>; <<http://www.cureceliacdisease.org/archives/category/faq-about-celiac-disease>>; <<http://celiacdisease.about.com/od/glutenintolerance/a/Gluten-Intolerance-Gluten-Sensitivity.htm>>; and Michael Spector, “Against the Grain: Should You Go Gluten-Free?” *The New Yorker*, November 3, 2014 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/03/grain>>, accessed 1/14/2015. For an analysis of the increase of allergies in contemporary society, see Matthew Smith, *Another Person’s Poison: A History of Food Allergy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

³This is found in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays*, pp. 754-769, with an abbreviated version, pp. 778-780; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*, pp. 230-236, with an abridged version, pp. 237-240; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, pp. 337-343, with an abridged version, pp. 344-348; *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pp. 87-93, with an abridged version, pp. 94-96.

⁴Berakhah aḥaronah, also known as berakhah aḥat me-ein shalosh, is found in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays*, pp. 782-784; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*, pp. 248-249; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, pp. 349-350; *Siddur Lev Shalem*, p. 97.

⁵The berakhah borei nefashot is found in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays*, p. 784; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*, p. 249; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, p. 350; *Siddur Lev Shalem*, p. 97.

eating pattern in partaking of sabbath and festival meals. Others choose to retain their regular eating pattern of not eating bread made from the five species of grain and do not ever recite Birkat Hamazon. Is never, or rarely, reciting Birkat Hamazon liturgically and spiritually appropriate?

A number of related questions arise. First, both those who cannot eat and those who choose to refrain from eating bread made from the five species of grain may eat bread in the form of loaves and other raised dough products made from gluten-free ingredients. Which berakhah is to be recited for non-gluten bread? Second, an issue closely related to Birkat Hamazon is that of zimmun (the communal invitation to Birkat Hamazon). Only those expected to recite Birkat Hamazon according to the criterion of whether they have consumed bread from the five species of grain are counted in the quorum needed for zimmun and can lead it. But in light of the shift in eating patterns, may those who are refraining from eating gluten products be counted in the quorum needed for Zimmin, and may they lead it? Third, those eating bread from the five species of grain observe the practice of the ritual washing of hands before eating. Would this be extended to those following newer practices of eating?

The Basis for Birkat Hamazon

The Torah teaches:

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְיָ־הָאֱלֹהֶיךָ...

“When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God...”
(Deuteronomy 8:10)

The mitzvah of reciting Birkat Hamazon at the end of a meal is based on this verse from Deuteronomy. Eating one’s fill is not to be a physical act alone: our tradition teaches that when we have met our nutritional needs, we need to acknowledge the spiritual realm.

Maimonides (Spain, Egypt, 1135-1204) writes:

מצות עשה מן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את יי' אלהיך, ואינו חייב מן התורה אלא אם כן שבע שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת, ומדברי סופרים אכל אפילו כזית מברך אחריו. ומדברי סופרים לברך על כל מאכל תחלה ואח"כ יהנה ממנו...

It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to recite a blessing after eating food, as it says “When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God...” (Deut 8:10), and one is obligated only if one is satiated. It is only from (the ruling of) the scribes (the religious leaders before the rabbis) that one recites a blessing afterward if one has eaten the equivalent of an olive, and it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing before eating any food and then enjoys it...and it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing after eating any food or consuming any drink....
(Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Berakhot, 1:1-2)

Maimonides distinguishes clearly between the biblical command to bless after one has eaten one's fill and the later rulings that prescribe a blessing after consuming an amount as small as an olive and a blessing before consuming food of any kind. He also omits any requirement that one needs to eat bread as part of a meal that should be followed by a blessing.

Maimonides then writes:

כל שמברכין עליו בתחלה המוציא מברכין לאחריו בסוף ברכת המזון כסדרה ארבע ברכות, וכל שמברכין עליו בתחלה בורא מיני מזונות מברכין בסוף לאחריו ברכה אחת מעין שלש חוץ מן האורז.

Any (food) for which one recites the blessing before (eating), one recites Birkat Hamazon afterwards. Any (food) for which one recites the blessing before (eating), one recites berakhah aḥaronah afterwards, except for rice.⁶

(Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Berakhot, 3:11)

Rabbi Joseph Caro (Spain, Israel, 1488-1575) comments on Maimonides' words:

ואיכא למידק שרבינו כתב מ"ע מן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון וכל הדברים בכלל מזון חוץ מן המים ומן המלח כדתנן בר"פ בכל מערבין וא"כ היכי קאמר בתר הכי דמד"ס לברך אחר כל מה שיאכל. וי"ל דכיון דקרא דואכלת ושבעת וברכת כתיב בתר קרא דארץ חטה ושעורה וכו' אית לן למימר דלא חייבה תורה לברך אלא על שבעת המינים הכתובים באותו פסוק וכמ"ש סמ"ג בשם ה"ג, ולפי זה מ"ש רבינו דמן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון אחר שבעת מינים קאמר וצ"ל דזייני טפי מדברים אחרים. ומיהו קשה דא"כ הו"ל לרבינו לומר שנאמר ארץ חטה ושעורה וכו' ואכלת ושבעת וברכת. ולכן נ"ל דרבינו דייק לישנא דתוספתא (ברכות מ"ח:) דקתני ברכת מזון מן התורה שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת ומשמע ליה דאחמשת מיני דגן דוקא קאמר מדנקט ושבעת ואין לך דבר שמשביע אלא ה' מיני דגן:

One can observe by making fine distinctions that our teacher wrote that it is a mitzvah from the Torah that one must recite Birkat Hamazon after eating food, including all types of food, except for water and salt, as it is taught at the beginning of chapter 3 of tractate Eruvin (27a)⁷, and if so, how can he say after this that it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing after eating any food or consuming any drink since it would appear that this is already included in what is written in the Torah.

One can say that since the verse "When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..." appears after the verse "a land of wheat and barley," we can argue that the Torah obliges us to bless only (after eating) the seven species of food mentioned specifically in that verse, just as claimed in Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (Rabbi Moshe Coucy) in the name of Halakhot Gedolot (Rav Yehudai Gaon).

Accordingly, what our teacher (Maimonides) wrote that "it is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to recite a blessing after eating food," he meant it only for the seven species of Land

⁶In M.T. Hilkhoh Berakhot 3:10, Maimonides writes that after eating rice, one recites berakhah borei nefashot.

⁷Although the discussion on that page in the Babylonian Talmud is in fact about which foods could constitute eruv tavshilin. A more apt source would be Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35b.

of Israel, but one must say that the reason is that (those species) yield more nutrition than other foods. In any case, it is problematic that if this is what he meant, our teacher (Maimonides) should have quoted “a land of wheat and barley...When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God...”

Therefore, it seems to me that our teacher (Maimonides) observed by making fine distinctions in the language of the Tosefta, “Our rabbis taught: Where is the source for Birkat Hamazon in the Torah? (The source is) as it is written, When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God...,” it was clear to him that this was meant to apply to five species of grain (and not the seven species of the Land of Israel), since he based his ruling on (the words) “and are satiated.” No food satiates like the five species of grain.

(Kesef Mishnah on M.T., Hilkhhot Berakhot, 1:2)

According to Caro, then, the reason for choosing to eat the five species of grain is because of their high nutritional value, not because of a biblical proof-text. Their essential characteristic is that the five species of grain are effective at satiation. In fact, Caro advises eating bread in the morning:⁸

קודם שילך לבה"ם יוכל לאכול פת שחרית אם הוא רגיל בו, וטוב שירגיל בו.

Before one goes to the beit midrash (house of study), one should eat morning bread if one is used to doing so, and it is good that this be one's custom.

(S.A., O.H., 155.2)

A sugya does entertain the idea that a food other than bread could satiate and serve as the basis of a main meal:

חמרא אית ביה תרתי - סעיד ומשמח, נהמא - מסעד סעיד, שמוחי לא משמח. אי הכי נבריך עליה שלש ברכות! לא קבעי אינשי סעודתייהו עלויה. אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק לרבא: אי קבע עלויה סעודתיה מאי? אמר ליה: לכשיבא אליהו ויאמר אי הויה קביעותא, השתא מיהא בטלה דעתו אצל כל אדם.

The fact is that wine does both: it satiates and makes cheerful, whereas bread satiates but does not make cheerful. If that is the case, let us say Birkat Hamazon after it? (The reason why Birkat Hamazon is not said after wine is that) people do not make it the basis of the meal. Rav Nahman bar Isaac asked Rava: Suppose a person makes it the basis of his meal, what then? He replied: When Elijah comes, he will tell us whether it can really serve as a basis. Now, at any rate, no one thinks of such a thing.

(Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35b)

The sugya assumes that there is a two-fold test for whether a food is the basis of a main meal (קובע סעודה): it must be able to satiate a person, and it must be the habit of the social group to

⁸I am indebted to an unpublished sermon of Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun for awareness of Caro's recommendation of eating bread every morning.

which one belongs to base a meal on it. Since wine is not customarily used as the basis of a meal, one does not recite Birkat Hamazon after it.

In general, halakhic sources have assumed that a main meal must include bread from the five species of grain, even if bread does not constitute the major substance of that meal and is consumed only in the measure of an olive. However, another approach is presented in the Mishnah:

אכל תאנים וענבים ורמונים מברך אחריהן שלש ברכות דברי רבן גמליאל וחכמים אומרים ברכה אחת מעין שלש ר"ע אומר אפי' אכל שלק והוא מזונו מברך אחריו ג' ברכות:

If one ate grapes, figs, or pomegranates, one recites Birkat Hamazon, according to Rabban Gamaliel.⁹ But the sages say, berakhah aḥaronah. Rabbi Akiva says: Even if one ate שלק (a boiled vegetable) for one's main food, one must recite Birkat Hamazon afterwards.

(Mishnah, Berakhot 6:8)

The Gemara offers the definition of שלק:

ומי איכא מידי דהוה שלק מזוני? אמר רב אשי: בקלח של כרוב שנו.

Is there a kind of boiled vegetable from which one can make a meal? Rav Ashi replied: The rule applies to the stalk of cabbage.

(Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 44b)

Rabbi Akiva's opinion is that it is appropriate to recite Birkat Hamazon even for vegetables that serve as one's main food. However, the halakhah until now has not followed the opinion of Rabbi Akiva because it was assumed that bread (from the five species of grain) was the key ingredient that satiates and serves as the basis of a main meal.

In our time, when main meals for many people are not bread-based, it is appropriate to adopt the position of Rabbi Akiva. We recognize that eating habits have changed and that we should no longer consider bread as the determining factor for a main meal (קובע סעודה). Many people do not eat bread at all but base their diet on other ingredients. The definition of a main meal should be the satiation of the person consuming the food: a person recognizes the difference between a snack and a main meal that satiates and satisfies a significant part of a person's nutritional needs.¹⁰ A snack is a minor amount of food that tides a person over until a main meal and/or provides quick energy: it does not constitute a main meal. A meal that provides a

⁹Another passage, Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 37a, records Rabban Gamaliel persisting in his opinion that a non-bread food, in this case, large dates, would incur the recitation of Birkat Hamazon.

¹⁰There are two approaches in halakhah to this issue: the approach we have taken takes into account the satiation of the person who eats as to whether the meal is a main meal or a snack. The other approach considers the identity and the amount consumed.

significant part of a person's nutritional needs and leaves a person satiated would constitute a main meal, even if it lacked bread. After eating such a filling meal, a person should recite Birkat Hamazon.

An objection to this approach is that Birkat Hamazon is lengthy and that reciting it more often, in place of berakhah aḥaronah, might be seen by some as burdensome. However, there are considerations to be balanced against this objection. First, it must be noted that we already have abbreviated versions of Birkat Hamazon in our siddurim: *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays*, pp. 778-780; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*, pp. 237-240; *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, pp. 344-348; *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pp. 94-96. The interest in shortening Birkat Hamazon is not new: the version in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*, *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, and in *Siddur Lev Shalem* is attested in fragments from the Cairo Genizah from the first millennium CE.¹¹ Second, Birkat Hamazon is the liturgy for a main meal, whereas berakhah aḥaronah and berakhah borei nefashot are for snacks. Those who cannot eat gluten are currently not reciting Birkat Hamazon at all, while others who are refraining from consuming products containing gluten may recite it occasionally only if they modify their eating habits from time to time, perhaps in honor of Shabbat and festivals. Many others are simply never eating bread-based main meals. Does it make sense for the liturgy meant for a main meal to be omitted so often, even on a daily basis?

Nowadays, when many people do not eat bread at all but base their diet on other ingredients, it is appropriate to adopt the position of Rabbi Akiva: we should no longer consider bread as the determining factor for the recitation of Birkat Hamazon. The determining factor is whether the person consuming the food is satiated and therefore has intended that the food consumed is a main meal.

The Berakhah מן הארץ לחם, the Five Species of Grain, and Non-Gluten Bread

The berakhah (blessing) for bread that is made from the five species of grain, defined traditionally as wheat, oats, barley, spelt, and rye, is *המוציא לחם מן הארץ* (“hamotzi leḥem min ha-aretz”).¹² A meal for which this berakhah is recited does not require berakhot (blessings) for any of the other foods and beverages that may be consumed as part of the meal (except for wine): this berakhah serves as the master berakhah for the meal.(O.H. 177)¹³ This is so, even if a person who

¹¹See *Siddur Lev Shalem*, p. 94. There is another abbreviated version in a commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh* from the first half of the 18th century (Be'er Heitev, section 1, on S.A., O.H., 192).

¹²O.H. 167:2; Mishnah Berakhot 6:1, 5; Mishnah Pesahim 2:5; Rabbi Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: JTS, 1979), p. 43; Medwed, “Prayer,” in *The Observant Life*, pp. 53-55.

¹³Karo highlights a distinction between foods, such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, vegetables, and pickles, meant to be eaten with the bread, and fruit, meant to be eaten separately, for which a separate berakhah is to be recited.(O.H. 177:1)

recites this berakhah does not know what other foods will be served in the course of a meal and consumes bread in the amount as minimal as the measure of an olive.(O.H. 184:6)

The traditional five species of grain, wheat, oats, barley, spelt, and rye, vary in the amount of gluten they contain. Wheat, rye, and barley contain gluten, and they serve as the basic ingredients for bread.¹⁴ Rye contains less gluten than wheat, and barley contains even less.¹⁵ Oats do not contain gluten¹⁶ and, therefore, cannot be made into raised breads on their own: oat breads are made from a limited amount of oats mixed with a large amount of wheat flour.¹⁷ Spelt, the fifth of the traditional species of grain, is a variety of wheat, and it contains gluten.

Diners who need or wish to avoid breads with gluten do have the option of non-gluten breads, that is, loaves and other forms of raised dough products.¹⁸ These breads are made from rice flour or potato starch combined with xanthan gum, a product that mimics the elastic action of gluten in creating pockets of air.¹⁹ The berakhah for bread made from rice flour is בורא מיני מזונות.²⁰ The berakhah for bread made from potato starch is בורא פרי האדמה.²¹

However, some may wish follow to another line of reasoning. The appropriate berakhah for products made from the five species of grain is not always המוציא לחם מן הארץ. A special category of foods made from these five species of grain is פת הבאה בכיסנין, and the appropriate berakhah is based on whether it is used as the basis of a main meal:²²

¹⁴See Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (revised and updated; New York: Scribner, 2004), pp. 464-471, 521-528, 545-546. There is another grain that contains gluten, called triticale, a wheat-rye hybrid developed in the 19th century. Its commercial production is limited, but it continues to be a subject of horticultural research.

¹⁵Even though rye and barley contain gluten, rye and barley breads are commonly made from dough consisting mostly of wheat flour and a lesser percentage of rye flour or barley flour.

¹⁶Oats contain avenin in place of the gliadin (a protein that is a component of gluten) in wheat. Some people sensitive to gluten may have a reaction to avenin as well.

¹⁷It is likely that the identification of שכולת שועל with oats in post-Talmudic literature is faulty and that it is more likely that the references in the Mishnah are designating two-rowed barley, a grain that does include gluten. See Yehudah Feliks, הצומח והחי במשנה: בליווי פרק על כלי החקלאות ומנוחה, (Jerusalem: Ha-makhon le-ḥeker ha-mishnah, 1985), pp. 155, 189.

¹⁸This is to exclude non-gluten products such as noodles. See O.H. 168:13 and Arukh Hashulhan O.H. 168:46 for a distinction based on form.

¹⁹See, for example, the ingredients for the gluten-free flour blends of <<http://www.blendsbyorly.com/faqs/>> or the products of <<http://www.katzglutenfree.com/>>.

²⁰S.A., O.H., 208:7; M.B. 208:25.

²¹It must be noted that there is a debate over whether the berakhah for potatoes is בורא פרי האדמה or שהכל נהיה בדברו. See Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Belarus, United States, 1895-1986), *Yabi'a Omer*, part 7, O.H. 29 and especially O.H. 33, on flour made from potatoes, and Rabbi Menashe Klein (Hungary, United States, Israel, 1924-2011), *Mishneh Halakhot*, part 6, siman 29.

²²See the excursus for a discussion on the identification of פת הבאה בכיסנין.

רב יהודה הוה עסיק ליה לבריה בי רב יהודה בר חביבא, אייתו לקמייהו פת הבאה בכסנין. כי אתא, שמעינהו דקא מברכי המוציא. אמר להו: מאי ציצי דקא שמענא? דילמא המוציא לחם מן הארץ קא מברכיתו? - אמרי ליה: אין; דתניא רבי מונא אמר משום רבי יהודה: פת הבאה בכסנין מברכין עליה המוציא, ואמר שמואל: הלכה כרבי מונא. אמר להו: אין הלכה כרבי מונא אתמר. אמרי ליה: והא מר הוא דאמר משמיה דשמואל, לחמניות - מערבין בהן ומברכין עליהן המוציא! - שאני התם דקבע סעודתיה עלייהו, אבל היכא דלא קבע סעודתיה עלייהו - לא.

Rav Judah gave a wedding feast for his son in the house of Rabbi Judah bar Haviva. They set before the guests פת הבאה בכיסנין. He came in and heard them saying the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ. He said to them: What is this chirping that I hear? Are you perhaps saying the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ? They replied: Yes, we are, since it has been taught: Rabbi Muna said in the name of Rabbi Judah: Over פת הבאה בכיסנין, the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ is said; and Samuel said that the halakhah is as stated by Rabbi Muna. He said to them: (You have misspoken. In fact, what was taught was) the halakhah is *not* as stated by Rabbi Muna. They said to him: Is it not the Master himself who has said in the name of Samuel that bread rolls may be used for an eruv, and the berakhah said over them is המוציא לחם מן הארץ? [He replied]: There [we speak] of a different case, namely, where they (the bread rolls) designate a main meal (i.e. serve as the basis of a main meal); but if they do not designate a main meal, this does not apply.

(Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 42a)

This sugya recounts this episode: guests are served פת הבאה בכיסנין, and they recite the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ. Rav Judah questions them and deems their reasoning as mistaken - the berakhah they have recited is not the correct one. The guests object to Rav Judah's correction and offer what they claim is his own statement as proof that the berakhah should be המוציא לחם מן הארץ. Rav Judah corrects them a second time and states that the rule is the opposite of what they said: only if פת הבאה בכיסנין were the basis of a meal would the appropriate berakhah be המוציא לחם מן הארץ.²³

In regard to the berakhah for non-gluten bread, some may wish to follow the argument of Berakhot 42a. We should take into account the use of a food, not only its makeup. The usage is decisive. Just as the berakhah for פת הבאה בכיסנין switches to המוציא לחם מן הארץ if it becomes the basis of a main meal, so too if non-gluten bread is the basis of a main meal, then the berakhah is המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Zimmun (the Communal Introduction to Birkat Hamazon)

Birkat Hamazon is introduced with zimmun, a formal invitation to recite Birkat Hamazon together. (Mishnah Berakhot 7.1; O.H. 192.1) In this teshuvah, we have ruled that the criterion for a main meal is the eater's satiation and intention, even if that person is not consuming bread from the five species of grain, and that Birkat Hamazon is the appropriate way to conclude. The logical

²³The previous sugya in b. Berakhot 42a also agrees with this ruling.

consequence is that a person expected to recite Birkat Hamazon is counted in the requisite number needed for zimmun without any qualification and may serve as the prayer-leader for zimmun (and Birkat Hamazon). It is not necessary that others included in zimmun must have eaten bread made from the five species of grain.

Even the halakhic ruling that presumed that a main meal required bread made from the five species of grain allows a person who has not eaten it to be counted in the three person quorum needed for zimmun as long as the other two had eaten bread.

ויש אומרים דבכזית דגן מהני אפילו אינו פת ויש אומרים דבירק ובכל מאכל מהני הלכך שנים שאכלו ובא שלישי אם יכולים להזקיפו שיאכל כזית פת מוטב ואם אינו רוצה לא יתנו לו לשתות ולא מאכל אחר ואם אירע שנתנו לו לשתות או מאכל אחר יזמנו עמו אף על פי שאינו רוצה לאכול פת.

There are those who say that an olive's worth of grain is sufficient (for zimmun), even if it is not bread. And there are those who say that even with vegetable or any foodstuff, it is sufficient. Therefore if two ate, and a third comes along, if they want to force him to eat an olive's worth of bread, it is better. But if he does not want to, they should not give him to drink or to eat a different food. And if it happens that they gave him drink or a different food, they should do zimmun with him even if he didn't want to eat bread.

(O.H., 197:3)²⁴

Furthermore, a person who has eaten or drunk anything (except water) may be counted in the ten person quorum required to mention the divine name in zimmun.(Arukh Hashulhan, O.H., 197:5)²⁵

²⁴ See also Arukh Hashulhan, O.H., 197:1-3 and Mishnah Berurah 197:21.

²⁵ Those who hold that the issues of reciting Birkat Hamazon and of inclusion and leadership in zimmun are parallel and non-intersecting issues may find it worthwhile to consider this explanation of Rabbi Yehiel Michel Halevi Epstein (Russia, 1829 - 1908):

...לפיכך חבורה שאכלו, אלו אכלו כדי שביעה, ואלו אכלו רק כזית וכביצה – נכון לכתחילה שיברך מאותן שאכלו כדי שביעה, ולא מאותן שאכלו כזית וכביצה, דמוטב שהמחוייב מן התורה יברך להמחוייב רק דרבנן ולא להיפך. אמנם בדיעבד או אם אין בהאותם שאכלו כדי שביעה שידעו לברך – יברך מי שאכל כזית, וכולם יצאו ידי חובתם. והטעם: דברכת המזון כיון שמחוייב לברך, הוה כברכת המצות שאחד יכול להוציא לחברו אף שלא עשה המצוה כלל, מטעם ד"כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה". ולא דמי לברכת הנהנין דאינו מוציא אלא אם כן נהנה גם בעצמו. אלא דברכת המזון אי אפשר להוציא בלא אכילה כלל, דאיך יאמר "שאכלנו משלך", והרי לא אכל? ולכן מוכרח לאכול כזית. אבל כשאכל כזית – דיו, ויכול להוציא אחרים ידי חובתן...

(The majority of the halakhic decisors were of the opinion that Birkat Hamazon was an obligation derived from the Torah as long as one ate to satiety and that eating a measure of bread equal to an olive was of rabbinic derivation). Therefore in regard to a group that ate, some of whom ate to satiety and some of whom ate a measure equal to an olive, it is correct ab initio that the one who leads ought to be one who ate to satiety, not one who ate less, whether the measure of an olive or an egg, since it is better that one who is obligated according to the Torah rather than one who is obligated rabbinically and not the other way round. However, after the fact, if among those who ate to satiety there is none

Netilat Yadayim (The Ritual Washing of Hands Before a Meal)

It has been the practice that a person eating a main meal (with bread) performs netilat yadayim (ritual washing of the hands) before eating. The question arises: would a person eating a main meal according to the definition of a main meal advocated in this teshuvah also have to perform netilat yadayim?

The answer is no, and the reason has to do with the link of hand washing to ritual impurity:

חכמים תקנו ליטול הידים במים כשרוצה לאכול לחם כדתנן בחגיגה י"ח: נוטלין לידיהם לחולין ולמעשר ולתרומה ומפרש בגמ' לחולין באכילה ולתרומה אף בנגיעה משום דסתם ידיהם הוי שניות לטומאה ושני עושה שלישי בתרומה וגזרו על אכילה דחולין משום סרך תרומה [חולין ק"ו]. דאם לא ירגילו ליטול ידיהם בחולין אתו למיסרך גם בתרומה לבלי ליטול ידיהם ולא החמירו בנגיעה דחולין דדיינו אם נרגיל עצמינו באכילה דחולין...

The sages ordained that the hands must be rinsed when one wants to eat bread, as we learn in Hagigah 18b: “The hands are to be rinsed for unconsecrated food, the tithe, and terumah.” It is explained in the Gemara that this applies to eating unconsecrated food and to touching terumah because hands can cause impurity at two removes, while terumah can cause impurity at three removes, and the (sages) required hand washing when eating unconsecrated food in order to acquire the habit of washing for terumah, as Hullin 106a: “If they do not habituate themselves to wash their hands before eating unconsecrated food, they will come to follow the habit of not washing their hands for terumah.” They were not stringent (in requiring it) for touching unconsecrated food because it seemed sufficient to acquire the habit when *eating* unconsecrated food (and not necessary when *touching* unconsecrated food)....

(Arukh Hashulḥan, O.H., 158:1)

who knows how to lead Birkat Hamazon, let one who ate only the measure of an olive lead Birkat Hamazon, and then all can fulfill their obligation to recite Birkat Hamazon. The reason is this: In regard to Birkat Hamazon that one is obligated to recite, is it like a berakhah for mitzvot that one who has not performed it at all may fulfill another's obligation (in this particular case) because “all Israel are guarantors for one another” and not like berakhot of enjoyment (such as for eating different foods) where one can fulfill another's obligation only if one has consumed (that particular food) oneself. Rather, in regard to Birkat Hamazon, we do not say that one can fulfill the obligation of others unless one has eaten the measure of an olive because how can one say “the one of whose food we have partaken” (a citation of a line from zimmun) if one has not eaten. Therefore, one must eat the equivalent of an olive. But that is sufficient, and one can (lead zimmun and Birkat Hamazon and) fulfill the obligation of others.

The criterion he suggests for leading zimmun and Birkat Hamazon is minimum participation, eating as little as the measure of an olive.

Ritual washing was required so as to acquire the habit of washing before touching terumah, consecrated food meant for the priests and their households to consume (when the Jerusalem Temple was standing).(m. Terumot 8:2) Ritual washing was limited to those eating bread and was not extended to touching any other unconsecrated food product. There is no reason to extend the practice prompted by hand impurity to other foods beyond bread made from the five species of grain when terumah no longer exists.²⁶

פסק

1. If a person eats a meal that satiates so that it constitutes a main meal satisfying a major part of that person's nutritional needs without eating bread made from the traditional five species of grain (wheat, oats, barley, spelt, and rye), that person should recite Birkat Hamazon after the meal.
2. The berakhah for non-gluten bread made from rice flour is בורא מיני מזונות. The berakhah for non-gluten bread made from potato starch is בורא פרי האדמה.
3. Some may wish to follow this ruling: Since the berakhah for פת הבאה בכיסנין, when used as the foundational component of a main meal, is המוציא לחם מן-הארץ, so too the berakhah for breads (loaves and raised dough products) made with gluten free flours eaten as a foundational component of a main meal (קובע סעודה) should be the berakhah המוציא לחם מן-הארץ.
4. A person eating a main meal without bread made from the traditional five species of grain can be counted in the minimum number needed for zimmun and can serve as the prayer-leader for zimmun and Birkat Hamazon.
5. A person eating a main meal without bread made from the traditional five species of grain does not have to observe netilat yadayim (the ritual washing of the hands before a meal).

²⁶A number of people assisted me with counsel and criticism in the course of writing this teshuvah, and I wish to express my appreciation to them: Jacob Cytryn, Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Rabbi Adam Kligfeld, Rabbi Judah Kogen, Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz, Rabbi Avram Reisner, and Rabbi David Wise.

Excursus on פת הבאה בכיסנין

What is meant by the category פת הבאה בכיסנין is unclear. The word כיסנא means “hemp seed,” but it is unclear what this means in the time of the Babylonian Talmud. A number of possibilities come to mind: 1) The dough was mixed or filled with these seeds; 2) wheat grains were baked or fried and thereby **looked** like hemp seeds; or 3) wheat grains were baked or fried and were **eaten** like snacks of hemp seed.²⁷ Rabbi Marcus Jastrow suggests that the root of the word is כִּסַּס, “to nibble,” signifying that פת הבאה בכיסנין refers to “nibblings, dessert”.²⁸ While this etymology is incorrect, it may nonetheless be how the term פת הבאה בכיסנין was understood in certain time periods, as a snack made of bread-like food.

Later halakhic authorities agree that it is a dish meant as a snack or as dessert but disagree as to which other ingredients are mixed in and how it is cooked or baked. According to S.A. 168:7, there are three basic definitions:

1. Dough that has been baked into a crisp and hard texture. Examples of this definition are crackers, flatbread, bread sticks, and pretzels.²⁹

1a. This definition is further refined: these items are usually eaten as a snack. (Mishnah Berurah, O.H. 168:35)

2. Dough that has been sweetened with honey, oil, milk or spices and is cake-like, tasting sweet and fruity.³⁰

2a. The Bach (Rabbi Joel Sirkes, 1561-1640, Poland) further develops this definition by stating that the eggs, honey and sweet and spiced ingredients should be in greater amounts than the flour. (Be'er Heitev on O.H. 168:12)

2b. The Taz (Rabbi David ben Samuel Halevi, 1586-1667, Poland) disagrees with the Bach, stating that the liquid ingredients should be more honey than water. (Taz on O.H. 168:6; Be'er Heitev on O.H. 168:12)

3. Dough that is filled with honey, nuts, sweets, and spices.

What all these explanations have in common is that they identify these foods as a snack or a dessert. These foods are something other than a major course in a main meal.

²⁷See Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), p. 577.

²⁸Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli (sic) and Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature*, p. 634.

²⁹This may originally be the opinion of Rabbi Hai Gaon, quoted in an entry in the *Arukh*, s.v. כִּסַּס, cited by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the *Beit Yosef* on Tur O.H. 168:8. See Nathaniel ben Yehiel, *Arukh Hashalem* (ed. Rabbi Alexander Kohut; Vienna: Menorah, 1926), volume 4, pp. 275-276.

³⁰See Rashi on Berakhot 42b.

Birkat Hamazon and Zimmun
For Meals that Do Not Include Bread From the Five Species of Grain
 Rabbi Pamela Barmash
 Source Sheet

1. Rabbi Karen G. Reiss Medwed, "Prayer," *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), p. 53

"By framing the physical act of eating with blessings, eating becomes a religious act that brings physical craving for nourishment into the realm of the spiritual. By acknowledging God in a moment of physical need, we transcend those needs and, ideally, develop a sense of control over the desires and cravings that motivate so much of human activity."

2. Deuteronomy 8:10

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ...

"When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..."

3. Maimonides (Spain, Egypt, 1135-1204), *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Berakhot, 1:1-2*

מצות עשה מן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את יי' אלהיך, ואינו חייב מן התורה אלא אם כן שבע שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת, ומדברי סופרים אכל אפילו כזית מברך אחריו. ומדברי סופרים לברך על כל מאכל תחלה ואח"כ יהנה ממנו...

It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to recite a blessing after eating food, as it says "When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..." (Deut 8:10), and one is obligated only if one is satiated. It is only from (the ruling of) the scribes (the religious leaders before the rabbis) that one recites a blessing afterward if one has eaten the equivalent of an olive, and it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing before eating any food and then enjoys it...and it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing after eating any food or consuming any drink....

4. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Berakhot, 3:11*

כל שמברכין עליו בתחלה המוציא מברכין לאחריו בסוף ברכת המזון כסדרה ארבע ברכות, וכל שמברכין עליו בתחלה בורא מיני מזונות מברכין בסוף לאחריו ברכה אחת מעין שלש חוץ מן האורז.

Any (food) for which one recites the blessing before (eating), one recites Birkat Hamazon afterwards. Any (food) for which one recites the blessing before (eating), one recites berakhah aḥaronah afterwards, except for rice.

5. Rabbi Joseph Caro (Spain, Israel, 1488-1575), Kesef Mishnah on Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Berakhot, 1:2

ואיכא למידק שרבינו כתב מ"ע מן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון וכל הדברים בכלל מזון חוץ מן המים ומן המלח כדתנן בר"פ בכל מערבין וא"כ היכי קאמר בתר הכי דמד"ס לברך אחר כל מה שיאכל. וי"ל דכיון דקרא דואכלת ושבעת וברכת כתיב בתר קרא דארץ חטה ושעורה וכו' אית לן למימר דלא חייבה תורה לברך אלא על שבעת המינין הכתובים באותו פסוק וכמ"ש סמ"ג בשם ה"ג, ולפי זה מ"ש רבינו דמן התורה לברך אחר אכילת מזון אחר שבעת מינים קאמר וצ"ל דזייני טפי מדברים אחרים. ומיהו קשה דא"כ הו"ל לרבינו לומר שנאמר ארץ חטה ושעורה וכו' ואכלת ושבעת וברכת. ולכן נ"ל דרבינו דייק לישנא דתוספתא (ברכות מ"ח:): דקתני ברכת מזון מן התורה שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת ומשמע ליה דאחמשת מיני דגן דוקא קאמר מדנקט ושבעת ואין לך דבר שמשביע אלא ה' מיני דגן:

One can observe by making fine distinctions that our teacher wrote that it is a mitzvah from the Torah that one must recite Birkat Hamazon after eating food, including all types of food, except for water and salt, as it is taught at the beginning of chapter 3 of tractate Eruvin (27a), and if so, how can he say after this that it is only from (the ruling of) the scribes that one recites a blessing after eating any food or consuming any drink since it would appear that this is already included in what is written in the Torah.

One can say that since the verse "When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..." appears after the verse "a land of wheat and barley," we can argue that the Torah obliges us to bless only (after eating) the seven species of food mentioned specifically in that verse, just as claimed in Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (Rabbi Moshe Coucy) in the name of Halakhot Gedolot (Rav Yehudai Gaon).

Accordingly, what our teacher (Maimonides) wrote that "it is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to recite a blessing after eating food," he meant it only for the seven species of Land of Israel, but he should have said that the reason is that (those species) yield more nutrition than other foods. In any case, it is problematic that if this is what he meant, our teacher (Maimonides) should have quoted "a land of wheat and barley...When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..."

Therefore, it seems to me that our teacher (Maimonides) observed by making fine distinctions in the language of the Tosefta, "Our rabbis taught: Where is the source for Birkat Hamazon in the Torah? (The source is) as it is written, When you have eaten and are satiated, you will bless the LORD your God..." it was clear to him that this was meant to apply to five species of grain (and not the seven species of the Land of Israel), since he based his ruling on (the words) "and are satiated." No food satiates like the five species of grain.

6. Rabbi Joseph Karo, Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, 155:2

קודם שילך לבה"ם יוכל לאכול פת שחרית אם הוא רגיל בו, וטוב שירגיל בו.

Before one goes to the beit midrash (house of study), one should eat morning bread if one is used to doing so, and it is good that this be one's custom.

7. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35b

חמרא אית ביה תרתי - סעיד ומשמח, נהמא - מסעד סעיד, שמוחי לא משמח. אי הכי נבריך עליה שלש ברכות! לא קבעי אינשי סעודתייהו עלויה. אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק לרבא: אי קבע עלויה סעודתיה מאי? אמר ליה: לכשיבא אליהו ויאמר אי הויא קביעותא, השתא מיהא בטלה דעתו אצל כל אדם.

The fact is that wine does both: it satiates and makes cheerful, whereas bread satiates but does not make cheerful. If that is the case, let us say Birkat Hamazon after it? (The reason why Birkat Hamazon is not said after wine is that) people do not make it the basis of the meal. Rav Nahman bar Isaac asked Rava: Suppose a person makes it the basis of his meal, what then? He replied: When Elijah comes, he will tell us whether it can really serve as a basis. Now, at any rate, no one thinks of such a thing.

8. Mishnah, Berakhot 6:8

אכל תאנים וענבים ורמונים מברך אחריהן שלש ברכות דברי רבן גמליאל וחכמים אומרים ברכה אחת מעין שלש ר"ע אומר אפי' אכל שלק והוא מזונו מברך אחריו ג' ברכות:

If one ate grapes, figs, or pomegranates, one recites Birkat Hamazon, according to Rabban Gamaliel. But the sages say, berakhah aḥaronah. Rabbi Akiva says: Even if one ate שלק (a boiled vegetable) for one's main food, one must recite Birkat Hamazon afterwards.

9. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 44b

ומי איכא מידי דהוה שלק מזוני? אמר רב אשי: בקלח של כרוב שנו.

Is there a kind of boiled vegetable from which one can make a meal? Rav Ashi replied: The rule applies to the stalk of cabbage.

10. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 42a

רב יהודה הוה עסיק ליה לבריה בי רב יהודה בר חביבא, אייתו לקמייהו פת הבאה בכסנין. כי אתא, שמעינהו דקא מברכי המוציא. אמר להו: מאי ציצי דקא שמענא? דילמא המוציא לחם מן הארץ קא מברכיתו? - אמרי ליה: אין; דתניא רבי מונא אמר משום רבי יהודה: פת הבאה בכסנין מברכין עליה המוציא, ואמר שמואל: הלכה כרבי מונא. אמר להו: אין הלכה כרבי מונא אתמר. אמרי ליה: והא מר הוא דאמר משמיה דשמואל, לחמניות - מערבין בהן ומברכין עליהן המוציא! - שאני התם דקבע סעודתיה עליהו, אבל היכא דלא קבע סעודתיה עליהו - לא.

Rav Judah gave a wedding feast for his son in the house of Rabbi Judah bar Haviva. They set before the guests פת הבאה בכיסנין. He came in and heard them saying the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ. He said to them: What is this chirping that I hear? Are you perhaps saying the berakhah לחם מן הארץ? They replied: Yes, we are, since it has been taught: Rabbi Muna said in the name of Rabbi Judah: Over פת הבאה בכיסנין, the berakhah המוציא לחם מן הארץ is said; and Samuel said that the halakhah is as stated by Rabbi Muna. He said to them: (You have misspoken. In fact, what was taught was) the halakhah is *not*

as stated by Rabbi Muna. They said to him: Is it not the Master himself who has said in the name of Samuel that bread rolls may be used for an eruv, and the berakhah said over them is המוציא לחם מן הארץ? [He replied]: There [we speak] of a different case, namely, where they (the bread rolls) designate a main meal (i.e. serve as the basis of a main meal); but if they do not designate a main meal, this does not apply.

11. Rabbi Yehiel Michel Halevi Epstein (Russia, 1829 - 1908), Arukh Hashulḥan, Orah Ḥayyim, 158:1

חכמים תקנו ליטול הידים במים כשרוצה לאכול לחם כדתנן בחגיגה י"ח: נוטלין לידיהם לחולין ולמעשר ולתרומה ומפרש בגמ' לחולין באכילה ולתרומה אף בנגיעה משום דסתם ידים הוי שניות לטומאה ושני עושה שלישי בתרומה וגזרו על אכילה דחולין משום סרך תרומה [חולין ק"ו]. דאם לא ירגילו ליטול ידים בחולין אתו למיסרך גם בתרומה לבלי ליטול ידים ולא החמירו בנגיעה דחולין דדיינו אם נרגיל עצמינו באכילה דחולין...

The sages ordained that the hands must be rinsed when one wants to eat bread, as we learn in Hagigah 18b: “The hands are to be rinsed for unconsecrated food, the tithe, and terumah.” It is explained in the Gemara that this applies to eating unconsecrated food and to touching terumah because hands can cause impurity at two removes, while terumah can cause impurity at three removes, and the (sages) required hand washing when eating unconsecrated food in order to acquire the habit of washing for terumah, as Hullin 106a: “If they do not habituate themselves to wash their hands before eating unconsecrated food, they will come to follow the habit of not washing their hands for terumah.” They were not stringent (in requiring it) for touching unconsecrated food because it seemed sufficient to acquire the habit when *eating* unconsecrated food (and not necessary when *touching* unconsecrated food)....