



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

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How Much Should the Mezamen Recite Aloud?

Question: I learned that the *mezamen* (= *mzm* – leader of *zimun*) should recite, if not all of *Birkat Hamazon* (= *BHM*) aloud, at least the first *beracha* and the ends of *berachot*. Most people do neither. What should I do and/or tell others to do?

Answer: There are two reasons for *mzm* to recite aloud parts of *BHM*.

The original institution of *zimun* was for only *mzm* to say *BHM*, with the others being *yotzei* by listening. The practice has developed that rarely is one person *motzi* others with reciting a text when not necessary. The reason is that being *motzi* is not easy, because it requires intention on both sides (Mishna Berura 8:13), concentration of the one listening (Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 183), and likely also the latter's understanding of the Hebrew text (Mishna Berura 183:28). The Shulchan Aruch (OC 183:7) says that although everyone should

recite *BHM*, it is proper for the others to do so silently at the same pace that the *mzm* does it aloud, thus uniting them in a way that resembles full *zimun* (Mishna Berura 183:27).

The above is **not** a requirement, and the broad *minhag* is not to do so. Some explain the advantages. If they listen to *mzm* as they recite it, they may not concentrate well and might not have in mind to be *yotzei* with their own recitation (see Avnei Yaakov 31). We do not recommend, in places it is unusual, for *mzm* to read the whole *BHM* aloud. Beyond the pluses and minuses, it is also likely to give the impression of “holier than thou.”

It is somewhat common to tone down the above by reciting only the ends of the *berachot*. While listening/responding to this is insufficient to be *yotzei*, there may be value in joining for *BHM*'s most important parts, and it gives people the *z'chut* of answering *amen* (see Shabbat 119b). It is positive to do this. If the responders do not keep pace with *mzm*, it is unclear if they should answer *amen* to *mzm* in the midst of a *beracha* (see Mishna Berura 183:30; Dirshu 183:24; Yeshuot Moshe III:19).

The other element of reading aloud applies only to the first *beracha* (“... *hazan et hakol*”). Rav Nachman (Berachot 46a) says that *zimun* ends before *BHM*'s first *beracha*; Rav Sheshet says that the first *beracha* is part of *zimun*. (It is not a full

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part of *zimun*, as we recite it even without one, but Rav Sheshet requires *zimun* to be connected to the beginning of *BHM* (Tosafot ad loc.) One difference between the opinions is until what point one who stops eating to answer *zimun* has to wait before resuming eating (ibid.). The Shulchan Aruch (OC 200:2, based on the Rif and Rambam) rules like Rav Nachman. The Rama (ad loc.) *paskens* like Rav Sheshet, that one waits until *hazan et hakol* to resume eating. Likely, another difference between them is whether *mzm* recites the first *beracha* aloud (see Beit Yosef, OC 183).

We rule that we do not trust ourselves to be *yotzei* with *mzm* even for the first *beracha* (see ibid.). Still, the Mishna Berura (183:28) says that *mzm* should do at least that *beracha* aloud, so people can read along with him (they go ahead at the end of the *beracha* so they can answer *amen*) and get an element of *zimun*. So why doesn't everyone do this?

Explanations begin with the fact that Rav Nachman is not a "rejected" opinion so that Ashkenazim can rely upon him in this regard (see Tzitz Eliezer ibid.). They may assume that their concentration on

their own recitations is better that way (see Piskei Teshuvot 183:15) or for *kabbalistic* advantage (see Kaf Hachayim, OC 183:38). Still, we recommend for *mzm* to recite the first *beracha* aloud, when this is not a rare practice.

There is less reason to recite the first *beracha* aloud with a *zimun* of ten. The Tur (OC 200, accepted by Mishna Berura 200:9 and Chazon Ish, OC 31:2) says that in such a case, Rav Sheshet agrees that one who stopped can resume eating before the first *beracha* of *BHM* because by adding the Name of Hashem, the *zimun* is a self-standing *beracha*. If so, having *mzm* say the first *beracha* aloud is similar to his reciting all of *BHM* aloud.

Considering all the possibilities' viability, you should not "correct" people. ■

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