

Halacha Encounters

Bircas Hamazone on Shavuot and other Yomim Tovim
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Amongst the many laws and customs that accompany the arrival of a Yom Tov are the halachos governing the various changes and additions in our davening and bentching. Some changes are m'akeiv, which means that failure to incorporate them would result in one not being yotzei for the particular tefila, and consequently being obligated to repeat it. Others are not m'akeiv, in which case repeating the tefila would not even be permissible. It is therefore crucial that we become familiar with the particulars of these dinim.

The rule of thumb with regards to bentching is as follows. If one partakes of a meal in which eating bread is obligatory, and, while bentching, neglects to include a mention of the significance of the day which is the source of the obligation, bentching must be repeated. For example, the first two meals of Shabbos must include bread. Therefore, if one omits ritzei while bentching after either one of these meals, he must repeat bentching. With regard to the third meal of Shabbos, although eating bread is a definite preference, there are opinions that one's obligation is fulfilled by eating other foods. (See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 291:5 for details.) For this reason, omission of Ritzei would not obligate one to repeat bentching. On Rosh Chodesh, although eating bread is a mitzva, it is not an obligation. Therefore, one who omits ya'aleh v'yavo when bentching on Rosh Chodesh need not repeat bentching. Even when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos, omission of ya'aleh v'yavo would not be reason to repeat bentching, as long as ritzei was recited.

It must be noted that anytime ritzei or ya'aleh v'yavo are omitted from bentching by mistake, if one realizes his error before beginning to recite the fourth bracha, there is a special bracha which should be inserted at this point. If that bracha is indeed recited, one then proceeds to bentch as usual and no repetition is required. Our discussion as to when repeating bentching is necessary is relevant only where one began the fourth bracha of bentching before realizing his error.

This having been established, I would like to focus on the halacha concerning the omission of ya'aleh v'yavo from bentching on Yom Tov. There is an obligation to eat two bread meals each day of Yom Tov. (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 529:1). According to the rule established above, it should follow that omitting ya'aleh v'yavo would require one to repeat bentching. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 188:6) rules this way.

Nevertheless, HaGaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Responsa, Siman 1; Hashmatos to Responsa, ibid., and Hagahos Rabbi Akiva Eiger to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 188:6) maintains that this ruling would apply only to men. Women, he argues, are not obligated to eat bread on Yom Tov. The basis for this argument, is that seudas Yom Tov is a mitzvas aseh shehazman grama- a time-bound positive commandment from which women, as a rule, are exempt. Even according to the opinion that women are obligated in the mitzvah of simcha on Yom Tov and are not permitted to fast, eating bread would still not be part of their obligation. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva Eiger concludes, if a woman omits ya'aleh v'yavo on Yom Tov, she should not repeat bentching.

There is one exception to this ruling. On the first two nights of Pesach, there is a positive commandment to eat matza. Although this mitzvah is time-bound as well, the Talmud (Pesachim 43b) teaches us that any Jew who is included in the prohibition against eating chometz on Pesach is included also in the mitzva to eat matza. This, of course, includes women. Therefore, if a woman would omit ya'aleh v'yavo from bentching after the Pesach Seder, she would be required to repeat bentching, even according to Rabbi Akiva Eiger, since she too was obligated to eat bread - or rather matza - that night.

A Dissenting View

Not all acharonim agree with Rabbi Akiva Eiger's position on this matter. See, for example, Pischei Teshuva (Orach Chaim, 188:6 and 529:1) who maintains that women are indeed obligated to eat bread on Yom Tov, just as all agree that they are obligated to do so on Shabbos. It is also well worth noting that the Mishna Brura omits any mention of Rabbi Akiva Eiger's ruling, which would surely seem to indicate that he is not in agreement with this ruling. Furthermore, in the Be'ur Halacha (188:8), he cites an opinion that one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of simcha on Yom Tov without eating bread. In Siman 529:15, he brings in the name of the Sha'agos Aryeh that women are obligated in the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov. It would appear, therefore, very likely that in the view of the Mishna Brura, a woman is obligated to eat bread on Yom Tov and would be required to repeat bentching if she omitted ya'aleh v'yavo. (See also Bais Baruch to Chaye Adam, 47:17.)

In the Sefer Zikaron Mivakshei Torah on Yom Tov (Vol.1, p.241), HaGaon Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashuv, ZT"L is quoted as ruling in accordance with Rabbi Akiva Eiger. On the other hand, HaGaon Rav Moshe Feinstein, ZT"L, is said to have ruled that the prevalent custom is not in accordance with Rabbi Akiva Eiger. (See also Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim, Vol.4, Siman 100, which would seem to corroborate this oral ruling.) Even Rav Elyashuv indicates that a woman who forgot ya'aleh v'yavo might wish to avoid uncertainty by immediately washing again and eating another c'zayis of bread which affords her the opportunity to bentch once again, taking care this time not to repeat her error.

With Regard to Shavuos

It is worth noting that with regard to the Yom Tov of Shavuos, there is an added consideration. In a letter printed in Sdei Chemed (Vol. 8 pg. 229- Ma'areches Yom Tov 2:5), HaGaon Rav Shlomo HaCohen of Vilna comments at some length on Rabbi Eiger's chidush. Amongst his remarks, he maintains that even according to the position that women are generally exempt from seudas Yom Tov, with regard to Shavuos this would not be the case. He bases this on the well-known statement of the gemara (Pesachim 68n) that the obligation to feast on Shavuos is more pronounced than on other Yom Tovim, for this is one method of expressing our joy and pleasure over the historic event which this day commemorates: the receiving of the Torah. This obligation, maintains Rav Shlomo HaCohen, applies to women as well as men. Although Rabbi Akiva Eiger does not single out Shavuos in any way, the remarks of Rav Shlomo HaCohen would add additional weight to the argument that a woman who omits ya'aleh v'yavo should repeat bentching on this auspicious Yom Tov.

It should be noted, in conclusion, that the above discussion pertains only to the Yom Tov days. On Chol Hamoed during Pesach and Succos, although there is a mitzvah to eat bread, neither men nor women are actually obligated to do so. Therefore, if anyone omits ya'aleh v'yavo from bentching on Chol Hamoed, they would not repeat bentching.