

OU WEEKLY QUESTIONS: Laws related to bentching

The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU Kosher Halacha Yomis This Column is dedicated in memory of: Rav Chaim Yisroel ben Reb Dov HaLevi Belsky, zt'l Senior OU Kosher Halachic Consultant from 1987-2016

**If one knows that he will need to leave the meal early, and he does not want to have to wait for a *zimun*, what should he do?**

The obligation of *zimun* is only if three or more men are *koveya* (establish) themselves to eat together. This means that the men deliberately sit down to eat together, or they finish eating together. However, if one sits down with two that already began eating (i.e. he was not present at the beginning of the meal) and he finishes eating early (i.e. he is not present at the end of the meal), he is not obligated in *zimun* because he was never *koveya* himself to be part of the group.

Igros Moshe (O.C. I:56) writes that even if one sits down together with a group, if he says explicitly that he does not intend to join together with the others, then likewise there is no *keviyus* and therefore no obligation to wait for a *zimun*. Nevertheless, it is considered proper if possible for all three to finish together so they can form a *zimun*, since one should try to form a *zimun* whenever possible.

**If three men ate together, and one of the men needs to leave before the end of the meal, what should he do?**

Shulchan Aruch (OC 200:1) writes that if two men want to end their meal and *bentch*, but the third still wants to continue eating, the third member must temporarily stop his meal and participate in the *zimun*. After the leader finishes the first *bracha* of *bentching*, if the third man wishes to continue his meal, he may do so. However, if only one man wants to end his meal, and the other two wish to continue eating, they are not obligated to accommodate him. The rule is that one must accommodate two, but two need not accommodate one. However, they are permitted and it is even praiseworthy for them to pause their meal and answer the *zimun*. The Mishnah Berurah (200:5) writes that if the one who needs to leave will suffer a financial loss if he waits, he can *bentch* without a *zimun*. But it would be more appropriate for the others to pause and answer.

**If two men ate bread and a third only had a drink of juice can they join together for a *zimun*?**

Shulchan Aruch (OC 197:2) writes that one may form a *zimun* even if one of the participants only drank a *revi'is* (approx. 3.3 ounces) of juice or any other beverage except for water. Since one who drinks a *revi'is* of juice within the time span of *k'dei shetiyas revi'is* (time it takes to drink a *revi'is*, i.e. a few seconds) is required to recite a *bracha acharona*, he may join together with those who are *benching* and form a *zimun*. The one who drank should listen to the leader recite the first *bracha* and answer *amein*.

Afterward, he should say the appropriate *bracha acharona* for his drink.

The Beur Halachah (197:2) writes that even if the third participant only drank a majority of a *revi'is* (i.e. 1.7 ounces) of juice, he may also join in the *zimun*, because of a *sfek sfeika* (double doubt). Some opinions hold that

to join a *zimun* the third participant need not be obligated in a *bracha acharona*, and some opinions hold that one becomes obligated in a *bracha acharona* if they drink a majority of a *revi'is*. Though we do not follow either of these opinions by themselves, one may rely on this combination to join a *zimun*.

**If two men ate bread and a third joined them for dessert can they join together to form a *zimun*?**

Yes, the third member may join to form a *zimun*, provided that he ate enough cake, fruit, or any other food, such that he became obligated in a *bracha acharona*. This means he needs to eat a *kezayis* (half the volume of an egg) of food, within a time span of *k'dei achilas pras* (approximately 3 minutes). Even if the men who ate bread already finished their dessert, so long as they potentially could still eat more, (e.g. they did not yet wash their hands for *bentching* [*mayim acharonim*]), a third man may eat a *kezayis* and join them to form a *zimun*. Moreover, it is considered meritorious for the two who ate bread to offer food to a third person so that they can create a *zimun* even though they themselves finished eating.