

The Mesorat HaRav Birkon

ברכון מסורת הרב



KOREN



THE WINTMAN EDITION

ברכּוֹן מִסוּרַת הָרֵב  
THE MESORAT HARAV BIRKON

THREE ESSAYS ON  
RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK'S  
CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF  
BIRKAT HAMAZON, ZIMMUN, AND KIDDUSH

ADAPTED BY  
RABBI DAVID HELLMAN

OU PRESS  
KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM

**Note to the Reader**

For the full text of the Birkon, with commentary by  
Rabbi Soloveitchik, turn to the other end of this volume.

# *Contents*

*Birkat HaMazon:  
To Bless the Great and Holy Name  
7*

*The Zimmun:  
Eating Together, Blessing God as a Community  
17*

*The Mitzva of Kiddush:  
To Sanctify, to Praise, to Redeem  
27*

BIRKAT HAMAZON:  
TO BLESS THE GREAT AND HOLY NAME\*

*Birkat HaMazon*, like our entire liturgy, exists on two planes. On the one hand, it is a standardized text instituted by the rabbis that we are obligated to recite after every meal. However, it is much more than a codified formulation; its specific words and language encapsulate ideas, themes, and concepts that we must extract, define, and elucidate. Fundamentally, we must ask, what is the *telos* of *Birkat HaMazon* and what religious experience does it capture? In other words, what is the essence of the *mitzva* that the Torah itself commands? To address these questions we must turn our attention to a few crucial Talmudic passages.

*The Biblical Obligation*

Before we can appreciate the theological and religious implications of *Birkat HaMazon*, we must clarify the different views regarding its halakhic definition. It is quite clear that the Torah requires some sort of blessing after we eat: “You shall eat and be satisfied and shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deut. 8:31). However, when it comes to the *specific* blessings we recite there seem to be two contradictory Talmudic passages regarding their origin and authority. One source, a *beraita* (*Berakhot* 48b), sees allusions to the first three blessings of the *Birkat HaMazon* in the above quoted verse: “Our Rabbis taught: Where is the saying of grace intimated in the Torah? In the

\* This essay is based primarily upon a *shiur* delivered by the Rav in Boston in 1961, as well as *Shiurei HaRav al Inyanei Tefilla*, pp. 269–287, and *Reshimot Shiurim, Berakhot*, pp. 516–519. The essay also incorporates material from a *shiur* delivered in 1969.

verse, 'You shall eat and be satisfied and shall bless' – this signifies *Birkat HaZan* [the first blessing] ... 'For the land' – this signifies *Birkat HaAretz* [the second blessing]. 'The good' – this signifies *Boneh Yerushalayim* [the third blessing]." This source implies that the first three blessings of *Birkat HaMazon* are all Biblical obligations. (The last blessing of *HaTov VevaMeitiv* was established in response to the burial of the victims of the Betar massacre, and is clearly Rabbinic in origin. See Reshimot, p. 209.) Yet, the Talmud (*ibid.*) also quotes Rav Nahman as stating that these same three blessings were instituted by the courts of three different generations: "Moses established for Israel the blessing of *HaZan* at the time when the manna fell for them; Joshua established for them the blessing of *HaAretz* when they entered the land; David and Solomon established the blessing of *Boneh Yerushalayim*." As opposed to the *beraita*, this second teaching implies that all of the blessings of *Birkat HaMazon* are only of Rabbinic origin.

Looking to the *Rishonim* (medieval authorities), we find two major approaches to harmonizing these sources. Rashba (*Berakhot* 48b) explains that the Biblical obligation requires expressing thanksgiving for the themes of the first three blessings: for sustenance, for the Land of Israel, and for Jerusalem. Every time one eats, he must acknowledge God who provided him with his food, and who gave the people of Israel the Land of Israel and her capital, Jerusalem. However, the Torah did not mandate a set formulation. Instead, each individual could express these motifs in whichever way he chose, using the language he found most fitting. Later, Moses, Joshua, and then David and Solomon instituted set texts for the nation to recite. Thus, the formulation and phrasing are a Rabbinic institution, but the themes and motifs of the first three blessings are all of Biblical origin.

Ritva and *Shita Mekubetzet* (ad loc.), following Rashba's approach, point out a parallel as well as a distinction between *Birkat HaMazon* and the obligation of *tefilla*. Like the commandment of *Birkat HaMazon*, the Biblical obligation to pray also has no required text; originally, one would pray in his own words. Only because of the displacements and chaos of the exile, explains Maimonides (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 1:4), did the Rabbis compose a standardized text of the Amida to facilitate prayer for those who wouldn't otherwise have the tools to express themselves

properly. However, the difference between these two commandments is that the Biblical *mitzva* of *tefilla* does not require reciting any specific praises of God or making any specific requests. A person could recite any prayer to fulfill his obligation. In contrast, the Biblical blessing of *Birkat HaMazon* has a structure that requires the inclusion of three specific themes: that God has granted us sustenance, the Land of Israel, and the city of Jerusalem.

There is, though, another approach which understands that the Biblical commandment of *Birkat HaMazon* involves not three themes, but one simple, core idea. Naḥmanides, in his glosses to Maimonides' *Sefer HaMitzvot* (*Shoresh 1*) discusses several different commandments which are Biblical in nature, but for which the Rabbis codified a standardized text. Discussing *Birkat HaMazon*, Naḥmanides says that although the commandment is clearly Biblical, "its text is not Biblical; rather, the Torah commanded us to recite a blessing after we eat, each person according to his understanding, as in the blessing of Benjamin the Shepherd who recited, 'Blessed is the Merciful One, Master of this bread' (*Berakhot 40b*)."<sup>7</sup> This example of Benjamin the Shepherd proves that one can fulfill the obligation of *Birkat HaMazon* even with this simple blessing. Benjamin the Shepherd was not a scholar. He was a simple Jew who blessed God as best as he could, according to his meager understanding and capabilities. According to Rashba and his school, the Talmud means to say that Benjamin the Shepherd's simple blessing would fulfill the first of the three Biblically-mandated blessings, but it would not have fulfilled the Biblical obligation to mention the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. However, Naḥmanides seems to imply that Benjamin the Shepherd's blessing would fulfill the total Biblical obligation. In other words, according to Naḥmanides, the blessings for the Land of Israel and Jerusalem are Rabbinic in nature.

This opinion of Naḥmanides would also appear to be the position of Maimonides, who opens the first chapter of the *Hilkhot Berakhot* stating simply, "There is a positive commandment to bless after eating food, as it says, 'You shall eat and be satisfied and bless the LORD, your God.'" In discussing the Biblical obligation, Maimonides makes no reference to the Land of Israel or Jerusalem; he mentions those ideas only in Chapter Two of *Hilkhot Berakhot* when he discusses the fixed text of *Birkat HaMazon*

codified by the Rabbis. Like Naḥmanides, according to Maimonides we fulfill the Biblical commandment of *Birkat HaMazon* by reciting any blessing for the food we have eaten, regardless of its specific form or content.

But how can Maimonides and Naḥmanides maintain that there is no Biblical obligation to mention the Land of Israel when the verse states, “וּבִרְכַת אֲתִיּוּהוּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ” You shall bless the LORD your God for this good land that He gave you”? Seemingly, we find in this verse an explicit requirement to mention the Land of Israel. In fact, however, a dispute between the ancient translators on how to translate this verse will resolve this question.

*Targum Onkelos* translates the verse literally, that we are obligated to bless God “עַל אֲרֻעָא טַבְתָּא דִּיהַב לָךְ” for the good land that He gave you.” Accordingly, there is a clear Biblical obligation to thank God for the Land of Israel every time we eat, as is the opinion of Rashba and others. However, *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* translates the relevant phrase as “עַל כָּל פְּרִי אֲרֻעָא מְשַׁבְּחָא דִּיהַב לָכוֹן” for the *fruit* of the good land that He gave you.” This reading sees the phrase “the good land” as an elliptical reference to the fruit of the land, and thus the Biblical commandment does not include an obligation to thank God for the land itself, but rather only for its fruit, i.e., the produce one has consumed. Thus the dispute between Rashba and his school, on the one hand, and Maimonides and his school, on the other, revolves around how one translates the words “עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה.” The halakhic argument was clearly formulated only in the days of the medieval authorities, but the disagreement regarding how to understand the verse dates back to the ancient Aramaic translators.

### *Remembering God and Recognizing His Mastery*

Returning our focus to Naḥmanides’ position, that one can fulfill his Biblical obligation by stating “Blessed is the Merciful One, Master of this bread” – we will recognize that not only does this reduce the number of Biblical themes in *Birkat HaMazon* from three to one, but it also offers a fundamentally different perspective on the *mitzva*. Intuitively, we would assume that *Birkat HaMazon* is a *mitzva* of *hoda’ah*, thanksgiving, of offering our appreciation for the food that we have just enjoyed. Yet Benjamin the Shepherd’s formula contains no trace of thanksgiving – his



blessing does not thank God for the food at all. Rather, it is a statement of God's mastery and kingship, that He is the master of this food and that I enjoy it only with His permission. According to Naḥmanides, the Biblical commandment of *Birkat HaMazon* is not an obligation to praise or thank God for the kindness of providing us with food; it is an idea even more basic, a recognition even more fundamental to Judaism's worldview. *Birkat HaMazon* is a declaration of God's lordship over the world, and in particular, His mastery and ownership over the food we have consumed.

Indeed, if we examine the first blessing of *Birkat HaMazon*, we come to the same startling conclusion: it too contains no elements of thanksgiving. In the first blessing we recognize God as the creator and sustainer of the natural world, the one who feeds all living creatures. Only with the second blessing, opening with "We thank you LORD, our God..." does the concept of thanksgiving enter *Birkat HaMazon*. According to Naḥmanides, one fulfills the Biblical obligation of *Birkat HaMazon* even without expressing any sentiments of thanksgiving. The *mitzva* requires recognizing God's sovereignty, and no more. However, according to Rashba and his school, the themes of the first three blessings are all Biblical, and thus *Birkat HaMazon* includes both concepts, recognition of God's mastery over the world, and expression of thanksgiving for sustaining us. *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* translates the verse as "you shall thank and bless," reflecting these two concepts, and in this regard, he parallels the position of Rashba.

In truth, when we look at the context of the verse, the approach of Naḥmanides is almost explicit in the Bible itself. The Bible commands, "You will eat and be satisfied and bless the LORD your God." However, it continues, "Be careful lest you forget the LORD your God and not guard His commandments... Lest you eat and be satisfied... and your heart will grow haughty and you will forget the LORD your God... and you will think in your heart, my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth" (Deut. 8:10–17). The Torah doesn't require man to thank God; rather, the Torah warns man lest he forget God. The purpose of *Birkat HaMazon* is to prevent the arrogance which creeps into a man's heart and causes him to forget that God is the Creator. Fundamentally, *Birkat HaMazon* is not an act of thanksgiving or praise, but an act of remembering God, a fulfillment of the constant command to remember

and be cognizant of our Creator in every aspect of our life. As the Torah concludes the section, “Rather you shall remember the LORD your God who gives you the strength to be successful.”

Thus, *Birkat HaMazon* is not simply a particular commandment regarding food and our satiation; it is instead an expression of the belief and commitment that underpins our entire religious life. Indeed, from the standpoint of the psychology of religion, the *telos* of *Birkat HaMazon*, to remember God, is the most important element in one’s religious experience. To offer praise before God is easy; to give thanks, one merely has to become sentimental. However, to remember God and ascribe everything to Him, to attribute the whole cosmic process of creation to God, and to know always that He is the Master, the LORD, and the Owner of everything, requires a mental discipline of the highest order, and it is in truth the fundamental religious experience.

### *Birkat HaMazon and All Other Blessings*

Understanding *Birkat HaMazon* in this light – not as an expression of thanksgiving, but as an act of recognizing and remembering God’s kingship – also allows us to explain several passages in Maimonides’ Code that would otherwise be difficult to understand. In the beginning of *Hilkhot Berakhot*, Maimonides, as usual, begins with the Biblical commandment: “There is a positive commandment from the Torah to bless God after eating.” Maimonides then moves on to the Rabbinic obligations: “and there is a Rabbinic obligation to bless before a person enjoys any food... and to bless after anything a person eats or drinks.” Maimonides means to say that these Rabbinic obligations are not independent concepts, but extensions of the Biblical idea of *Birkat HaMazon*. However, the blessings that we recite before we eat are not expressions of thanksgiving, as they simply state, “Blessed is the LORD... creator of the fruit of the tree.” Moreover, the blessings before we eat couldn’t be expressions of thanksgiving, as thanksgiving is only appropriate *after* we have benefited from God’s kindness. Rather, the blessings that we recite before we eat are declarations of God’s mastery over this world, recognition that the food before us belongs to Him and that we enjoy it only with His permission. If *Birkat HaMazon* would have been an act of thanksgiving, it could not have been the conceptual basis for the Rabbinic blessings that we recite before we

eat. Only because *Birkat HaMazon* is an act of recognizing God's kingship and mastery over our possessions can it serve as the conceptual foundation for all blessings that we recite.

Maimonides continues, "Just as we recite blessings for all physical pleasures, so too we recite blessings before *mitzvot* and only then perform them. The Rabbis instituted many blessings as expressions of praise, thanksgiving, and request in order to constantly remember the Creator." Maimonides groups the blessings that we recite before the performance of *mitzvot* with the blessings that we recite before we eat, and he understands that all blessings are based upon the Biblical blessing of *Birkat HaMazon*. How does *Birkat HaMazon* serve as the conceptual source for the blessings recited before performing a *mitzva*? Based on what we have explained, it is because fundamentally all blessings are statements of God's authority. With *birkot hanehenin* we recognize His dominion over the natural order, and with *birkot hamitzvot* we similarly declare His dominion over the moral order. Just as He is the creator of the physical world and its laws, so too is He the author of the moral norm and the legislator of all religious laws. As Maimonides says explicitly, the common denominator of all blessings is to remember and fear the Creator.

We can now dispel a common misconception. Many believe that to bless God means to praise Him, and in fact, the English translation of *berakha*, benediction, comes from the Latin root words *bene* and *diction*, meaning to speak well of or praise. However, this understanding is simply incorrect. In Genesis we read "God blessed man, saying, 'You shall be fruitful and multiply.'" God didn't praise man; He blessed him: He instilled in him the ability to multiply, a new source of goodness and fortune in his life. So too, Rav Hayyim Volozhiner (*Nefesh HaHayyim* 2:2) and Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the *Ba'al HaTanya* (*Torah Or, Parashat Hayyei Sarah*), both explain that the word "*barukh*" means expansion, and to bless God means to expand God's presence in this world. How can a mortal human being, a frail and finite creature, accomplish such a thing? The answer is that man has the unique ability to recognize and declare God's authority and mastery. By dispelling the mirage of nature's independence and declaring the true Creator, the influence of God's presence thereby increases in this world. Similarly, the *Sefer HaHinnukh*

(*Mitzva* 430) writes in his discussion of *Birkat HaMazon* that when we say God is “blessed,” we declare that all blessing and goodness flow from Him. The prayer that God should be blessed is a wish that all people should recognize God as the source of goodness. All blessings, like *Birkat HaMazon*, are meant to forestall the natural human arrogance that makes man forget God. Blessing God is not an act of thanksgiving, but an act of remembering God, of declaring Him the true master of our world and its fullness, which is the very essence of *Birkat HaMazon*.

### “His Great and Holy Name”

Finally, we can understand a cryptic phrase that Maimonides uses in the heading to *Hilkhot Berakhot*, where he writes that the Biblical obligation is “to bless the great (*gadol*) and holy (*kadosh*) name after we eat.” What does Maimonides mean when he includes the divine descriptions “great and holy”? Maimonides is known for his precise language, and he should have simply written that we are obligated “to bless the name of God after we eat.” Moreover, elsewhere Maimonides attaches different attributes to the name of God. For example, regarding the prohibition to erase the name of God he writes (*Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 6:1) that “anyone who destroys one of the holy and pure names of God is lashed,” and similarly, in another context he writes (*Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:1) that “there is an imperative to love and fear the honored and exalted God.” Maimonides wrote with extraordinary precision, and he was even more careful in his use of divine attributes, as is evident by his discussions in the *Guide for the Perplexed*. If he uses “the great and holy name” to describe God in the context of *Birkat HaMazon*, it is because these two descriptions capture the essence of the commandment. How is this the case?

To understand Maimonides’ choice of words, we must first understand what we mean by describing God as “great.” We find this divine description in the Bible in the following verse: “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and LORD of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, who favors no person, and takes no bribe” (Deut. 10:17). In this verse we see that God’s greatness flows from His mastery, because He is the master of all other powers. Thus, to recognize God as great is to recognize Him as the authority of our lives, the master of our world. The appellation “holy” means that God is absolutely above and beyond all of creation,

that nothing in this world can be compared to Him. Thus, Maimonides defines the commandment of sanctifying God's name (*Kiddush Hashem*) as demonstrating our absolute commitment to God even to the point of loss of life – to publicize that we recognize no other authority and that no other person or force in the world could intimidate us to violate His will. It follows that when these two appellations are used together, the phrase “the great and holy God” means the God who is the absolute master and authority of all creation, totally unique and beyond all matters and powers of this world. It is in this sense that the prophet Ezekiel uses these descriptions when he writes that God declares that in the end of days, after the war of Gog and Magog, “I will make Myself great and holy, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations, and they will know that I am the LORD.” God will be great and holy when the whole world recognizes His dominion, that He is master of the world. The *Tur* (*Orah Hayyim* 56) writes that the opening phrase of Kaddish, “Let His name be made great and holy” (“*yitgadel ve'yitkadesh*”), is based on this verse in Ezekiel, and he explains that Kaddish is a prayer for that time when all nations will ultimately recognize the authority and kingship of the one true God.

In defining the Biblical commandment as “to bless the great and holy name after eating,” Maimonides underscores that by reciting *Birkat HaMazon* we acknowledge God's mastery of the world, and that He is the provider for the food we have just eaten, or as Benjamin the Shepherd put it, “Blessed is the Merciful One, Master of this bread.” The *mitzva* of *Birkat HaMazon* is not to praise or offer thanksgiving, but to remove from our hearts the arrogance of material success that leads man to forget God and to declare “my strength and the might of my hand produced this wealth” (Deut. 8:17). By reciting a blessing after we eat and are full and satiated, we affirm that God is the source of our sustenance, of life, and of existence itself. The purpose of the blessing is to declare, as the whole world will in the end of days, that He is the one true “great and holy God.”

THE ZIMMUN:  
EATING TOGETHER, BLESSING GOD AS A COMMUNITY\*

When three people eat together, they are obligated to recite the *zimmun*, a special introduction to *Birkat HaMazon* in which the leader calls the rest of the group to join in blessing “the One from whose food we have eaten.” The presence of three people, though, creates not only the forum for an introductory call and response, but also fundamentally alters the nature of the *Birkat HaMazon* itself. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 45a) derives the concept of *zimmun* from the verse, “Declare with me that the LORD is great, and let us exalt His name together” (Ps. 34:4). While the text of the *Birkat HaMazon* doesn’t change, the group recites the blessings from a new perspective – not as individuals, but as an assembly gathered “to exalt His name together,” a philosophically and experientially different performance. A more sophisticated understanding of the communal nature of the *zimmun* will lead us to an appreciation of the Torah’s perspective on eating in general and how man redeems and sanctifies his meals. Through the *zimmun* and the ideals it represents, the Torah transforms eating from a selfish, self-gratifying act into an exalted service that unites man, his fellow, and God.

*The Definition of Davar ShebiKedusha*

In truth, the introductory call of the *zimmun* can be subsumed under a more basic halakhic concept, that of *devarim shebikedusha*, those passages

\* This essay is based on a *yahrzeit* lecture published in *Shiurim LeZekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, pp. 91–115, a *shiur* delivered in Boston in 1961, *Reshimot Shiurim, Berakhot*, pp. 278–281, and the opening essay in *Festival of Freedom*, especially pp. 4–6, 18–21.

of our liturgy referred to as “holy matters.” Thus, before we can understand the *zimmun* we must first understand the concept of *devarim shebikedusha*. The Talmud (*Megilla* 23b) explains that the liturgical concept of the *davar shebikedusha* is based upon the verse “And I will be hallowed amongst the children of Israel” (Lev. 22:32). However, elsewhere (*Sanhedrin* 74a) the Talmud derives from the same verse the obligation of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying God’s name, even to the point of giving up one’s life to uphold the Torah in public. The Talmud derives both of these concepts from the same verse because at their core they express the same idea. Maimonides (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, Aseh 9) explains that the *mitzva* of *Kiddush Hashem* is to remain firm in our belief and not break from the pressure and threats of others, to demonstrate to the world that we recognize no authority other than God even at the cost of life. It is the ultimate public act of *kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim*, declaring our absolute acceptance of and allegiance to the authority of God. This also clarifies the concept of *davar shebikedusha* in the context of prayer: The *davar shebikedusha* is a communal, public act of *kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim*, accepting the yoke of God’s kingship and declaring His mastery.

While a person can accept upon himself the yoke of heaven as an individual, such as by reciting *keriat shema*, there is an added dimension when a group recognizes the kingship of God as a congregation. Only in the context of an assembly of people is the act of *kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim* transformed into a *davar shebikedusha*; this is why we require a *minyan* to recite a *davar shebikedusha* in prayer. In contrast, with regard to praising or thanking God, we find no distinction between the act of an individual and of a group within *halakha*. A person can sing *Hallel* by himself without the presence of a *minyan*. However, when it comes to recognizing God’s kingship and accepting the yoke of heaven, the fulfillment is qualitatively greater when a person declares his allegiance to God’s exclusive authority publicly, when his commitment is not private but known to all around him. For this reason, the *davar shebikedusha* requires a public forum, and in the context of *tefilla*, this means a *minyan*.

### *The Zimmun and the Ḥabura*

While a *minyan* creates the *davar shebikedusha* in the context of prayer, *zimmun* represents the *davar shebikedusha* in the context of the *Birkat*

*HaMazon*. *Zimmun* is not an expression of praise, but of a communal recognition of God's mastery. The leader calls out, "Let us bless God," and the others respond, "May God's name be blessed from now and forever." As explained in the previous essay, to bless God does not mean to praise Him, but rather to recognize His kingship and authority, and in so doing, to increase His presence in this world.

The *zimmun* shares another defining element of every *davar shebikedusha*: the dialogue of call and response. In *kedusha*, *barekhu*, and every other *davar shebikedusha*, the leader calls the others to bless or sanctify God's name, and they respond in turn. This fundamental aspect of a *davar shebikedusha* is based upon the prophet's description of the *kedusha* of the angels: "And one calls out to the other and says 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts'" (Is. 6:3). In the blessings before *keriat shema*, we describe the heavenly scene in more detail: The angels "All accept on themselves, one from another, the yoke of of the kingdom of heaven, granting permission to one another to sanctify the One who formed them." The angels first call to each other, they ask of each other to join in their declaration of God's majesty, the other angels respond, and they all pronounce as a unified group that God is holy. Thus, the *zimmun* contains all of the necessary elements of a *davar shebikedusha*. It is a public declaration of God's mastery and kingship, initiated by a leader's call and actualized by the group's unified response.

In one detail, though, the *zimmun* does differ from the *davar shebikedusha* in prayer: We require a full *minyan* to recite *kedusha* or *barekhu*, but to form a *zimmun*, three people suffice. We can explain this discrepancy with a comment of *Tosafot* (*Berakhot* 49b s.v. *amar*) in a slightly different context. A *minyan*, a gathering of ten adult males, is necessary to create a *tzibbur*, an assembly, which provides the public character necessary for a *davar shebikedusha*. However, when it comes to a shared meal, even the conjunction of three people creates a sense of community. *Tosafot* explain that in the synagogue, people come and go, they enter and leave; thus, there is a weaker bond amongst the people, and, therefore, a larger group of ten is necessary to create a sense of *tzibbur*. However, when people eat together, there is a greater cohesiveness; there is a camaraderie and fellowship formed by people who sit down to enjoy a meal as a group. Therefore, in the context of eating, the *halakha* recognizes the



concept of the *ḥabura*, that a group of three can generate a communal blessing modeled after the *davar shebikedusha*.

### *The Collective Birkat HaMazon*

The *zimmun* doesn't end with the introductory call and response; it is not merely a flourish that the group adds before each of its individuals recites the *Birkat HaMazon* privately. Maimonides (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 5:2), in his ever clear and precise fashion, defines the concept of *zimmun* as follows: "What is the blessing of the *zimmun*? ... One of them blesses and says 'Let us bless the One from whose food we have eaten,' and they all respond 'Blessed is the One from whose food we have eaten, and by whose goodness we live'... [The leader] then recites [*Birkat HaMazon*] until he finishes the four blessings, and they respond *amen* after each blessing." There are, in fact, two components to the *zimmun*: first, the introductory call and response, and second, the collective recitation of the blessings. One person says them aloud, and the rest of the company listens quietly and answers *amen*.<sup>\*</sup> The practice (according to the original enactment) in which only the leader recites the *Birkat HaMazon* gets to the essence of the concept of *zimmun*. Across all areas of *halakha*, there are two models for the communal fulfillment of a *mitzva*. *Tefilla* is an example of this duality. In our communal prayers, the entire congregation recites the silent Amida simultaneously – thus, each person fulfills his individual obligation through his own recitation. This is *tefilla betzibbur*, individuals satisfying their private obligation together with others who are doing the same. The communal context is created by the act of many discrete individuals. However, when the *ḥazzan* repeats the Amida aloud, it is a fundamentally different performance. While

\* According to the original enactment of *zimmun*, which is its optimal fulfillment, only the leader recites *Birkat HaMazon*. Even if the others at the meal know how to recite the blessings themselves, they do not. The *Shulḥan Arukh* (*Orah Ḥayyim* 183:7), based upon earlier sources, rules that today it is proper for each person at the meal to recite *Birkat HaMazon* quietly along with the leader. However, this is a compromise based on the reality that people will not focus on the leader's recitation. Even today the leader of the *zimmun* should recite the four blessings of *Birkat HaMazon* aloud so that everyone can hear him, as was the original enactment.

only the *hazzan* actually recites the prayer, the fulfillment relates to the entire congregation; it is *tefillat hatzibbur*, a prayer offered on behalf of the congregation as a whole, the indivisible, metaphysical entity which is more than the collection of individuals. The Rabbis modeled the *hazzan*'s repetition on the offering of the communal sacrifices in the Temple. While only one priest slaughtered and sacrificed the animal, he represented the entire congregation of Israel. Similarly, the *hazzan* stands in the place of his congregation, and offers one communal prayer on its behalf.

The *zimmun* parallels *tefillat hatzibbur*: it is not the simultaneous recitation of *Birkat HaMazon* by three individuals, but rather, one *Birkat HaMazon* offered on behalf of the integrated *habura*. This is a new concept based on the verse "Let us exalt His name together." The halakhic construct of *zimmun* revolves around the assembly as a whole, what the Rabbis called the *habura*. Moreover, the people sharing the meal not only discharge their obligation as a group, but the obligation itself devolves upon the integrated group and not upon each individual separately. Therefore, the *Shulḥan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim* 197:3) rules that if two people eat bread and a third eats only fruits or vegetables, they must still form a *zimmun*. Even though this group lacks three individuals who are required to recite *Birkat HaMazon*, a *zimmun* is still viable; the *zimmun* doesn't need three separate individuals, but a group who shared a meal. Since a group of three people ate together, and the majority of the group ate bread, it is defined as a *habura* who shared a meal over bread, and they thus can form a *zimmun*.

### *Listening and Responding*

Because the *zimmun* is not composed of the actions of individuals but the unified activity of a group, the method by which participants in the *zimmun* fulfill their obligation differs from other *mitzvot* as well. For example, when a person hears the reading of the *megilla* or the *shofar* blowing performed by another person, it is considered as though the listener performed the *mitzva* on his own, based on the concept of *shomei'a ke'oneh* (literally, "one who listens is considered to be like one who responds"). The concept of *shomei'a ke'oneh* applies to obligations that relate to the individual. Each person must blow the *shofar* or read the *megilla*;

however, he can either perform the *mitzva* himself or fulfill his duty by listening to another. However, as explained above, both the obligation and performance of the *zimmun* do not relate to the individuals separately but to the group as a whole. Therefore, the principle of *shomei'a ke'oneh* is neither necessary nor applicable to the *zimmun*. Instead, every member of the *zimmun* fulfills his obligation by belonging to the *habura*, by participating in the single, communal recitation of the *Birkat HaMazon*. Practically, there is one leader and the others respond, but fundamentally the performance relates to all of them equally, as they are all equal members of the *habura*.

This insight into the mechanism of the *zimmun* has practical applications as well. In cases where we apply *shomei'a ke'oneh*, Maimonides rules that merely listening with intent to the other's blessing suffices and responding *amen* is not required. However, in describing the collective *Birkat HaMazon* Maimonides writes that the leader recites the four blessings aloud and that all those listening "respond *amen* after each blessing." In the *zimmun*, the participants must not only listen to the leader's blessings, but must respond *amen* as well. To join the *habura*, to integrate into the collective recitation, the participant cannot only passively listen, he must actively participate.

Maimonides (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:11) distinguishes between merely listening to a blessing and actively responding: "Anyone who hears a blessing from its beginning until its end and has intention to fulfill his obligation fulfills it even though he did not respond *amen*. However, anyone who responds *amen* after the the blessing is as if he himself pronounced the blessing." Although the classical commentaries do not identify the source for Maimonides' ruling that responding *amen* surpasses merely listening to a blessing, it would seem that it is based on the following Talmudic passage (*Shevuot* 36a): "R. Yose b. Hanina said: 'Amen' implies acceptance of words... as it is written (Deut. 27:26), 'Cursed is the one who does not maintain all the words of the Torah to do them. And all the people shall say, *amen*.'" The Talmud derives the power of responding *amen* from the instruction to pronounce the curses and blessings at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. In that case, it was not necessary for each individual to recite the blessings and curses, and the *amen* of the people thus didn't serve as a vehicle of *shomei'a ke'oneh*. Rather, through

the response of *amen*, the people joined the Levites in the communal acceptance of their responsibilities. This was a covenant forged between God and the community of Israel as a whole. Through the declaration of the blessings and curses by the Levites and by the response of the Israelites, the nation accepted God's law as a congregation.

Similarly, whenever there is a halakhic institution that necessitates individuals to act as a congregation and not as a collection of individuals, the response of *amen* is indispensable. This then is why Maimonides writes that the participants in the *zimmun* must not only listen to the leader's *Birkat HaMazon*, but they must respond *amen* after his blessings. Even today, when we all read the *Birkat HaMazon* quietly, the leader must recite his blessings aloud, and the others must respond *amen*. Without this interaction, we are left with a collection of individuals simultaneously reciting the same blessings, not a unified *ḥabura* offering a collective blessing to God in fulfillment of the verse "We shall exalt His name together."

### *A Meal of Hessed*

From a philosophical perspective, the institution of the *zimmun* encapsulates the *halakha's* approach to the meal and eating in general. The fundamental problem which assailed the minds of our sages is that the drive for food and nourishment is a biological one, shared by man and animal alike. There is nothing uniquely human or meaningful in consuming food; it is instinctual, coerced and mechanical. Indeed, many Greek philosophers reached the conclusion that eating is a disgraceful necessity, a sensual, carnal pleasure that satisfies the beast in man. Thus, according to legend, many wise men shied away from eating in public, as they were embarrassed to be seen eating. Judaism is also concerned with this same problem, but it arrives at an entirely different conclusion. While the physical process might be identical, we believe that man can elevate eating into a uniquely human, meaningful act. *Halakha* has formulated many rules around the meal, especially the *Birkat HaMazon* and *zimmun*, and has transformed eating into the halakhic institution of the *se'uda*. It is neither an ordinary meal nor a feast; it is the crucible in which the bread of man is transposed into the bread of God. It expresses the fellowship between God and man and the participation of God in all human pursuits and activities.

When man is engaged in a carnal pursuit such as eating, and his own need presses the most, insisting upon immediate satisfaction, the Torah expects of him attentiveness to the need of the other self. The meal is turned into an occasion for the practice of *hessed*. The opening of the Haggada includes the invitation “Let all who are hungry come and eat,” but the source of this phrase is not connected to Passover at all. The Talmud (*Ta’anit* 20a) recounts that whenever Rav Huna would eat a meal he would first open the doors to his home and invite anyone in need to join him, using the same phrase. Similarly, in a celebrated passage, Maimonides writes that on holidays we are “obligated to feed the convert, orphan, and widow along with the other downtrodden poor. However, someone who locks the doors to his courtyard and eats and drinks, alone with his children and his wife, and doesn’t feed the poor and depressed – this is not the joy of a *mitzva*, but the rejoicing of his belly... and such a rejoicing is a disgrace” (*Hilkhot Yom Tov* 6:18). On holidays, there is a particular responsibility to think of others and share; when we eat a sumptuous meal and rejoice, there is an added duty to invite others. However, fundamentally, this is our perspective every day. Ideally, every meal should include *hessed*. Man should not eat alone, for the food does not belong to him; he eats from the hand of God and thus he must share with others. With this perspective, man no longer eats like a beast in the field who knows only of his own appetite. When he shares his food with others, he transforms his meal into a performance of *hessed* and finds God in the experience.

*“You Shall Rejoice Before the LORD, Your God”*

Moreover, the *halakha* also recognizes that a shared meal unites people, fosters friendships, and takes man out of seclusion and loneliness in order to join the “thou.” While the beast drags his prey back to his lair to devour it alone, man can choose to eat as part of a community. The host invites the destitute to share his material possessions, but he also invites the lonely and abandoned who crave companionship. He opens up his mind and heart and invites others to join him. The invitation to share a meal expresses the sense of responsibility and sympathy that he feels towards his fellow. He doesn’t only think of himself, and he is not driven by his biological impulses alone. He wishes to enjoy the food given to

him by the Almighty with others. Ideally, from such a *se'uda* of *hessed* a new community arises, one in which there is no division between host and guest, master and servant, generous philanthropist and embarrassed recipient. Everyone eats together, before the LORD. The meal is transformed into an exalted service, and their shared eating is redeemed. It is not primitive or beastly, but sanctified, a wholly human, even spiritual, experience.

In other words, the Torah doesn't tell man to hide when he eats, but rather to redeem eating by sharing his food as part of a *hessed*-thinking community before the LORD. This is the vision that the Torah (Deut. 12: 7, 12) sets forth: "And you shall eat there before the LORD your God... and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and your daughters, your slaves and your maidservants, and the Levite in your gates for he has no portion or heritage amongst you." To the ancient Greeks the concept of "eating before God" would have been unthinkable. How can man unite with God through such an unrefined, temporal act? Yet, the Torah and *halakha* maintain that man can eat in the presence of the LORD. When man recognizes the *hessed* of God who sustains him, his eating ceases to be a mechanical act and becomes a great service in which he stands in reverence and awe before his Maker. When he shares his abundant blessings with his neighbor, the host's act of *hessed* merges with the *hessed* of God, and the meal becomes a divine-human affair. Finally, the meal pulls man out of his self-centered state of mind and creates a community of equals, a fellowship of the God-committed and God-seekers.

The ceremony of the *zimmun* is the halakhic institution that gives expression to this philosophy, that man can invite others to his table and eat before his LORD. The Torah instructs us to share God's physical and spiritual blessings in order to create a community, but that community doesn't cease when the meal concludes. Before the participants depart and go on their separate ways, the assembly performs one last act together, they turn to bless God. They do so not as individuals, but as a fellowship that doesn't know the distinction of host and guest or rich and poor. In their *hessed* community there is a union between God and man and man and his fellow. First, the participants of the meal eat together and share the blessings that God has bestowed upon them, and, second, they conclude

their meal by offering a joint blessing of *Birkat HaMazon*. Their blessing surpasses the blessing that a single person can offer, no matter how heartfelt, for theirs is the blessing of a congregation, a *davar shebikedusha* offered by a *habura*, the ultimate expression of a *hessed* fellowship rejoicing before the LORD, their God.

THE MITZVA OF KIDDUSH:  
TO SANCTIFY, TO PRAISE, TO REDEEM\*

The *mitzva* of Kiddush, all agree, is a Biblical obligation. The Rabbis (*Pesaḥim* 106a; *Mekhilta* on Ex. 20:8) derived this imperative from the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the day of the Sabbath to sanctify it” (Ex. 20:8). This seemingly straightforward command, though, contains within it a complex, multi-dimensional *mitzva*. Thus, to properly understand Kiddush, as is the case for many *halakhot*, we must isolate each of its distinct components and analyze each one separately. Only when we understand each of its elements and themes independently can we appreciate the *mitzva* as an organic whole and perceive the totality of its beauty and depth.

*An Act of Sanctification*

First, there is a fundamental question that we must ask regarding the very essence of the *mitzva* of Kiddush. Literally, the word Kiddush means sanctification, implying that with its recitation we sanctify the day of Shabbat itself. According to Maimonides (*Hilkhot Shabbat* 29:1), the *mitzva* is “to sanctify the day of the Sabbath with words, as it says, ‘Remember the day of the Sabbath to sanctify it.’ This means to remember it by utterance of sanctification and praise.” Nahmanides (Commentary, Ex. 20:8) takes the idea of sanctification further, comparing Kiddush to the sanctification of the *Yovel* year. According to Nahmanides, just as the court sanctifies the *Yovel* by its declaration of *mekudash*, we sanctify Shabbat as well through the proclamation of Kiddush.

\* This essay is based on three *yahrzeit* lectures that analyzed different aspects of Kiddush published in *Shiurim LeZekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, pp. 116–165.



However, the notion that we sanctify the day of Shabbat through Kiddush would seem to contradict a fundamental distinction between the sanctity of Shabbat and that of Yom Tov. The Jewish people, through its jurisdiction over the calendar, establishes the beginning of each new month, and thus the dates of the holidays. Shabbat, though, exists independently of man's actions; when the sun sets on Friday afternoon, the holiness of Shabbat fills the world even if no one comes to greet it. The source of *kedushat Shabbat* resides not within man, but with God, who by resting on the seventh day of creation sanctified every Shabbat of the future: "And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:3). For this reason, the Kiddush of Yom Tov concludes with the phrase, "Blessed are You, LORD, who sanctifies Israel and the Festivals," whereas on Shabbat, it concludes, "Blessed are You, LORD, who sanctifies the Sabbath," without mention of Israel. The Talmud (*Pesaḥim* 117b; *Beitza* 17a) explains that unlike the sanctity of Yom Tov, the sanctity of Shabbat stands independently of the Jewish people. How then can Naḥmanides compare the recitation of Kiddush on Shabbat to the declaration of the *Yovel* year, when the sanctification of the *Yovel* year is effected precisely through the human court's declaration, unlike the sanctity of Shabbat?

To resolve this problem, we must conclude that while the holiness of Shabbat indeed exists independently of man, there is also a second element to the sanctity of Shabbat which man endows. This second aspect of *kedushat Shabbat* is implicit in the Torah's list of the yearly cycle of holidays, in which Shabbat is recorded as first in the list of holy times, *mo'adei Hashem* (Lev. 23:3). Shabbat too is one of the *mo'adei Hashem*, and like the other festivals "which you shall declare," it must be sanctified by man. This duality also expresses itself in the disparity between the reasons given for Shabbat in the two versions of the Ten Commandments. In the first version, in Exodus, we read: "For God made the heavens and earth in six days... and He rested on the seventh day" (Ex. 20:10–11). Here, the sanctity of Shabbat flows directly from God, and from His rest on the seventh day of creation. However, in the second rendering of the Ten Commandments, in Deuteronomy, instead of observing Shabbat to commemorate creation, we are bidden to observe the Sabbath to "remember that you were a slave in the Land of Egypt, and the LORD your God

redeemed you” (Deut. 5:14). In this version, Shabbat commemorates the Exodus, as do the rest of the holidays on the Jewish calendar. While the primary holiness of Shabbat is created by God, there is an added element of Shabbat, as one of the *mo’adei Hashem*, which must be instilled by man.

In other words, if man does not actively sanctify the day, if his Shabbat observance is only passive, he cannot experience the totality of its holiness. While the basic level of *kedushat Shabbat* commences on its own with the sun’s descent on Shabbat eve, only man’s declaration of Kiddush can create the additional element of holiness. Just as the sanctity of the *Yovel* year necessitates the declaration of the court, the day of Shabbat is infused with its full holiness only through the initiative of man. This idea that man contributes to the sanctity of Shabbat is the basis for the concept of *tosefet Shabbat*, that one can begin Shabbat before sunset and create *kedushat Shabbat* before its designated time. If God alone would have the ability to sanctify Shabbat, if man would have no role in investing the day of its holiness, then *tosefet Shabbat* would be impossible. Only because man has a part in the endowment of sanctification does he also have the ability to alter when Shabbat begins and to invest holiness into otherwise mundane time.

Moreover, according to the Talmud (*Berakhot* 33b), there are two components to the *mitzva* of Kiddush, of instilling this added dimension of holiness into the day. First, the central *berakha* of the Amida of Shabbat eve, the *berakha* of *kedushat hayom*, constitutes a Kiddush. Then we again recite Kiddush as a blessing over wine before eating. These two recitations, though, are not a mere duplication, but rather represent two different acts of sanctification, corresponding to the two elements of *kedushat Shabbat*. The recitation of the Kiddush in the Amida ushers in the holiness of the day which generates the prohibition to perform work. It celebrates Shabbat as a day of rest, beginning with the phrase, “May You find favor in our rest,” and concluding, “so that Israel... may find rest on it.” This first Kiddush is connected to the passive aspect of Shabbat observance, the imperative of *Shamor*, to guard the day by abstaining from prohibited activity. However, the Kiddush that we recite over a cup of wine at our meal relates not to the restrictions of *Shamor*, but to the commandment of *Zakhor*, to actively affirm the sanctity of the day. This is accomplished through the *mitzvot* of *kibud* and *oneg*, honoring and

enjoying Shabbat. This Kiddush ushers in the aspect of the day's sanctity which obligates us to partake in *se'udot* to celebrate the grandeur and beauty of Shabbat.

### *An Expression of Praise*

Kiddush, though, is not only an act of sanctification which infuses a new level of sanctity into the day. Maimonides, we saw, writes that the *mitzva* of Kiddush is to recite words of "sanctification and praise." Similarly, in *Sefer HaMitzvot* (Aseh 155), Maimonides writes: "We are commanded to sanctify the Shabbat ... to remember the greatness of the day, its elevated status, and its uniqueness as compared to all other days." There are thus two aspects to Kiddush: first, to invest holiness into the day, and second, to extol the day and its elevated status. Specifically, we declare Shabbat as the day on which God rested, and which, by His rest, He sanctified and blessed for all eternity. As we recite in the *birkot keriat shema* of Shabbat morning: "This is the praise of the seventh day, for on it God rested from all of His work." We praise the day of Shabbat by proclaiming it as the day God chose for an eternal testimony to His creation and His sovereignty.

This aspect of the *mitzva*, the imperative to praise the day of Shabbat, allows us to understand the nature of the Kiddush that we recite on Shabbat day, before the second Shabbat meal, and how it differs from the Kiddush of Shabbat evening. The evening Kiddush, with which one fulfills the Biblical obligation, contains both components of the *mitzva*, sanctifying Shabbat, and extolling the day. However, the daytime Kiddush, which is a Rabbinic enactment, fulfills only the second aspect of the *mitzva*, praising Shabbat. The evening Kiddush invests holiness in the entire day, making another act of sanctification unnecessary and, in fact, impossible. However, while sanctification cannot be performed twice, praise can be recited more than once. Thus, the second recitation of Kiddush fulfills the obligation to declare the unique stature of Shabbat. We do not repeat the blessing of "*mekadesh HaShabbat*" during the daytime Kiddush, because it is not an act of sanctification.

Indeed, the minimum text of the daytime Kiddush is nothing more than the blessing of "*borei peri hagafen*." However, we must ask: how can this simple blessing fulfill the *mitzva* of Kiddush? Rashbam (*Pesachim* 106a, s.v. *amar*) cites R. Ahai Gaon, author of the *She'iltot*, who explains

the nature of this Kiddush as follows: “One brings a cup of wine, makes a blessing, and drinks in honor of Shabbat, to distinguish between the attribute of Shabbat and of the weekdays. It is a form of song (*shir*), for we only recite song over wine (*ein omrim shirah ela al hayayin*).” In other words, the blessing of “*borei peri hagafen*,” as we explained, is not an act of sanctification, but rather an expression of song, praise for the day and its uniqueness among the days of the week. In this context, “*borei peri hagafen*” is not simply a *birkat hanehenin*, a blessing required before we partake of food, but a declaration in honor of Shabbat. It is praise of the Creator, but also a song for Shabbat, the ongoing testimony to His creation. On Shabbat we feel God’s majesty and kingship as Creator more intensely than on any other day. To express these feelings and mark the greatness of the day, we take a cup of wine and pronounce, “Blessed is the LORD, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”

### *A Process of Redemption and Elevation*

There is yet still another important dimension to Kiddush, which underlies its relationship to the Shabbat meals. All week long we acknowledge that God is the Creator of everything and thus possesses ownership over the entire world. “The earth is the LORD’s and all it contains, the world and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). On the basis of this verse, the Talmud (*Berakhot* 35a) declares that one who derives benefit from this world without a blessing has performed an act of “*me’ila*,” meaning, theft of an item dedicated to the Temple. In other words, every apple, each loaf of bread, every glass of wine belongs to God, and it is the blessing which serves as the *matir*, the act which allows us to derive benefit from it. As the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 6:1) puts it: “The entire world is like a [holy] vineyard. How is it redeemed? With a blessing.” The blessing that we recite before we eat food redeems the item from its consecrated status, which is akin to redeeming an item from the Temple’s holdings. The entire week we see God as the Creator of the universe, and thus, as the true owner of everything. To enjoy His world without desecrating it, we must redeem it through a blessing, an affirmation that God is the Creator of all.

On Shabbat, though, we experience the world differently. We perceive God not just as the Creator of the universe, but also as the One who

completed it and brought it to perfection through His rest on Shabbat. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 10) compares the newly formed world after the first six days of creation to an ornate wedding canopy without a bride. When God rested on the seventh day, He escorted the bride into this world, completing and elevating the rest of creation. Thus on Shabbat, we sense God's kingship and claim over this world more profoundly, for He is both the One who fashioned it during the six days of creation and the One who perfected it on the seventh day. It follows that on Shabbat, the world is doubly consecrated to God: "God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy" (Gen. 2:3). God's property rights are doubled on Shabbat. He owns the world because He created it, and He reacquires the world on Shabbat because the world was finished on that day. Therefore, His property rights on the Sabbath are more strict and rigid than those He exercises on an ordinary day.

During the week, a regular blessing can redeem food from its consecrated status and render its consumption permissible; on Shabbat, however, we need an additional "*matir*" to permit the food, because of its additional sanctity. Kiddush serves as the "*matir*" which gives us license to partake of Shabbat meals. We declare in the Kiddush of Shabbat eve, "in love and favor, He gave us His holy Sabbath as a heritage." With the recitation of Kiddush, God gives us His Shabbat; He allows us to enjoy His creation that was completed on the seventh day.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the "*matir*" of the regular blessing during the week and the "*matir*" of Kiddush on Shabbat. A simple blessing "redeems" the item, as the Talmud Yerushalmi defines it, allowing it to be used for the human purposes of nourishment and enjoyment. This act of redemption takes the item from the world of the sacred into the world of the mundane. Kiddush on Shabbat, though, does the reverse. By recalling that God blessed and sanctified the day of Shabbat, we do not remove the sanctity of the food, but rather elevate our meal to the status of *se'udat Shabbat*. Our meal becomes a fulfillment of the *mitzva* of *oneg Shabbat*, and is thus no longer a desecration of the food's holiness but, on the contrary, a fulfillment of it. During the week, we can enjoy the world only by removing its holiness; on Shabbat, our food remains consecrated to God, but we may partake of it within the framework of Kiddush and the *se'udat Shabbat*. We recite Kiddush to distinguish between our

mundane eating during the week and the holy meals of Shabbat which fulfill the prophet's call to "declare Shabbat a delight."

This background explains the concept of *Kiddush bimekom se'uda*, the requirement that Kiddush be recited in conjunction with a meal. Part of the essential nature of Kiddush is to usher in the sanctity of the day that creates the obligation of *oneg Shabbat*, and to establish the Shabbat meals as a fulfillment of *oneg Shabbat*. Only through the redemption, the "*matir*," of Kiddush can we enjoy God's food without desecrating its elevated Shabbat sanctity. While a Shabbat meal without the anchor of Kiddush is not complete, the converse is true as well; a recitation of Kiddush which is not connected to a *se'uda* is itself deficient, as it doesn't fulfill one of its central purposes, to establish a meal as a *se'udat Shabbat*. The requirements of Kiddush and *se'uda* are not distinct obligations; each one needs the other, as they are intertwined in one complementary fulfillment.

The connection to the meal also adds significance to the cup of wine and the *borei peri hagafen* blessing as part of Kiddush. *Magen Avraham* (*Orah Hayyim* 296:2) rules that if one hears only the blessing of Havdala (*hamavdil bein kodesh lehol*), but not the opening blessing of *borei peri hagafen*, he nonetheless has fulfilled his obligation, because hearing the blessing over the wine is not crucial to the fulfillment of Havdala. However, Rav Hayyim Soloveitchik ruled that this is only true regarding Havdala, which is an example of a *kos shel berakha*, a blessing recited over a cup of wine to grant it greater significance. For such recitations, the cup of wine and its blessing enhances the *mitzva*, but if someone did not hear the *borei pri hagafen*, it is not crucial. However, in the case of Kiddush, the blessing of *borei peri hagafen* is an integral and indispensable part. If one doesn't hear the *borei peri hagafen*, he has not fulfilled his obligation at all and must recite the entire Kiddush again. Kiddush must establish the meal as a *se'udat Shabbat* and elevate it to a *mitzva*. Without the cup of wine, the recitation alone would not be integrated into the meal. The cup of wine doesn't merely extend significance to the blessing, as in other *kosot shel berakha*; it is the vehicle through which the Kiddush fulfills its function of establishing the Shabbat meal.

Not only is the blessing of *borei peri hagafen* a crucial part of the Kiddush, but drinking the wine is itself part of the *mitzva*. Maimonides (*Hilkhhot Shabbat* 27:9) stresses that when one makes Kiddush he must

drink from the cup, a point that he doesn't make, for example, when he describes the laws of Havdala. Similarly, the *Shulḥan Arukh* (*Orah Ḥayyim* 271:14) cites the opinion of the Geonim that though in the case of other blessings one of the listeners may drink the wine, in the case of Kiddush, the one reciting the blessing must drink the cup himself. For other blessings, we require someone to drink the wine merely so that the blessing of *borei peri hagafen* has not been said in vain, but for Kiddush, the requirement to drink the wine is an intrinsic part of the *mitzva*. Drinking the wine connects the blessings to the meal and elevates the meal to be a holy one, in honor of Shabbat, which is one of the purposes of Kiddush.

In sum, the recitation of Kiddush constitutes three distinct fulfillments. First, it is an act of sanctification, infusing into the day an aspect of holiness that would not exist without man's initiative. Second, it is an expression of praise for Shabbat, extolling its uniqueness as the eternal testimony to the Creator who rested on the seventh day. Finally, Kiddush establishes the meal as a *se'udat Shabbat* and sanctifies our eating to be a fulfillment of *oneg Shabbat*, which permits us to partake of and enjoy the food despite its added holiness.