

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVI: Ekev (Deut. 7:12–11:25)

Essay 8. Don't talk while eating

תענית פֶּרֶק קָמָא רַב נַחְמָן וְר' יִצְחָק הָיוּ יְתָבִי בְּסֵעוּדָתָא. אָמַר ר' נַחְמָן לְר' יִצְחָק לִימָא מָר מִלְתָּא בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה. אָמַר לִיה הֲכִי אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן: אִין מְשִׁיחִין בְּסֵעוּדָה, שְׁמָא יְקָדִים קָנָה לְנוֹשֵׁט ע"כ.

It is written in tractate **Ta'anit**, the first chapter:

Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were sitting at a meal. Rav Nachman said to Rabbi Yitzchak: Let the Master say a matter of Torah. [Rabbi Yitzchak] said to [Rav Nachman]: Rabbi Yochanan said: One may not speak during a meal, lest the trachea will precede the esophagus, and come into danger [of choking]. [Food is meant to enter the esophagus, and when one speaks his trachea opens and the food might enter there].

- Ta'anit 5b

מקשים על מעשה זה דאמאי לא הקדים רב נחמן לומר הוא דברי תורה והיה ממתין שיאמר דוקא ר' יצחק. ועוד איך תיסק אדעתין דלא ידע רב נחמן שהיא דאין משיחין וכו' שמא יקדים קנה לנושט והא מילתא דפשיטא הוא. ועוד קשה מה צורך היה לר' יצחק להאריך לשונו ולומר לו טעם שמא יקדים קנה לנושט, הלא לסברתו שאסור להשיט בסעודה גם אסור להרבות דברים חוץ מן ההקדים, דבנדאי אף אם רב נחמן לא היה שמיץא ליה עד השתא שהיא דאין משיחין הלא תכף שיאמר לו אין משיחין הוא היה חכם ומבין מדעתו הטעם מבלי שיאריך לשונו.

People question about this incident, that why didn't Rav Nachman say a matter of Torah, and instead he was waiting for Rabbi Yitzchak to say something. Also, how would it enter your mind that Rav Nachman didn't know that one may not speak during a meal, lest the trachea will precede the esophagus, for this is an obvious matter? Another difficulty is what need was there for Rabbi Yitzchak to speak at length and to say to him the reason, "lest the trachea precede the esophagus," isn't his opinion known that it's forbidden to converse at a meal and also forbidden to talk too much except for necessity? Certainly, even if Rav Nachman had not heard until that moment that one does not speak during a meal, as soon as [Rabbi Yitzchak] said to him that one does not speak during a meal, through his wisdom and

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understanding wouldn't he know the reason, without [Rabbi Yitzchak] speaking at length to give him the reason?

ונראה לתרץ דאיתא בפרק ו' דברכות (דף מ"ג) שאילו את בן זומא: מפני מה אמרו בא להם יין בתוך המזון, כל אחד מברך לעצמו, לאחר המזון, אחד מברך לכולם? אמר להם, לפי שאין בית הבליעה פנוי. ולכאורה הקושיא יותר מתחזקת שהיה לו לרב נחמן לדעת שהיה דאין משיחין דהא מתניתין היא בא להם יין וכו'.

This is apparently solved as it is brought in the 6th chapter of Berachot (page 43a):

They asked Ben Zoma: Why did [the sages] say [in a Mishnah]: If wine came before them during the meal, each and everyone recites a blessing [over the wine] for himself; [but if the wine came] after the meal, one recites a blessing on behalf of them all? He said to them: Because [while eating], the throat is not available. [After the meal, one recites a blessing and the others answer "Amen" and immediately drink the wine. But if they were still eating, one person might be ready to answer "Amen" and drink, but another might still be chewing and swallowing his food. To prevent making them interrupt their eating, the sages ruled that there is no need to recite the blessing together.]

- Berachot 43a

It seems that the difficulty that Rav Nachman had is getting stronger, for Rav Nachman should have known this, that one doesn't talk during a meal, for we learned this from the Mishnah that if wine came before them during the meal, each and everyone recites a blessing [over the wine] for himself.

אמנם כדמעיינינו ביה שפיר תהיה גלויה לפנינו סברת רב נחמן, שכתבו התוספות (בד"ה הואיל ואין בית הבליעה פנוי) דכשאמר המברך "סברי מורי" והם מניחים לאכול כדי לענות "אמן" שפיר דמי שאחד מברך לכולם. אבל רבינו אלקנה פליג דכיון שתיקנו חכמים שיברך כל אחד לעצמו אינו יוצא כלל בברכת חבירו וגם שלא תחלוק בין פנוי לשאינו פנוי דאמי למטעמי עכ"ל. ועדיין הוא מחלוקת בין השלחו צרוד והגהה בארח חיים (סימן קע"ד) ועיי"ש בט"ז (ס"ק י"א).

Indeed, when we examine this, it is fine that the opinion of Rav Nachman should be disclosed before us, for the Tosafists wrote at the text beginning, "because [while eating], the throat is not available," that when the one reciting the blessing over wine said the introduction, "Attention, my teachers," and they would temporarily stop eating in order to answer "Amen," that one can recite the blessing for everyone.

But the Tosafists note that one of their members, Rabbeinu Elchanan,¹ disagreed, that since the sages of the Mishnah instituted that each person recite his own blessing unless the meal were completely finished, that one would not be exempt at all with the blessing of his fellow.

¹ Elchanan ben Yitzchak of Dampierre (d. 1184), French Tosafist, remembered especially for commentaries on tractates Yoma and Avodah Zarah.

I.e., the anonymous Tosafists held that the rabbis of the Mishnah made a communal blessing over wine during a meal optional, but if people would stop eating when someone said the introduction, “Attention, my teachers,” that the blessing would exempt everyone else. But Rabbi Elchanan was of the opinion that the rabbis of the Mishnah didn’t make the communal blessing over wine during a meal optional, but rather that they forbade it entirely.

Also, according to Rabbeinu Elchanan, the sages of the Mishnah held that one should not draw a distinction between someone whose throat is empty and someone whose throat is not, in case one errs and come to choke while trying to say “Amen” before being ready.

This is still a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch² and the gloss³ in Orach Chaim, siman 174, se’if 8. Also, see there in the Taz, se’if katan 11.

ומעתה נוכח לומר דרב נחמן הנה סבירא ליה פדיעה הראשונה דכשאומר "סברי" והם מפסיקים מלאכול דאין הכי נמי דאחד מברך לכולם, ומשום הכי אמר לר' יצחק לימא מר מילתא, שאני כבר סלקתי את עצמי מלאכול. ומשום הכי לא התחיל הוא בדברי תורה לפי שלא היה בטוח שר' יצחק יסלק את עצמו מלאכול, ואם כן היה אסור לו לפתוח בדברי תורה. ור' יצחק הנה סבירא ליה כהרב רבינו אלקנה שאפילו כשאומר "סברי מורי" כל אחד מברך לעצמו, או משום דלא פלוג רבנו או משום תקנתא דרבנו.

Now we are able to say that Rav Nachman was of the first opinion, as expressed later by the anonymous Tosafists, that when one said, “Attention, my teachers,” and they stopped eating, that it is indeed so that one can recite the blessing for everyone. Because of this, he said to Rabbi Yitzchak: Let the Master say a matter of Torah, for I have already removed myself from eating.

Because of this, he didn’t begin with words of Torah, because he was not certain that Rabbi Yitzchak had removed himself from eating, and if so, it would be forbidden for [Rav Nachman] to open with words of Torah. I.e., Rav Nachman knew that they weren’t completely through with the meal, but thought that if Rabbi Yitzchak was taking a break from eating, that either one of them could share a word of Torah. But he knew that if Rabbi Yitzchak was not taking a break from eating, that it would be dangerous for Rabbi Yitzchak to talk and eat at the same time, and likewise that even he should not give a word of Torah, lest Rabbi Yitzchak want to make a comment on what he was saying.

But Rabbi Yitzchak was of the opinion like that held later by the rabbi, Rabbeinu Elchanan, that even when one said, “Attention, my teachers,” everyone should recite the blessing for himself, either because the rabbis did not distinguish between someone whose throat is empty and someone whose throat is not, or because of an edict of the rabbis.

² Rabbi Yosef Karo follows Rabbeinu Elchanan in giving the halacha as followed by the Sephardim, that “Everyone blesses for oneself upon wine during a meal, even if they are dining together.”

³ Rabbi Moshe Isserles follows the anonymous Tosafists in his gloss, giving the practice of the Ashkenazim: “There are those who say that if he said to them, ‘Attention, my teachers,’ and they listen and pay attention to the blessing and don’t eat, then they will answer ‘Amen,’ one blessing for all of them. And that’s how we are accustomed.”

ומשום הכי השיב לו אין משיחין בסעודה בשום פנים דתקנתא דרבנן. היא כד, ועוד שמא יקדים קנה לנפשט, דתיישינן דאמי למטעי פסקרת הרב רבינו אלקנן ופרתי קאמר ליה, ומשום הכי האריך לשונו.

Because of this, he answered him, “we absolutely do not talk at a meal,” for this is an edict of the rabbis. Also, a second reason that we don’t talk at a meal is lest the trachea will precede the esophagus, for we are concerned lest he err, according to the opinion of the rabbi, Rabbeinu Elchanan. Thus, he’s saying two things, and because of this, he spoke at length.

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