



The Chicago Center
for Jewish Education

Mishna Berura

Digest

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סימן קכ"ח סעיף י"א-י"ד

Halacha Highlight

Procedure for *birkas kohanim*

Shulchan Aruch Siman 128 Seif 11

כשמחזירין פניהם כלפי העם

When the *kohanim* turn towards the *tzibbur*

Shulchan Aruch (סעי' י"א) writes that after the *kohanim* turn towards the *tzibbur* they recite the *beracha* on the *mitzvah* of *birkas kohanim*. Mishnah Berurah (סק"מ) references *Rishonim* who maintain that the *beracha* should be recited before the *kohanim* turn towards the *tzibbur*. Mishnah Berurah (סק"מ) relates that those who are meticulous in their *mitzvah* observance strive to fulfill both opinions. They begin the *beracha* while facing the *aron kodesh* and in the midst of the *beracha* they turn towards the *tzibbur* and complete the *beracha*. Sha'arei Teshuvah (ס"ק י"ח) cites Birkei Yosef (אות ט) who explains that when the *kohanim* finish reciting the words של אהרן בקדשתו they should turn to face the *tzibbur* and then complete the *beracha*. Eshel Avrohom (בוטשאטש) comments that it is important for all the *kohanim* to conduct themselves in accordance with the same practice. Therefore, if one is *davening* in a *Bais HaKnesses* in which the *kohanim* follow a different practice one should follow their custom.

There is also a dispute when the *kohanim* should lift up their hands. One opinion maintains that the *kohanim* do not lift up their hands until they complete the *beracha* so that the *beracha* should be immediately before the performance of the *mitzvah* and the spreading out of the hands is the beginning of the *mitzvah*. Support for this approach is found in the sequence of *seifim*. Seif 11 discusses the *beracha* recited before *birkas kohanim* and seif 12 discusses the *kohanim* lifting their hands. This implies that the *kohanim* do not lift up their hands until after the *beracha* is recited. A second approach is that the *kohanim* should lift their hands before the recitation of the *beracha*. This approach points to the *pasuk* that reads *שאו ידיכם קדש וברכו את ה'*—Lift up your hands in holiness and bless Hashem. The order is first to sanctify their hands and then recite the *beracha*. Regarding this matter as well a compromise approach is suggested, namely, when the *kohanim* begin the *beracha* they do so with their hands at their sides but when they turn in the middle of the *beracha* to face the *tzibbur* they lift their hands (פסקי תשובות אות ל"ז).

Stories to Share

A Question of Accents

ש"ע ס' קכ"ח, י"ג: "ואחר כך מקרא אותם שליח צבור מלה במלה..."

Many questions arise from differences in nusach and pronunciation. It is possible to visit a shul with a different nusach and feel completely lost. And the same is true regarding various dialects and pronunciations.

In Israel *birkas kohanim* is pronounced every day. In a certain small community in Israel, a Sefardic man lost his father. He began to lead the services in the town's little shul. This man had a heavy accent, however, and the one kohein—an Ashkenazic Jew from America—had a hard time following him. Although we find on today's amud that the chazzan should lead the kohein word for word, it appeared strange that the chazzan should lead a kohein who gets confused due to his manner of leading. The community wondered whether someone else should lead the kohein.

When this question reached Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, he conceded that they had a good point. "Since the chazzan leads the *kohanim* to avoid confusing them, if his manner of leading them itself

Overview

Siman 128 Seif 11:

When the *kohanim* turn towards the nation they recite the *beracha* אשר קדשנו וכי.

- ❖ Those who are meticulous begin the *beracha* facing the *aron kodesh* and then turn towards the people in the middle of the *beracha*. (M.B. 40)
- ❖ All the *kohanim* recite the *beracha* rather than one kohen recite the *beracha* on behalf of others. (M.B. 41)

Siman 128 Seif 12:

They lift their hands as high as their shoulders and the right hand should be slightly higher than the left hand. They spread out their hands and divide their fingers to make five windows, between two fingers and the other two fingers is one window, between the finger and the thumb is another window and between the thumbs is a window. They spread out their hands so that their palms face the ground and the backs of their hands face the sky.

- ❖ One must be certain that the thumb of the right hand remains on top of the thumb of the left hand so that the window should not become broken. (M.B. 43)
- ❖ There are authorities who write that between words and between *berachos* they may bring together their thumbs and fingers to rest them. (M.B. 43)

Siman 128 Seif 13:

The *kohanim* begin with the word *יברך*. Some say that even the word *יברך* should be introduced by the *shaliach tzibbur* (and this is the custom in these countries) and after that the *shaliach tzibbur* reads for them each word and they answer after him each word until they complete the first *pasuk* at which time the *tzibbur* answers *אמן*. This is the procedure for the second and third *pasuk* as well.

- ❖ When there is one kohen and he is not called all opinions agree that the *shaliach tzibbur* introduces the word *יברך* as well. (M.B. 47)
- ❖ It is only a *mitzvah l'chatchila* for the *shaliach tzibbur* to introduce each word but it is not essential. (M.B. 49)

Siman 128 Seif 14:

The *beracha* must be recited in *lashon kodesh*, while standing, with lifted hands and out loud.

- ❖ Almost all of the *Poskim* write that these requirements are essential and even *b'dieved* the *mitzvah* is not fulfilled if one of these criteria is not met. If a kohen is not capable of fulfilling one of these criteria it is preferable that he should walk out before *רצה*. (M.B. 50)
- ❖ The requirement is only that the *kohanim* must stand but the custom is that even the *tzibbur* stands during *birkas kohanim*. A kohen who is weak and must lean on something may not recite *birkas kohanim*. (M.B. 51)
- ❖ If a kohen's hands tremble so that he cannot hold up his hands, he may not recite *birkas kohanim*. If he is able to lift them for a short period of time and then put them down between words, he may recite *birkas kohanim*. (M.B. 52)
- ❖ Shulchan Aruch's intent is that the *beracha* must be recited in a normal voice as opposed to a whisper. However, when there is a large crowd the *kohanim* must use a loud voice so that the entire *tzibbur* should be able to hear the *beracha*. (M.B. 53)
- ❖ Someone who is hoarse and can only speak in a whisper may not recite *birkas kohanim* and should walk out before *רצה*. (M.B. 53)

confuses them it is better for someone else to lead them. But if the *kohanim* are not confused by the chazzan's accent, it is better for the chazzan to lead them. Why deviate from the prevalent custom if there is no pressing need?"

תפארת רפאל, ע' תכ"ז-תכ"ח