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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן קס"ז סעיף י"ד-ט"ז

Halacha Highlight

Honoring a kohen or all the kohanim?

Shulchan Aruch Siman 167 Seif 14
גדול שבהם בוצע
The most prominent amongst them breaks the bread

Shulchan Aruch (סע' י"ד) writes that when many people gather together to eat the most prominent person should be the one who recites hamotzi. Rema adds that if there are a number of people who are equally prominent and one of them is a kohen, the kohen should be chosen to recite hamotzi. This is based on the Gemara in Huriyos (12b) that derives from the word וקדשתו that there is an obligation to honor kohanim by having a kohen read from the Torah first or to recite hamotzi or birkas hamazon on behalf of others. Below Mishnah Berurah notes that this exposition is Biblical rather than Rabbinic (סי' ר"א ס"ק י"ג).

In seif 17 Shulchan Aruch teaches that the one who breaks bread is given the first choice to take food as it is served. He then adds that if the one who broke bread is prominent and there are kohanim present, when distributing the slices of bread one should give a piece to the kohen first. Later authorities have a disagreement regarding the scope of this practice. Some authorities hold that the obligation is to first give a piece to a kohen. Once one gave a kohen a piece there is no obligation to give all the kohanim before giving to others. The nature of the obligation is to sanctify and honor the tribe of kohanim. Once that was accomplished by honoring a kohen the mitzvah was fulfilled. Others agree that the mitzvah was fulfilled once one gave a piece to a kohen, but Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק ע"א) referencing the Gemara in Megilla (28a) teaches that honoring kohanim is a segulah for length of days. Accordingly, some have the practice to give to all the kohanim who are present before giving to the other people who are in attendance at the meal (פסקי תשובות אות כ"ה הע' 152).

Stories to Share

The Honor Due a Kohein

מ"ב ס' קס"ז, ס"ק ס"ט: "דכתיב וקדשתו..."

The Gemara in Brochos 7b states that serving a scholar is greater than learning Torah. This is such an important element in one's development that the Gemara in Kesuvos 96b writes that a Rebbi who doesn't allow his students to serve him is considered as if he had withheld chessed from them.

One time, a kohein served Rabbeinu Tam by pouring water on his hands. A student who was present asked, "How can the Rebbi allow a kohein to wash his hands? The Yerushalmi states that one who makes use of a kohein transgresses the prohibition of me'ilah!"

Rabbeinu Tam was quiet.

Rabbeinu Pater spoke up and said, "But they can forgo their kedushah! This comes out of the Gemara in the first perek of Kiddushin…It is obvious that he can be mochel on the obligation of v'kidashto!"

The Taz asked, "According to Rabbeinu Pater, a kohein should be able to be mochel on his kedushah and marry a divorcee, etc. Yet this contradicts the Gemara in Yevamos 88!"

The Taz answered his own question. "There is a fundamental difference. The kohein cannot be mochel on what the Torah explicitly prohibits. He can, however, forgo his kedushah to wash his Rebbi's hands, since v'kidashto was not meant to prohibit what the kohein rightly views as beneficial. Certainly, being meshamesh was beneficial to the kohein and was permitted.

The Taz concluded, "Don't think for a moment that Rabbeinu Tam was quiet because he couldn't answer Rabbeinu Pater's claim. He didn't answer the student so as not to aggrandize himself by calling himself a talmid chacham, as he himself writes about Ravina in Bava Metzia 67b!"

Overview

Siman 167 Seif 14:

If many people are eating together the most prominent person should break the bread. If two are equally prominent and one of them is a kohen there is a mitzvah to give him precedence. If the kohen is an am ha'aretz, a Torah scholar precedes him. If the kohen is also a Torah scholar but less of a scholar than the other fellow it is preferred to give precedent to the kohen but there is no obligation. See below siman 201. **If the ba'al habayis is present he should break the bread even if one of the guests is more prominent** (and the one who recites the beracha should first say, ברשות מורי ורבותי").

- The most prominent is the biggest Torah scholar. (M.B. 67)
- The one breaking bread is discharging the obligation of others. Even when each person will recite a beracha on his own bread the most prominent person should recite his beracha first. A chosson on the day of his wedding breaks the bread even if more prominent people are present. (M.B. 68)
- The Torah scholar may not allow the kohen who is an am ha'aretz to precede him since that degrades the Torah. In siman 201 Shulchan Aruch teaches that this is limited to where he is honoring him as a kohen but if he does it for other reasons there is no issue. (M.B. 70)
- The host precedes even a kohen and Torah scholar so that he will distribute the bread generously. (M.B. 73)
- Magen Avrohom agrees with Lechem Chamudos that nowadays hosts honor the most prominent person but other authorities disagree. When many people eat together and each has his own bread it is correct to honor the most prominent person since the issue of being generous does not apply. (M.B. 74)
- Even when the most prominent person breaks the bread or the host he should ask permission as an expression of humility. (M.B. 75)

Siman 167 Seif 15:

Those present may not eat until the one who recited the beracha eats (but it is permitted to give each person his portion before he eats and but they must wait for him to eat.) **If each one will eat from his own loaf and will not have the loaf that is in the hands of the one breaking the bread they may eat before him. On Shabbos each person must have lechem Mishnah besides the lechem Mishnah that is in front of the one who breaks bread and then each one may eat before the one who breaks the bread.**

- Shulchan Aruch refers to when they fulfill their obligation with the host's beracha. Pri Megadim writes that even if they will not discharge their obligation with his beracha, nevertheless, since they are dependant upon his loaf it is not respectful if they eat before him. (M.B. 76)
- Even if he gave them permission they must wait. Taz maintains that it is improper for him to distribute bread if they cannot eat until he eats and as such distributing the bread would constitute an interruption that is l'chatchila prohibited. (M.B. 79)
- Yom Tov is the same as Shabbos. (M.B. 82)