The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן ר"א סעיף ב'-ד'

Overview

Siman 201 Seif 2:

One who is yisroel and a Torah scholar should not honor a kohen to lead birkas hamazon as if he is required to do so, but if he wants to grant him permission there is no issue. If there is a kohen who is a Torah scholar there is a mitzvah to give him precedence as it says: וקדשתו which teaches that he should begin first and recite berachos first (See above siman 167:14).

- This causes the Torah to become despised when they see the Torah scholar lowered before the am ha'aretz. (M.B. 8)
- This does not diminish the stature of the Torah scholar since it requires the kohen's permission. (M.B. 10)
- Even if the Torah scholar is greater it is nevertheless preferable to honor the kohen since he is also a Torah scholar and one who does so will experience length of days. (M.B. 12)
- He receives the first aliyah, recites berachos first at a meal and makes kiddush on behalf of others. Poksim write that included in this obligation is speaking first at gatherings. (M.B. 13)
- Magen Avrohom maintains that the obligation to honor a kohen is Biblical, nonetheless, he may honor others to go ahead of him except for krias hatorah. It is not clear why we do not honor kohanim according to these requirements. (M.B. 13)
- It is also appropriate to honor a levi ahead of a yisroel if they are equal in scholarship for birkas hamazon, hamotzi and tzedaka since levi'im receive aliyos ahead of yisroelim. (M.B. 13)

Siman 201 Seif 3:

One who is given the kos to lead birkas hamazon and one who refuses will have his life shortened.

- Magen Avrohom asserts that this ruling is limited to when they will recite birkas hamazon with a cup of wine and the guest is obligated to bless the host. Although when there is no kos there the curse will not take effect, nevertheless, it is not right for a person to push off a mitzvah that presents itself. (M.B. 14)

Siman 201 Seif 4:

One should make an effort to recite the beracha on the kos shel beracha.

Halacha Highlight

Kohanim leading birkas hamazon

Shulchan Aruch Siman 201 Seif 2
אבל כהן תלמיד חכם מצוה להקדימו
But when there is a kohen who is a Torah scholar there is a mitzvah for him to lead

Shulchan Aruch (סע' ב') relates that there is a mitzvah to ask a kohen to lead birkas hamazon. This obligation is derived from the word וקדשתו which teaches the general obligation to give precedence to kohanim. Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק י"ג) cites Magen Avrohom who maintains that the obligation is Biblical. This leads Magen Avrohom to wonder why people are not particular to ask a kohen to lead birkas hamazon. He suggests that perhaps it is due to the fact that kohanim nowadays cannot demonstrate that their lineage makes them kohanim. Teshuvas Rav Pealim (ח"ב סי' ל"ט) also notes that the custom is that people do not specifically ask kohanim to lead birkas hamazon and instead the honor is given to Torah scholars. He explains that we rely on Rivash's opinion that kohanim are no longer considered to have confirmed yichus. Despite the rationalization, Magen Avrohom writes that one should honor a kohen in this manner.

Sefer Mikor Chaim (סי' קס"ז סע' י"ד) also observed that in Poland not only did they not have the custom to honor kohanim with birkas hamazon, but when someone else would lead birkas hamazon they would not even ask permission to do so (i.e., ברשות הכהן). He suggested that the reason is that since the mitzvah is derived from the word וקדשתו and that same pasuk also mentions korbanos, we can infer that the obligation to honor kohanim applies only when the Bais HaMikdash is standing. Nowadays that we do not have a Bais HaMikdash there is no mitzvah to honor kohanim.

Kaf HaChaim (סי' קצ"ב סק"ב) writes that if one is leading birkas hamazon in the presence of a kohen one should ask his permission. Sefer Orchos Chaim, however, writes that it is not our custom to say ברשות הכהן because we rely on the fact that the kohen did not protest as evidence that he does not mind that someone else is leading birkas hamazon (חיי משה).

- In other words that he should be the one who leads birkas hamazon and discharge the obligation of others rather than listen and answer אמן. (M.B. 15)