The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן רצ"ח סעיף א'-ג'

Overview

Siman 298 Seif 1:

One recites the beracha בורא מאורי האש if one has a flame and if one doesn't, he is not obligated to make an effort to obtain one. This is true on motzai Shabbos but on motzai Yom HaKippurim there is an opinion that maintains that one must make an effort to obtain one. If one does not have a cup of wine for havdala, when he sees a flame he should recite the beracha and the same is true regarding besamim.

- The first creation of fire was on motzai Shabbos. The reason we recite the beracha on a flame after Yom Kippur even when it does not coincide with Shabbos is to demonstrate that it was prohibited to use fire on Yom Kippur and for that reason there is an opinion that requires one to make an effort to obtain a flame on motzai Yom HaKippurim. (M.B. 1)
- According to Bach if one recited בורא מאור האש he did not fulfill his obligation but if he recited ברא מאורי האש in the past tense his obligation is fulfilled. (M.B. 2)
- The beracha is not recited once motzai Shabbos has passed. (M.B. 3)
- If one thinks that he will obtain wine later that night and wants to study Torah before he obtains the wine, Rav Akiva Eiger indicates that he could wait to recite the beracha on the flame until he obtains the wine. (M.B. 4)

Siman 298 Seif 2:

The preferred fulfillment of the mitzvah is to use a torch. There is an opinion that maintains that if one does not have a torch he must kindle an additional flame for havdala besides the flame that is used to illuminate the house. A lamp that has two wicks is considered a torch.

- It produces a good quality light and should be made of wax. Sefer Chassidim writes that one should not use fuel that is malodorous but it seems that he is referring to the preferred manner of fulfilling the mitzvah since one may even use malodorous fuel for Shabbos lights which are obligatory. Pri Megadim also writes that when one has no alternative he may use a malodorous fuel. (M.B. 5)
- This is done to demonstrate that it is for the sake of the mitzvah. Shulchan Aruch refers to where one cannot bring the flames next to one another because if he could, he would be able to create a torch. (M.B. 6)
- A torch is not essential for the mitzvah. (M.B. 7)
- Since the two flames reach one another it is considered a torch. In our lamps if one adds many wicks it is merely considered a thicker wick but is not a torch unless one separates between the wicks with wax or fat similar to what we do when we braid together candles or hold them together during the recitation of the beracha. (M.B. 8)

Siman 298 Seif 3:

It is customary to gaze at one's palms and fingernails. One should gaze at the fingernails on his right hand and hold the kos with his left hand. He should bend his fingers into his hand so that he could simultaneously see his fingernails and his palm and will not see the inside of his fingers.

- The custom is to look at one's fingernails to ascertain if one could benefit from the light to the degree that one could distinguish between coins as one could distinguish between one's nails and the surrounding skin. The nails also are a sign of blessing since they grow throughout one's lifetime. We also look at our palms since the lines on one's palms a sign for blessing. (M.B. 9)
- We bend the four fingers on the thumb. (M.B. 10)
- Some have the custom to straighten out their fingers and gaze at the fingernails from that perspective. (M.B. 11)

Halacha Highlight

Gazing at one's hand during havdala

Shulchan Aruch Siman 298 Seif 3

נוהגים להסתכל בכפות הידים ובצפרנים

The custom is to gaze at one's palms and fingernails

Shulchan Aruch (סע' ג') relates that the custom is to gaze at the palm of one's hand and his fingernails. Rema explains that one should fold his fingers into his hand so that he can gaze at his fingernails and palm simultaneously and he should not look at the inside of his fingers. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ט) initially explains that one looks at his fingernails to determine whether he can benefit from the light by distinguishing between his fingernails and the surrounding skin which is comparable to Shulchan Aruch's barometer (סע' ד') of being able to distinguish between coins from different countries. He then explains that fingernails represent beracha since they grow throughout one's lifetime and we also gaze at our palms since the lines contain something through which one is blessed. Tur, in fact, writes that one should gaze at the lines on his palms until he can distinguish between them. Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק י"א) also mentions that there are those who have the custom to straighten out their fingers and look again at their fingernails.

The correct procedure is to first bend one's fingers into his palm with his fingers covering his thumb but with the lines on his palm exposed. He should then gaze at his fingernails and the lines on his palm. He should straighten out his fingers and look closely so that he can distinguish between the fingernails and the surrounding skin. In this position, as well, the thumb should be covered so that it is not visible. The use of plural by Tur and Shulchan Aruch indicates that one should follow this procedure for both hands whereas Rema writes that one follows this procedure only with the right hand and the left hand holds the kos. Some authorities, in fact, are very particular that one should not gaze at one's left hand during havdala but others are not particular about this and look at their left hand as well (פסקי תשובות אות ד').