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ותלמוד
"תקף תנים"
לעשות רצונך
בלבב שלם



שע"י "חדר הוראה" שכונת מנחת יצחק פעיה"ק ירושלם תובב"א - בראשות הרב חיים אהרן בלייער שליט"א

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Krias HaTorah

Halachos of Birkas Kohanim – 3

Parshas Shelach 5785

356

Passing Within Four Amos of Someone Davening Kohen

- To wash his hands.** Some say if a Kohen would need to walk within four amos in front of someone davening Shemoneh Esrei to wash his hands, it is better to rely on the opinion that a Kohen can rely on the netilas yodayim he did before davening if he did not lose focus of it (הגר"י קרליץ) and did not touch an unclean area (היסח הדעת). However, most poskim agree a Kohen may walk in front of someone davening because the washing is for a mitzva purpose (הגר"ש אלישיב, see Issues 311 and 312 at length).
- To go up for Birkas Kohanim.** If there is no other path, a Kohen may walk in front of someone davening to get to the front for Birkas Kohanim, as it is a passing mitzva (מצוה עוברת) and a mitzva involving many people (מצוה דרבים). If there are two Kohanim, it is also a mitzva d'oraisa (הגר"ח קנייבסקי בשם החזו"א).

Levi

- To wash a Kohen's hands.** A Levi should not walk in front of someone davening to wash a Kohen's hands, as that is not essential to the mitzva (ד"אמות של תפלה ח"ב סי' ז' הע' 84).

Yisroel

- To stand in front of the Kohen.** Someone by the front wall who wants to back up to stand in front of the Kohen (ק"ב) should not walk in front of someone davening for this purpose. The same applies to those who come from all parts of the shul to stand directly in front of the Kohen during the bracha. This is because doing this is just a minhag, not an actual mitzva.

Giving the Bracha with Love

Nusach of the Bracha

- The bracha ends, "וצונו לברך את עמו ישראל באהבה." Many wonder: What is the source for this wording? We do not find any other mitzva which is conditional on being done with love, so much so that it is part of the very wording of the bracha (באר"ש סוטה ל"ט ד"ה) באר"ש סוטה ל"ט ד"ה (לברך, מהר"ץ חיות שם).

Can Only Bentch All of Klal Yisroel with Love

- As a source for the wording of the bracha, the poskim (מג"א סי' קכח) cite the Zohar which says a Kohen who does not love the people or is not loved by the people cannot do Birkas Kohanim. A precondition for bentching Klal Yisroel is that it has to be with love. If a Kohen wants to bentch Klal Yisroel—which is made up of varying stripes and types—and include everyone together, the only glue he can use for this is the glue of unconditional love.
- Like Aharon HaKohen.** Similarly, we find that Aharon HaKohen "loved peace and pursued peace." That is why only he was zocheh to have **all of Klal Yisroel**, not just a segment, mourn him after his death, as the posuk says, "ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל" (פרקי דר"א פ"ז).
- Hashem's shluchim.** Additionally, the Kohanim are transmitting the bracha of Hashem Himself (see Issue 354, par. 2). In Birchos Krias Shema, we also say "הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה." Hence, the shliach has the force of the One Who sent him, i.e., with love for each and every person, as every person is a child of Hashem's.

Halachos Derived from This

- A Kohen disliked by the tzibbur or who dislikes the tzibbur should not do Birkas Kohanim. It is a great danger for a Kohen to do Birkas Kohanim without love. Therefore, he should leave the shul before (זוה"ק שם, שו"ע הרב סי"ט, מ"ב סק"ז) רצה.
- Before Birkas Kohanim, every Kohen should subdue his yetzer to remove any hatred from his heart and take it upon himself to love the tzibbur. The tzibbur should also take it upon themselves to love the Kohanim (מ"ב שם) (ערוה"ש סכ"א, מ"ב שם). If a Kohen feels any hatred toward even one individual in the tzibbur, he should remove it from his heart (נשיאת כפים כהלכתה פט"ז אות ב').

Kohen in the Middle of Shemoneh Esrei

Netilas Yodayim

- The poskim discuss whether a Kohen in the middle of his Shemoneh Esrei who needs to interrupt for Birkas Kohanim must wash his hands before Birkas Kohanim (שאלת יעב"ץ א' מ"ב). However, the accepted minhag is not to wash in the middle of davening. If he did not wash his hands, he can still do Birkas Kohanim and rely on the opinion that his netilas yodayim before Shacharis is enough (חיי אדם) (קצש"ע כ"ז, ככל ל"ב סכ"ו, as we mentioned (Issue 355, par. 28).

First Opinion

- There is a machlokes haposkim whether a Kohen in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei should do Birkas Kohanim, based on two opinions.
- No other Kohanim.** Some hold that if there are no other Kohanim in shul, a Kohen in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei should do Birkas Kohanim so that the mitzva will not be missed. This is because Birkas Kohanim is d'oraisa, while interrupting mid-Shemoneh Esrei is only an issue d'rabanana (הובא במג"א סק"מ).
- He should do this by shifting slightly when the shliach tzibbur reaches רצה; then, after the shliach tzibbur says the bracha of "הטוב שמוך," he should stop his Shemoneh Esrei wherever he is and go up for Birkas Kohanim; then, after he finishes Birkas Kohanim, he should go back to his spot to finish his Shemoneh Esrei.
- Other Kohanim present.** However, if there is/are another Kohen/other Kohanim there to do Birkas Kohanim, a Kohen in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei should not interrupt for Birkas Kohanim, which he is not obligated in if he did not begin moving forward at רצה. Also, the call of "Kohanim!" is not directed at Kohanim who are still davening Shemoneh Esrei (רדב"ז שם).

Second Opinion

- Other brachos of Shemoneh Esrei.** Others argue. They hold a Kohen should never interrupt his Shemoneh Esrei to do Birkas Kohanim if he is up to one of the other brachos of Shemoneh Esrei (א"ר סק"ג, יעב"ץ בסידור, שו"ת הלכות קטנות סי' ס"ד) Many poskim follow this opinion.
- After הוראה.** However, if the Kohen has finished the bracha of הוראה together with the shliach tzibbur, where Birkas Kohanim is said, he can do Birkas Kohanim before שלום (שם).
- The Kohen should do this if he estimates during his tefilla that he will reach the end of הוראה together with the shliach tzibbur. In that case, he should move forward slightly when the shliach tzibbur gets to רצה; then, when he reaches the end of the bracha of הוראה, he should walk up to the front to do Birkas Kohanim; then, he should return to his tefilla afterward without getting mixed up (מ"ב סק"ק ק"ו).

Yisroel in the Middle of Shemoneh Esrei

After Bracha of הודאה

19. **Stopping to pay attention.** Many people, if they are davening Shemoneh Esrei and reach the end of the bracha of הודאה with the shliach tzipbur and are now hearing Birkas Kohanim, pause, listen, and pay attention to Birkas Kohanim (שירת אגל"מ). חזו"א, דינים והנהגות ח"ג סי' ט"ו, שירת אגל"מ (שירת אגל"מ). אלו"ה ח"ד סי' כ"א, שירת שבט הלוי ח"ג סי' ט"ו, מו"ר בשו"ת שבט הקהתי ח"א סי' ע"ט (אל"ה ח"ד סי' כ"א).
20. **Saying Amen to the bracha of Birkas Kohanim.** Some poskim hold that a person in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, after the words "לברך את עמו," may answer Amen after the bracha "ישראל באהבה." They hold it is not an interruption in Shemoneh Esrei since the bracha is related to the spot in davening he is currently at (שירת אגל"מ). Others hold he should not answer Amen (ה"ח סי' ט"ו, פמ"ג שם, א"ר סקל"ה).
21. **Amen after the three pesukim.** However, most poskim hold one may answer Amen to the actual brachos of Birkas Kohanim, i.e., after each of the three pesukim, because he is up to that spot (שירת אגל"מ). (שבט הלוי ח"ג סי' ט"ו, ס' כה תברכו עמ' תק"ד).

At a Different Bracha

22. Some hold that if one is at a different point in Shemoneh Esrei and hears the shliach tzipbur reach Birkas Kohanim, he should pause, listen, and pay attention to Birkas Kohanim since a Yisroel also has a mitzva to receive the bracha (שירת אגל"מ, שבט הקהתי שם). Others hold one should not pause to listen to Birkas Kohanim, and he is included in the bracha even if he does not pause to listen (כה תברכו).
23. **Answering Amen.** Even if one follows the opinion that he may pause, he should not answer Amen after the bracha or after the three brachos of Birkas Kohanim, because he is not up to that point, so it is considered an interruption (כה תברכו).

Calling the Kohanim

Different Ways to Call to the Kohen

24. We mentioned (Issue 355, par. 7) that Kohanim are only obligated to go up for Birkas Kohanim if a Yisroel (ש"ע סכ"ב) calls upon them to give the bracha, as is seen from the Targum on the posuk of "אמור להם," i.e., "כד יאמרו להם." This shows that Kohanim are only obligated to give the bracha when they are told to (תוס' סוטה לה:). There are multiple minhagim as to how to perform this call, as will be explained.
25. **אלוקנו ואלוקי אבותינו.** In some places, the shliach tzipbur says "אלוקנו" in an undertone, and then when he reaches the word "Kohanim," he raises his voice and calls out "Kohanim!" out loud. With this, he calls upon the Kohanim to give a bracha (סו"ת אגל"מ). This is the minhag of Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel.
26. Others say the whole nusach out loud, as it is part of the nusach of the tefilla. However, one should change his tone when he reaches the word "Kohanim" to show he is not merely continuing to read the nusach, but he is actually calling the Kohanim up for the bracha (ליקוטי מהר"ח ח"ג מנהגי יום הפסח, שערי זבולון שער ז' פ"ז).
27. **Shliach tzipbur calls "Kohanim!"** Some have the minhag that the shliach tzipbur does not say ואלוקי אבותינו. That is only for when there are no Kohanim to give the bracha; when there are Kohanim, the shliach tzipbur does not say it at all (ד"ע ראשונה ברמ"א). Instead, the shliach tzipbur waits for the tzipbur to finish answering Amen to "ולך נאה להודות," and then he calls "Kohanim!" It is not an interruption in the tefilla since it is for the purpose of the tefilla (מ"ב סקל"ד).
28. **Someone in the tzipbur calls "Kohanim!"** Some have the minhag that the shliach tzipbur does not call the Kohanim out of concern it might be an interruption in the tefilla. Instead, someone from the tzipbur calls "Kohanim!" It is proper for it to be a distinguished person or someone involved in communal affairs (מעשה רב). (סעי' קס"ח, חיי אדם כלל ל"ב סט"ו, שו"ת תשובות והנהגות ח"ב סי' ק"י).

Only Calling Two or More Kohanim

29. The chiyuv to call the Kohanim is only when there are two or more Kohanim. There is no chiyuv to call a lone Kohen coming up for Birkas Kohanim, as the posuk says, "אמור להם," implying two (ש"ע). Thus, if there is only one Kohen, the shliach tzipbur should not say ואלוקי אבותינו or the word "Kohanim." Instead, the Kohen should begin the bracha as soon as the tzipbur finishes answering Amen to "ולך נאה להודות."

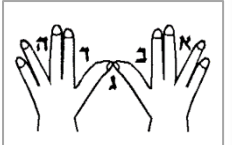
How to Lift the Palms

Lifting the Palms

30. The Kohen must bentch the tzipbur with his palms lifted up; this is a feature of the actual mitzva. It is called "lifting the palms" [נשיאת כפים], not "lifting the hands," implying that the Kohen's fingertips, which extend from the palm, should also be extended upward somewhat (ברכי יוסף ריש סי' קכ"ח).

Position of the Hands During Birkas Kohanim

31. **Shoulder height.** The Kohanim lift their hands level with their shoulders (ש"ע ס"ב), as the posuk says (ויקרא ט', כ"ב). This is essential—if a Kohen does not lift his palms to shoulder height, he does not fulfill his chiyuv (הג' מיימונית הובא בב"י).
32. **Right hand higher.** The Kohen lifts his right hand slightly higher than his left (ש"ע שם), as that posuk uses the word "ידו," his hand, in the singular, hinting that one hand should be slightly higher, which presumably means the right hand (מ"ב שם). Even a left-handed person should lift his right hand higher (קנ"ג איש איט"ר). However, this halacha of lifting the right hand higher is just l'chatchila; it is not essential b'dieved (שו"ת אבני נזר א"ח סי' ל"א אות י').
33. **Palms, or arms too?** Some hold it is enough to just raise the palms to shoulder height; the arms may be lower than the shoulders, with the elbows bent (שו"ת אבני נזר שם). Someone who has difficulty lifting the whole length of his arms may certainly rely on this.
34. Some say the whole length of the arms must also be lifted to shoulder height, i.e., the elbows are completely straight, not bent. The reason is because the entire arm is called "יד," as we find with tefillin, where the posuk says "וקשרתם לאות על ידך," which refers to the arm. Thus, a Kohen must lift his whole "יד" for Birkas Kohanim, i.e., the arm too (באר שבע סוטה דף ל"ז ע"ב, קרית ספר הל' תפילה פ"ד מצוה י"ט).
35. **Hands open, facing down.** The fingers must be extended so the hand is open, not closed into a fist. The palm should face down toward the ground, with the back of the hand facing up (ש"ע שם).
36. **Separate fingers to make five gaps.** The Medrash (נחומא פ' נשא) says, "He watches from the windows" — from between the Kohanim's fingers; "He peers from the cracks [החרכים]" (שיר השירים) — when they stretch out their palms. From here derives the minhag that the Kohen must separate and arrange his fingers in such a way that he creates five gaps, based on the posuk "וה' חרכים." The Shechina "peers through the spaces" כביכול.
37. **Five spaces.** It should be noted that there are multiple different minhagim as to how exactly to separate the fingers to create five spaces (ראה בסוף הספר נשיאת כפים כהלכתה בתוספת ברכה סי' ז באריכות). Each Kohen should follow his family minhag. If a Kohen does not have a particular minhag, he should do the method mentioned by the poskim, as will be explained.
38. Five spaces are created by keeping two fingers touching each other; then another two fingers touching each other, creating one space between the two groups of fingers. Then, the thumb is held apart from the two fingers next to it to create another space. The same is done with the second hand, creating four spaces. Then, the two thumbs are brought together until they are touching (מג"א סק"ט), creating another space between the two thumbs, for a total of five spaces.
39. **Holding the two thumbs together.** We find two ways to put the two thumbs together to create a space between them.
40. The first way is to put the two tips of the thumbs together with the bottoms of the thumbs separated, creating a space between them [ג]. In this method, the other spaces are facing outward, whereas this space faces inward, toward the Kohen's body; see illustration [taken with permission from the sefer נשיאת כפים כהלכתה].
41. A second way is to bend the thumbs and bring them together at the bent point, such that a space is created [ג] facing outward. In this way, it matches up with the other spaces, which also face outward; see illustration [this is what my rebbi, R' Shamai Kehos HaKohen Gross showed me he does with his hands].



Calling Out the Bracha

42. It is a mitzva to call the bracha out to the Kohanim word by word so that they do not get mixed up, as the posuk says, "תוסי' ברכות דף ל"ד ד"ה) (לא יענה). See the Kli Yakar in parshas Naso, where he explains that the chazzan is the intermediary who brings down the initial flow of bracha from the Source of Brachos and pours them onto the heads of the Kohanim, who become vessels brimming with Hashem's bracha. Then, the Kohanim pour them from their full vessel into an empty vessel when they bentch Klal Yisroel.
43. **Call out loud.** The one calling the bracha should say the words in a loud voice; there is no reason to say the words in an undertone (מאירי סוטה דף ל"ט, שו"ת שבט הלוי ח"ג סי' ט"ו, מו"ר בשו"ת שבט הקהתי ח"ב). On the contrary, calling out the brachos rouses the Kohanim to also say the brachos in a loud voice, powerfully. However, the one calling the brachos should not make his voice louder than the Kohanim's voices.