

Besamim – Part I

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Introduction. The issue of בשמים is not one that we often think about, however, as we will soon discover, there are many aspects of בשמים that provide interesting areas of study, and affect other aspects of הבדלה that certainly have halachic relevance. In the first part of this article, we will focus our discussion on the reasons for the obligation to smell בשמים on שבת מוצאי שבת, the ramifications these reasons have on the הלכה, how far one must go in order to obtain בשמים for הבדלה, and which items are recommended and discouraged for use as בשמים.

The Reasons for smelling בשמים.

The opinion of תוספות. גמרא ביצה דף טז. teaches us that each God gives every Jew an extra soul (נשמה יתירה), and He takes it away from us on שבת מוצאי שבת. תוספות in their commentary explain that due to the loss of this extra נשמה, we become upset and need to be comforted. The rabbis decided to institute the practice of smelling a pleasant fragrance in order to appease us after the loss of our נשמה יתירה. It is interesting to note that according to the יסוד ושורש העבודה one only receives the נשמה יתירה of he immerses in a מקוה ערב שבת. This position seems to be untenable for two reasons. First, the גמרא שם makes no mention of any prerequisites to receiving the נשמה יתירה. Second, one who does not immerse in a מקוה ערב שבת מוצאי שבת בשמים should not be required to smell בשמים (שו"ת שלמת מוצאי שבת בשמים יוסף הערה א').

Difficulty with this approach. It should follow that when יום טוב coincides with שבת מוצאי שבת one should still have to smell the בשמים, because there is no indication from the גמרא that we are granted a נשמה יתירה יום טוב. However, Tosafot explain, since we are going to be eating delicious foods on the יום טוב we do not require the בשמים to appease us at that time. The ב"ח points out that following this logic would lead us to the conclusion that one who is fortunate enough to enjoy fine foods every day should never be required to smell בשמים. Even a cursory glance at the מנהג ישראל throughout history reveals that this is not at all true. Even the wealthiest families use בשמים during הבדלה every שבת מוצאי שבת.

The opinion of the ב"ח. בית חדש, in his commentary to טור, cites an entirely different reason for the practice to smell בשמים on שבת, אורח חיים סימן רצ"ז. He writes that the fires of מוצאי שבת stop raging on שבת, and continue to rage again on מוצאי שבת. In order to appease the soul after the increased intensity of the fires of גהינם, we smell the sweet fragrances of the בשמים on מוצאי שבת.

Difficulty with this approach. If this is the reason for the בשמים, it should follow that since the fires of גהינם rest on יום טוב as well, we should be required to smell the בשמים on מוצאי יום טוב. Yet, Jewish practice has always been not to use בשמים during מוצאי יום טוב on הבדלה. This question is what motivated תוספות to reject this as the legitimate reason for the custom to smell the בשמים.

The compromise approach. ב"ח points out that in all likelihood both of the previously mentioned reasons are correct. One is only required to smell the בשמים when he loses his נשמה יתירה and the fires of גהינם are re-kindled. This explains why we do not smell בשמים מוצאי יום טוב (we did not lose a נשמה יתירה), and why we do not use בשמים מוצאי שבת that coincides with יום טוב (the fires of גהינם are still at rest).

Is it possible that these are the only reasons. One who is trained on standard halachic analysis can't help but to be troubled by these rather obscure sources for the obligation to use בשמים. It is difficult to find a rabbinic institution with less concrete halachic explanations than the obligation of בשמים. ערוך השלחן notes this difficulty, and reassures us that while we may not be comfortable with these spiritual explanations, each and every Jewish soul intuitively appreciates them. After all, argues the ערוך השלחן, which Torah observant Jew does not feel a tangible change in his existence upon the departure of the שבת? Even if we may not appreciate the necessity for בשמים on an intellectual level, we can all appreciate it on a metaphysical level.

מוצאי שבת on בשמים Must one go out of his way to obtain
Oddly, while the גמרא explicitly discusses whether one is required

to make an effort to obtain a candle for **הבדלה** on **שבת**, there is no discussion about obtaining **בשמים** for **הבדלה**. This omission opened the door to rabbinic dispute on this matter.

The opinion of the רשב"א and רא"ש. The גמרא ברכות דף נג: concludes that one is not required to go out of his way to obtain a candle for **הבדלה** on **שבת**. מוצאי שבת. In fact, רב זירא reports that he used to have the practice to exert himself to obtain a candle for **הבדלה**, but changed his practice after learning the גמרא's conclusion. The רא"ש and רשב"א reason that if one is not required to exert himself to obtain a candle for what is a legitimate halachic requirement (using a candle for **הבדלה**), he certainly would not be required to exert himself to obtain **בשמים** which was only instituted to give a person a little extra physical pleasure.

The opinion of the מאיר"י. Although one is clearly not required to exert himself to obtain a candle for **הבדלה**, מאיר"י argues that one is certainly required to do so in order to obtain **בשמים**. The reason for **בשמים** cannot be dismissed as something that grants us "extra pleasure", but fulfills a deep spiritual purpose of comforting our souls on the worsening of our spiritual condition.

פסק הלכה. The שולחן ערוך סימן רצ"ז rules in accordance with the opinion of the רא"ש, רשב"א, ורי"ף, and does not require one to go out of his way to obtain **בשמים** for **הבדלה**. Therefore, one who does not have **בשמים** available in his house should not delay **הבדלה** on their account.

What should be used for בשמים?

The qualifications that are required. Not every sweet smelling fragrance is recommended for use as **בשמים** in the context of **הבדלה**.

The שולחן ערוך (אורח חיים סימן רי"ז) records the various ברכות that one is obligated to recite over different fragrances. Not every fragrance requires a **בשמים**. Some require a **בורא מיני בשמים**, while others require a **בורא עצי בשמים**. The משנה ברורה סימן רצ"ז סעיף קטן א' writes that one should be careful to use a spice whose proper ברכה is **בורא מיני בשמים**.

For this reason, many Jews are careful to use whole cloves for the בשמים.

Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch (סימן קל"ד) writes that it is not sufficient to smell בשמים that have a faint or mildly pleasant smell. In order to recite a ברכה over the בשמים, one must smell something that provides him with considerable pleasure. Rabbi Shternbuch points out that many גדולים would omit the בשמים from הבדלה entirely. These גדולים did not use בשמים because they were concerned that they do not enjoy the smell sufficiently to warrant a ברכה.

The שולחן ערוך (סימן רצ"ז סעיף ב') records the widespread practice of using leaves of הדסים for בשמים. The רמ"א writes that the ideal practice is to mix the הדס leaves with cloves and smell the mixture. There are two basic explanations offered by the פוסקים for the practice to use הדסים, with an obvious נפקא מינה between them:

The משנה ברורה (סימן רצ"ז סעיף קטן ח') explains that we try to extend מצוות as much as possible. Therefore, when we finish with our מינים after סוכות, we should continue to use the הדסים for a מצוה. In keeping with the theme of extending the use of the leaves for מצוות, שו"ת תורה לשמה, מצוות, recommends that when the הדסים dry out and lose their smell, they should be used as firewood to bake חלות for שבת. The logical conclusion one can draw from this approach is that the custom to use הדס leaves is limited to those leaves that were used in the performance of the מצוה of מינים. As soon as those leaves dry out, one would not have to replace them with other הדסים until after the following סוכות.

On a more mystical level, שו"ת קרית חנה דוד (הו"ד בילקוט יוסף) cites the תיקונים that one should use the leaves of the הדסים that grow in groups of three to remember the three אבות. This approach would lead to the logical conclusion that one should keep the three הדס leaves together and intact when using them for הבדלה. It would also seem that one need not use the same הדסים that he

used for מינים, as any הדסים would serve to effect this reminder of the אבות.

Using the הדסים on סוכות. The משנה ברורה (שם) rules that one may not use the הדסים from the לולב ואתרוג during the holiday of סוכות, because at that point in time the הדסים are considered to be specifically designated for the מצוה of מינים. As such it would be prohibited to derive any benefit (הנאה) from them until after סוכות (עמוד ר"ט). Although we generally do not consider the benefit of using something for the fulfillment of a מצוה to be considered הנהא, the מצוה of בשמים was instituted specifically for the purpose of giving us הנהא, as we explained earlier.

Items that should be avoided:

The שולחן ערוך (סימן רצ"ז סעיף ב') writes that one should not use anything that emits a foul odor for the מצוה of בשמים.

The משנה ברורה (שם ס"ק ז') adds that an empty box that used to contain בשמים and still retains the fragrance, should also not be used for the מצוה of בשמים. The logic for this ruling is that we require the actual item that emits the fragrance to be present. For this reason, many פוסקים rule that one should not use air fresheners and deodorizers that are sold in cans, as their smell is chemically extracted and produced. (עיין שולחן שלמה סימן רצ"ז)

The שולחן ערוך rules that perfumes used to deodorize a bathroom or a corpse should not be used because their primary function is not to give a pleasant odor, but to neutralize a foul odor. Based on this ruling, it follows that one may not use deoderant for the מצוה of בשמים, even in the absence of other spices.

The שלחן ערוך adds that one may not use spices that were used at meals of idol worshippers. The logic behind this ruling is that we assume some form of idol worship was performed with these spices, thereby making them forbidden for any benefit. As we pointed out earlier, although performance of מצוות generally does not constitute הנהא, the מצוה of בשמים is

different because it is there to comfort us on the loss of the נשמה יתירה.

The (רצ"ז סעיף ג') adds that perfumes worn by women who one is forbidden to be with are also forbidden, lest the smell lead one to come to close to the woman. This is similar to the הלכה in (יורה דעה סימן קצ"ה) that one may not smell the perfume of his wife while she is a נדה for the same reason. It should be noted that the perfumes these פוסקים refer to are not liquid perfumes in a bottle, but are strings of spices that women would wear around their necks. These perfumes were commonly removed and put back on (unlike our perfumes which fade or are washed away, never to be smelled again).

If these perfumes are used has one fulfilled his obligation?

The שולחן ערוך is very clear that if one used the spices of bathrooms and corpses, he has not fulfilled his obligation at all. Many פוסקים assume that the same would be true of the perfumes of forbidden women (שולחן ערוך הרב). However, the שולחן ערוך rules that there is a distinction to be drawn between the fragrances used for corpses/bathrooms and women's perfumes. While the former may not be used because they are simply not defined as בשמים, the women's perfume is certainly defined as בשמים, but is forbidden for an external reason. Therefore, one who smells the former has not accomplished anything, but one who smells the perfumes has in fact smelled בשמים.

Conclusion. We have discussed some of the basic elements of the מצוה of בשמים. Although the reasons for the מצוה are mystical in nature, it is observed by virtually all of Torah Jewry. We have discussed the extent to which one must go to obtain בשמים, and the preferred spices to use for בשמים. Next week we will discuss the proper ברכה to recite on the בשמים, extenuating circumstances that may exempt one from the obligation to smell the בשמים, how to position the בשמים at various stages of הבדלה, the permissibility of smelling them in advance to make sure that they still have a fragrance, and various qualifications of a box.