

Besamim – Part II

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Introduction. In the first part of this article, we began a discussion of the halachic requirement to smell בשמים during the recitation of the הבדלה. We discussed the reason for the obligation, whether one must go out of his way to obtain בשמים, which spices are ideal for use, and which may not be used. This week we will continue our discussion on בשמים, specifically focusing on the proper beracha to recite over the בשמים, extenuating circumstances under which one would not use בשמים for הבדלה, how to position the wine and בשמים during the different parts of הבדלה, and certain issues pertaining to the בשמים box.

The Proper ברכה for בשמים. The שולחן ערוך סימן רט"ז records the various ברכות that are recited over pleasant fragrances. There is not a single standard ברכה that is recited on all fragrances. Rather, the ברכה depends on the source of the fragrance. If the fragrance comes from a piece of wood, the proper ברכה is בורא עצי בשמים. Of the fragrance comes from weeds or grass the ברכה is בורא עשבי בשמים. If one smells an edible fruit he should recite ברוך הנותן ריח טוב בפרות. One is only supposed to recite the ברכה of בורא מיני בשמים when the item he is smelling is neither a wood, nor a grass, nor an edible fruit. As we discussed last week, generally people have the custom to use cloves for בשמים by הבדלה. If one does so there is no question that the appropriate ברכה to recite is בורא מיני בשמים. The problem arises, however, if one uses some other sweet smelling item (i.e. cinnamon) whose ברכה is not בורא מיני בשמים.

Opinion of the משנה ברורה. The משנה ברורה סימן רצ"ז ס"ק א' writes that since people are unfamiliar with the various formulations of ברכות, our custom is to always recite בורא מיני בשמים, even when using items whose proper ברכות are something else. One may do this because the ברכה of בורא מיני בשמים is a more general ברכה that can also apply to other items (similar to the ברכה of שהכל נהיה בדברו on food items whose proper ברכות are something else - משנה ברורה סימן - רט"ז ס"ק י"ג).

Sefardic custom. In ילקוט יוסף הערה א', Rav Yitzchak Yosef points out that the sefardic custom is to recite the appropriate ברכת הריח based on which item one uses for הבדלה.

Extenuating circumstances. There are a number of situations where one is exempt from smelling the בשמים on שבת מוצאי שבת.

One who fasted on Shabbos. As we noted last week, the purpose of smelling a pleasant fragrance after Shabbos is to comfort us on the loss of the נשמה יתרה that we had enjoyed throughout the shabbos. The ראשונים therefore debate whether one who fasted on shabbos must smell the fragrance of the בשמים. After all, one who does not eat does not receive a נשמה יתרה. As a practical matter, there are only two possible occasions when one is permitted to fast on Shabbos, and the הלכה may be different for each occasion.

Yom Kippur. When Yom Kippur falls out on Shabbos, we fast the entire day of Shabbos. For this reason, the שולחן ערוך סימן ג' מוצאי יום כיפור בשמים rules that we do not use בשמים, even when it fell on Shabbos. The ב"ח (שם) disagrees with the ruling of the שולחן ערוך, and pints out that unlike other ברכות where a situation of doubt would warrant caution so as not to violate the severe prohibition of ברכה לבטלה, if one smells the בשמים there is nothing to lose by making the ברכה. It would not constitute a ברכה לבטלה because he has actually experienced the pleasure of the fragrance (similar to one who makes a ברכה on a cup of wine during the week, when there is no obligation of קידוש, as long as he drinks the wine the ברכה is not considered to be wasted). In defense of the ruling of the שולחן ערוך, not to use בשמים after Yom Kippur, the ט"ז (שם) writes that although the beracha on the besamim may not be a ברכה לבטלה, one would have no right to insert this ברכה in the middle of the text of the הבדלה unless he is obligated to do so. In fact, if somebody adds an unnecessary beracha into the middle of his הבדלה he has created a הפסק between the בורא פרי הגפן that he recited at the beginning of the הבדלה and the drinking of the wine that he does at the conclusion of the הבדלה. The ב"ח's argument, therefore, that "you have nothing to lose" by using בשמים מוצאי יום כיפור בשמים separately, outside of the context of the rest of the הבדלה.

Women drinking the הבדלה wine. There is a custom that women do not drink from the cup of wine used for הבדלה. There are a number of more mystical sources that explain

this custom. (The של"ה הקדוש הו"ד במגן אברהם סימן רצ"ו סק"ד explains that wine is what made אדם הראשון want to separate from אדם הראשון so it is symbolically an inauspicious way for a woman to begin her week.) Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, however, suggested a reason for this custom based on הלכה. We have just mentioned that if one inserts sections that are not obligatory in the הבדלה there is a disconnect between the בורא פרי הגפן and the actual drinking of the wine, causing the beracha to be a ברכה לבטלה, and the drinking to be forbidden until another ברכה is recited. Since there is a disagreement amongst the ראשונים whether women are obligated in the mitzvah of הבדלה at all, it is possible that their answering אמן to all of the ברכות of הבדלה is not viewed as part of the order of הבדלה, but as a הפסק between the ברכה on the wine and the drinking of the wine. For this reason, Rav Isser Zalman suggested, women should not partake of the הבדלה wine (without at least reciting another ברכה first. (See שו"ת הר צבי where he questions this explanation)

תענית חלום. The only other circumstance under which one may fast on שבת is one who fasts on account of a bad dream. The שולחן ערוך השלחן סימן רצ"ז סעיף ה' points out that one may distinguish between the fast of יום כיפור and a תענית חלום vis-a-vis the requirement of בשמים. On יום כפור we do not even eat on Friday night, so we do not receive a נשמה יתירה at all. On a תענית חלום, however, we only fast on Shabbos day, which would lead one to believe that we did receive the נשמה יתירה on Friday night. It is possible that the נשמה יתירה then remains with us for the duration of the Shabbos even if we do not eat anymore. Therefore, the שולחן ערוך concludes, one should use בשמים even if he fasted a תענית חלום on Shabbos.

One who cannot smell anything. The שולחן ערוך סימן רצ"ז סעיף ה' rules that one who is unable to smell anything (i.e. he has a cold) should not recite the ברכה over בשמים unless others are relying on his ברכה in order to smell the בשמים. A number of אחרונים (משנה ברורה ס"ק י"ג ערוך השלחן סעיף ז', מגן אברהם, ט"ז וכו') dispute this ruling of the שולחן ערוך and state that even if others are listening to his ברכה one may not recite the ברכה on בשמים unless he can smell them himself. Even though one may recite all of the ברכות of הבדלה for the benefit of somebody else, once he has already fulfilled his

obligation, that is only permitted because הבדלה is a מצוה where we can apply the principle that כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה, and my recitation on behalf of somebody else is considered as if I am required in the mitzvah myself. When it comes to בשמים, though, there is no formal obligation to smell them. The rabbis merely instituted this custom of enjoying the fragrance to give us a little pleasure in an otherwise depressing time (as we lose the spiritual fulfillment of the Shabbos). This beracha is therefore no different than any ברכת הנהנין where one cannot recite it exclusively for the benefit of others if he is not also going to partake of the benefit.

Should one smell the besamim in advance to determine whether he will be able to smell them?

Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen writes that Rav Moshe Feinstein had the custom to smell the besamim in advance to ensure that the subsequent beracha would not be wasted. This practice is recorded by ילקוט יוסף הערה ו' in the name of many other leading authorities, and while it has been met with some criticism, seems to be widely regarded as an acceptable (and perhaps preferable) practice). Should people recite their own ברכה on the בשמים? There is a custom in many segments of כלל ישראל that even those who listen to somebody else recite הבדלה take it upon themselves to recite the ברכות of בשמים and בורא מאורי האש. There is mixed reaction amongst the leading פוסקים to this practice.

The ערוך השלחן (רצ"ז:ז) records this practice without expressing any objection to it. In fact, he seems to be supportive of it. The משנה ברורה (רצ"ז:י"ג) objects to this practice for two reasons. First, he argues, often times people are so busy reciting these ברכות for themselves that they miss the remaining portions of הבדלה. If one wants to fulfill the mitzvah of הבדלה, it is crucial that he pay attention when the final ברכה of הבדלה is recited. Second, he argues, whenever we have an opportunity to include many people in one ברכה we try to do so. This is a fulfillment of the concept of ברוב עם הדרת מלך.

How to position the wine and the בשמים during הבדלה. The שולחן writes that while reciting the ברכה on the wine one should hold the cup of wine in his right hand and the בשמים in his left. When reciting the ברכה on בשמים one should hold the בשמים in his right hand and the wine in his left hand. שו"ת באר משה חלק ה' סימן כ"ה.

reports that the custom of the Vilna Gaon was to hold the wine in his right hand throughout the recitation of הבדלה, and only lift the בשמים with the left hand at the appropriate time. This custom is based on a passage in the מאיר"י ברכות דף מג: and is opposed to the practice suggested by the שלחן ערוך.

Why are so many people not careful to follow the instructions of the שלחן ערוך regarding this issue?

Responsa בית יעקב suggests that the custom developed to place the wine on the table while reciting the blessing on the besamim because the transfer of the wine from one hand to the other will often cause the wine to spill, and one is likely to lose his focus on what he is saying.

Other אחרונים (סידור בית יעקב וערוך הלשחון) suggest that the שלחן ערוך did not mean that it is necessary to hold the wine in the left hand while reciting the blessing on besamim. Rather, he just meant that it should not remain in the right hand, and can be placed on the table.

Conclusion. From these two articles on besamim, it is clear that although this is a custom that takes approximately two seconds of our week, we see that each and every action required by הלכה carries with it deep significance.