

Women and Havdalah

Rabbi Yehuda Balsam

There is no question that the women of klal yisrael play a central role in the mitzvah of shabbos. They are the backbone behind the difficult and time-consuming preparations that are necessary in order to m'kayeim both kavod and oneg shabbos. They are equally important in helping to escort the shabbos on its way and preparing for the upcoming week. With that in mind, it is necessary to understand exactly what obligation the Torah places upon women concerning these mitzvos. Furthermore, understanding women's obligation (or exemption) from these commandments aids us in our general classification and knowledge of the halachos involved. What follows is a summary of the laws of havdalah as they relate to women. We will begin by discussing whether women are at all required to recite havdalah and then move on to a couple of the minhagim that women observe as related to this mitzvah.

Many of us are aware that women are exempt from Mitzvos Aseh Shehazman Gramah. This includes Tefilin, Tzitzis, Shofar, Kri'as Shema and many other central commandments. Thus it follows that women should be patur from all of the positive commandments regarding the shabbos. However, the Gemarah (Berachos 20b) teaches us 'Kol Sheyeshno B'shmira Yeshno B'zchira'. This means that anyone who is included in the mitzvos lo taaseh that apply to shabbos, (represented by the word Shamor, from the Pasuk 'Shamor es Yom Hashabbos L'kadsho' Devarim 4:12) is also obligated in the mitzvos aseh of shabbos (represented by the word Zachor, from the Pasuk 'Zachor es Yom Hashabbos L'kadsho' Shemos 20:8). This hekesh teaches us that just as women, who are obligated to abstain from all issurim in the Torah, must avoid performing any melachos on shabbos, they must keep all of the mitzvos associated with the day. Thus one must decipher whether havdalah is considered a mitzvas aseh mid'oraisa, in which case women would be as obligated as men in its fulfillment, or it is only Midrabanan, and women would be exempt as in other mitzvos aseh (Midrabanan) shehazman g'ramah.

The Torah tells us: 'Zachor Es Yom Hashabbos L'kadsho' (Shemos 20:8) and the gemarah (Pesachim 106a) explains that one must remember it over wine. This is what we refer to as Kiddush. Although Tosfos (ibid s.v. zoruhu) and the Rambam (hil. shabbos 29:6) among other Rishonim understand the obligation to recite kiddush over wine as being mid'rabanan, most everyone agrees that there is an obligation mid'oraisa to mention and sanctify the coming of shabbos (see Rambam 29:1, and Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 31). This is true with regard to greeting the shabbos. Is it also the case by ushering it away? The Rambam (ibid) writes that it is a mitzvas aseh min hatorah to mention the shabbos when it enters and when it leaves: with kiddush and havdalah. The Maggid Mishnah explains that the Rambam is assuming that havdalah is of Biblical origin. He concludes that since the Rambam considers havdalah to be min hatorah, it would be obligatory for women and men alike. He also mentions that the Rambam's view is not a universally accepted shittah. There are those who assume that although kiddush is d'oraisa, havdalah is not. This is the opinion of the Rabbeinu Tam (see Tosfos

Nazir 4a s.v. mai) and the Rosh (Shut 11:3). However, many Rishonim concur with the Rambam's opinion (Ravi'ah Brachot 3:1, Ritvah as quoted by the Nimukei Yosef Pesachim 55, and Sefer Hachinuch Mitvah 31). Thus it would seem that the Rishonim who agree with the Rambam are of the opinion that women are chayav in havdalah and those who oppose him would exempt them. However, this is not fully accurate. The aforementioned Maggid Mishnah writes that even if havdalah is d'rabanan, our sages might have established its parameters after the model of kiddush, and included women in the obligation. This being said, the Beis Yosef (296:8) quotes the Orchos Chaim (hil. Havdalah 18) that women should not recite havdalah for themselves, because the obligation is only mi'drabanan. This opinion did not deter the Mechaber from paskening in the Shulchan Aruch that women can say havdalah for themselves, and afterwards quoting that there are those who argue. The Rema seems more concerned about this issue and writes that women should not say havdalah for themselves, but should try to hear it and be yotzeh with a man's recitation. The Bach (end of 296) argues on the Rema based on the following argument: Ashkenazim normally permit women to volunteer for mitzvos aseh shehazman gramah, and to say a brachah (see Tos. Berachos 13b) so why should havdalah be any different? This argument is accepted by the Magen Avraham and the Mishnah Berurah (35). Thus a woman who cannot hear havdalah from a man should certainly say it for herself. The Mishnah Berurah does advise that a man who has already said havdalah for himself (or been yotzei with someone else) should not recite havdalah for a woman. This is despite the concept of Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Bazeh, because arvus only applies when the individual who is being yotzeh has a chiyuv. Since there is a small safek whether women do possess this obligation, and one cannot rely on the din of arvus, she should say havdalah for herself. The Aruch Hashulchan (ibid:5) permits a man (who was already yotzeh) to say havdalah for a woman who is unable to recite it for herself.

Drinking from the wine

The Magen Avraham (ibid:4) quotes from the sefer Shnei Luchos Habris (Shlah Hakadosh) that women have a minhag not to drink the wine from havdalah. This is based on the hidden Torah, and would apply only to wine. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (shut Har Tzvi O"C 154) quotes a halachik reason from Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. He explains, that based on our aforementioned safek whether women are obligated in havdalah, they should not drink from the havdalah no matter what beverage was used. If they are, in fact, patur from hearing havdalah, the brachos that followed the Borei Pri Hagafen (or Shehakol) would constitute a hefseik, and when one answers amen to these Brachos, she is speaking out in between the brachah on the beverage and the act of drinking it. If she were obligated to hear these brachos as part of havdalah, they would obviously not serve as an interruption, as it is her chiyuv to say (or hear) havdalah said al hakos. In the end, Rav Frank rejects this supposition since the psak is that a woman must say havdalah for herself, and a chiyuv misafek is still a chiyuv. If a woman is saying havdalah for herself, the Aruch Hashulchan (5) writes that she should surely drink from the cup, for one shouldn't push off a halachah because of a minhag. The Mishnah Berurah (35) concurs. However, the Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah (60:38,145) recommends saying the havdalah on a beverage other than wine.

Saying a Brachah on the Candle

The Bi'ur Halachah (s.v. Lo based on the Magen Avraham) writes that when a woman says havdalah for herself, she should not say the brachah of Borei Me'orei Ha'eish. This is because the brachah on the flame is specifically designed for motza'ei shabbos, for that is when fire was created. It would thus not be learned out from the pasuk of Zachor and would constitute a separate chiyuv, which is indeed a z'man grammah. This is also quoted by the Shmiras Shabbos (61:24). The Shmiras Shabbos quotes from Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach that a woman who wishes to say the brachah, may do so, but should recite it after drinking from the havdalah. She is permitted to volunteer herself for this Mitzvah (the same way as the Bach explained), but should not use it a hefsaik between those berachos that she is obligated to say.