

THE BLESSING OF HATOV V'HAMEITIV OVER WINE

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Wine - the beverage which "gladdens the heart" and is used to sanctify and celebrate the Shabbos and yamim tovim as well as milestone events, has an elevated status in Halachah. While all foods and beverages require a blessing before they are consumed, wine - under certain circumstances - requires another blessing in addition to borei pri hagafen. Whenever two or more types of wine are drunk at one sitting, the blessing of hatov v'hameitiv, the One Who is good and does good, should(1) be recited to praise Hashem for the good fortune He has bestowed upon us.(2)

There are, however, many conditions which must be satisfied before this blessing may be recited. Indeed, there are so many complicated and conflicting rules that many people never recite this blessing at all,(3) while others do so only in the presence of a Torah scholar who can instruct them on the spot.(4)

In order to understand why this blessing has generally fallen into disuse, we will list some of the points disputed by the poskim concerning the conditions under which hatov v'hameitiv is recited:

- * Is there a minimum amount of wine that must be drunk?(5)
- * Does the second bottle of wine need to be of superior quality?(6)
- * Is the blessing recited only at a meal?(7)
- * Does it matter where the second bottle of wine was located when the hagafen was recited over the first bottle?(8)
- * If, for some reason, hagafen must be recited over the second bottle also, is hatov v'hameitiv recited as well?(9)

Some poskim rule stringently on these and other questions, with the result that it is nearly impossible to satisfy their conditions for reciting hatov v'hameitiv. According to the stringent opinions, the blessing of hatov v'hameitiv is recited only under the following improbable circumstances:

- * if one recited hagafen over wine during a meal [or at Kiddush before the meal], and
- * he is sharing that meal with at least one other person [his wife or children or guests](10), and
- * at least two people at the table drink a revi'is of wine, and

- * at least two people at the table were aware [when they recited hagafen] that another bottle of wine will be served later on during the meal, and
- * the second bottle of wine was not on the table or even in the house when they recited hagafen, and
- * while the first bottle of wine was still on the table [and still contained some wine] a second bottle of wine is served, and
- * the second bottle of wine is clearly superior in quality⁽¹¹⁾ to the first bottle, and
- * at least two people are planning to drink a revi'is from the second bottle, then
- * they should both recite hatov v'hameitiv before⁽¹²⁾ drinking from the second bottle.

It is obvious that it is highly unlikely for such a confluence of circumstances to occur, and thus, people who follow the stricter opinions rarely - if ever - recite hatov v'hameitiv.

THE LENIENT OPINIONS

But in those communities where the lenient opinion is followed, people routinely recite hatov v'hameitiv. According to the more lenient view, hatov v'hameitiv may be recited so long as the following conditions are met:

- * if one recited hagafen over wine, and
- * he is sharing this drinking session or meal with at least one other person [his wife or children or guests], and
- * at least two people at the table drink any amount of wine, and
- * while the first bottle still contains some wine, a different type of wine is drunk by at least two people at that table, and
- * the different kind of wine is not inferior in quality or taste to the first, then
- * they should both⁽¹³⁾ recite hatov v'hameitiv before drinking from the second bottle of wine.

According to the second, more lenient opinion, it makes no difference where the second bottle of wine was located at the time that hagafen was made on the first bottle of wine. Even if the second bottle was in the house or right on the table when the first bottle of wine was drunk, hatov v'hameitiv is made over the second bottle.

Alternatively, even if no one was aware that a second bottle of wine would be served [and therefore a second hagafen would have to be made over the second bottle of wine], hatov v'hameitiv is recited⁽¹⁴⁾ in addition to hagafen.

IN SUMMARY

As the above discussion shows, the stringent and lenient opinions are mutually exclusive, for if one follows the stringent view, he will have neglected to recite a blessing according to the lenient view. If he follows the lenient view, he will have recited a brachah l'vatalah according to the stringent view. While either opinion may be followed, one can help avoid getting himself into a questionable situation by bearing in mind the following:(15)

- * To avoid this problem entirely, refrain from drinking two types of wine at one sitting.
- * If one is aware that more than one wine type will be served and one of the wines is clearly superior to the rest, he should place all of the wines on the table before ha-gafen is recited and recite ha-gafen over the clearly superior wine. Ha-tov v'hameitiv is not recited over the other wines. By doing this, one does not run afoul of either the stringent or lenient view.
- * If none of the wines is clearly superior or inferior to any other, one could follow the stringent opinions and refrain from reciting ha-tov v'hameitiv, or one could follow the lenient opinions and recite the blessing. If he follows the lenient opinion, he should remove one of the bottles from the table, recite hagafen, and then return the second bottle and recite hatov v'hameitiv.
- * If a superior or different wine is used for the cup that is drunk after Birkas ha-Mazon, ha-tov v'hameitiv is not recited over that wine. This is because the fourth blessing of Birkas ha-Mazon, in which the words ha-tov v'hameitiv are recited, covers this cup as well.(16)
- * Contemporary poskim debate as to whether a drink of grape juice followed by a drink of wine would require ha-tov v'hameitiv on the wine.(17) But all agree that drinking grape juice after wine is considered drinking an inferior type of wine and no hatov v'hameitiv is recited.
- * The halachos mentioned above apply when a different type of wine is used for the second cup of the Four Cups on the Seder night.(18)

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Magen Avraham 323:1 writes that reciting this blessing is obligatory, not optional.
- 2 See Mishnah Berurah 175:2 who explains why this particular text was chosen.
- 3 See Minchas Yitzchak 9:14.
- 4 The custom among Sefaradic communities; Harav M. Eliyahu, quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 171.
- 5 Many poskim do not mention a minimum amount, but some do; see Da'as Torah 175:1, Kaf ha-Chayim 175:10 and Masgeres ha-Shulchan 49:1.
- 6 This issue is disputed by the Rishonim, and Shulchan Aruch 175:2 rules that so long as the second wine is not inferior to the first, hatov v'hameitiv is recited. But other poskim are hesitant about this; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 175:5, Kaf ha-Chayim 175:12 and Minchas Yitzchak 9:14.

7 Most authorities do not require a meal, but Kaf ha-Chayim 175:28 opines that some Rishonim allow hatov v'hameitiv to be recited only at a meal.

8 Mishnah Berurah 175:4 rules that hatov v'hameitiv is recited only if the second wine was not in the house at the time hagefen was recited. But Mishnah Berurah contradicts himself in 175:5 and 175:14 on this point.

9 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 175:2 quotes Rav Akiva Eiger's opinion that whenever hagefen is recited, hatov v'hameitiv is not, but he contradicts himself in Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 175:3; see Minchas Shelomo 1:18-6, note 6.

10 who are not limited in the amount of wine that they are allowed to drink.

11 Superiority is not measured by one's personal preference but by what is generally considered superior wine (oral ruling by Harav S.Y. Elyashiv, quoted in Avnei Yashfei 1:36).

12 If they failed to recite the blessing before partaking of the second wine, they may do so afterwards, so long as some wine remains in the second bottle; Mishnah Berurah 175:15.

13 Or one of them recites the blessing and the other fulfills his obligation by listening and answering amen (O.C. 175:4).

14 First hatov v'hameitiv and then hagefen; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 49:9.

15 Based on Mishnah Berurah 175:4,5,14 and Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 171.

16 Mishnah Berurah 175:2.

17 See Avnei Yashfei 1:38 and Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 172, who quote differing opinions as to whether non-alcoholic hagefen beverages are included.

18 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 175:3. However, one should avoid reciting hatov v'hameitiv during the Seder night meal; Mishnah Berurah 175:2.

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