

RECITING SHEVA BERACHOS: LAWS AND CUSTOMS PART 3

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Before Birkas ha-Mazon is about to be recited, two cups of wine^[1] or grape juice are prepared. Since two separate mitzvos are about to be fulfilled - Birkas ha-Mazon and Sheva Berachos - two kosos shel berachah are used. To use one kos for both mitzvos would violate the Talmudic principle of ein osin mitzvos chavilos chavilos, literally, mitzvos should not be "bundled together." Indeed, some poskim hold that in order to properly comply with this rule, the second cup - the one over which Sheva Berachos will be recited - should not even be filled at the same time as the first. Rather, the first cup should be filled before Birkas ha-Mazon is recited and the other should be filled before the Sheva Berachos are recited^[2]. While other poskim^[3] disagree and allow both cups to be filled at the same time before Birkas ha-Mazon^[4] - and this is the more prevalent custom^[5] - it is recommended by some poskim^[6] that each cup be filled by a different person so it does not appear as if the two mitzvos are being lumped together^[7].

Both cups should hold at least a revi'is, approx. 3 fl. oz., but no matter how large the cup is, it should be filled to the top^[8].

When a silver wine cup (becher) or a crystal wine goblet is available, paper or plastic cups may not be used^[9]. L'chatchilah, the becher or goblet should not be chipped, cracked or wobbly, neither the rim, the stem, nor the base. But if nothing else is available, a flawed cup may be used, as long as the cup can hold at least 3 fl. oz.^[10]

If wine or grape juice is not available, any other beverage which is considered chamar medinah may be substituted^[11]. If there is enough wine or grape juice for only one cup, it should be used for Birkas ha-Mazon and the chamar medinah used for the second cup. If there is enough wine, grape juice or chamar medinah for only one cup, both Birkas ha-Mazon and the Sheva Berachos are recited over that one cup. According to many poskim, Sheva Berachos may be recited even in the absence of any beverage^[12].

It is a hiddur mitzvah that both cups be of similar size and quality^[13]. When two similar cups are not available, the bigger and more valuable cup should be used for Birkas ha-Mazon and the lesser one for Sheva Berachos^[14].

The liturgical poem Devai haser is recited before Birkas ha-Mazon as part of the zimun. [There are conflicting customs as to whether or not Devai haser is recited on Shabbos.] During the zimun, the words ha-simchah bi'meono are added^[15].

After Birkas ha-Mazon is completed[16], the first wine cup that was used for Birkas ha-Mazon is placed on the table but is not drunk from yet. Sheva Berachos are then recited over the second cup. If several people are reciting the Sheva Berachos, as is customary, the cup is handed from one person to the next. The blessing of borei pri ha-gafen is recited last so as not to prolong the pause between the blessing and the drinking of the wine which follows. But if, by mistake borei pri ha-gafen was recited first, the other six berachos are recited and then the cups of wine are drunk. Similarly, if any of the Sheva Berachos was recited out of order, it does not matter[17].

Although some poskim are critical of the practice[18], it is customary for the guests to join in singing aloud parts of the asher bara blessing.

At the conclusion of the six berachos, borei pri ha-gafen is recited by the person who led Birkas ha-Mazon. He should have kavanah (intent) to exempt all those who are present so that they can drink without reciting their own borei pri ha-gafen. He then drinks at least a cheekful (1.6 fl. oz.) from the first cup. [It is preferable that he drink an entire revi'is so that he meets the requirement for reciting Al ha-gefen.]

Since it is appropriate and customary to drink from the second cup as well[19], the borei pri ha-gafen which was recited over the first cup covers the second cup too[20]. Furthermore, it is a long-standing and commonly practiced minhag Yisrael[21] that the chasan and kallah[22] [and, very often, many of the guests[23]] drink a bit of wine from each of the two cups after mixing wine from both cups into a third cup. This mixture is then divided into two cups, one for the chasan and one for the kallah, and they, in turn, pass their cups around to the rest of the men and women, respectively.

There are conflicting opinions about when the wine should be mixed: some hold that in order to avoid the problem of kos pagum, the wine should be mixed before anyone drinks from either cup[24]. Others hold that it should be mixed after some wine was drunk from the first cup[25]. The kos pagum problem can then be rectified by adding some wine from the bottle into the third cup before it is passed around[26].

A suggested procedure is as follows: After drinking a revi'is from the first cup, part of the second cup is poured into the first cup, thus mixing the wines and rectifying the kos pagum problem at the same time. Part of the wine in this [first] cup is then poured back into the second cup, resulting in two cups of mixed wines which can now be given to the chasan and kallah.

When the Sheva Berachos ceremony takes place during seudah shelishis on Shabbos and Birkas ha-Mazon is completed after sunset but during bein ha-shemashos[27], the regular procedure is followed[28]. But if Birkas ha-Mazon is not over until nightfall, drinking the wine becomes a problem since no beverages may be drunk after nightfall until Havdalah is recited. There are many different opinions about the correct procedure under these circumstances and one should follow his custom or the directive of his rabbi. Rav M. Feinstein ruled that only the chasan and kallah should drink, and between them, they should consume no more than a cheekful from both cups of wine[29].

1. Red wine is preferable.
2. Chochmas Adam 129:7; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 149:1.
3. Taz, E.H. 62:7; Kaf ha-Chayim, O.C. 190:1.
4. Before washing mayim acharonim.
5. Sova Semachos 4:7. There are, however, some communities that follow the first view and fill the second cup after Birkas ha-Mazon.
6. Ezer mi-Kodesh, E.H. 62; Maharam Shick, O.C. 64.
7. Kaf ha-Chayim 190:1 writes that the second cup should not be placed in front of the person who is leading Birkas ha-Mazon, but rather in front of the person who is going to recite the [first of the] Sheva Berachos.
8. Rama, O.C. 183:2. It need not, however, be filled to overflowing; see Mishnah Berurah 9 and Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 183:2.
9. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:39. Other poskim are not particular about this requirement.
10. Mishnah Berurah 183:11 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 14.
11. A shehakol, though, is recited instead of ha-gafen.
12. Sova Semachos 4:5.
13. Ezer mi-Kodesh, E.H. 62.
14. Rav M. Feinstein (Oholei Yeshurun 5:3).
15. Ha-simchah bi'meono is added whenever guests are invited to a meal in honor of a chasan and kallah, even when Sheva Berachos are not recited, e.g., when the last Sheva Berachos ends after sunset of the seventh day; when only three people ate bread; when no panim chadashos participated.
16. The person leading Birkas ha-Mazon may not speak until after he drinks the wine upon concluding Sheva Berachos; Mishnah Berurah 183:21.
17. Chochmas Adam 129:8; Be'er Heitev, E.H. 62:1 quoting Igros ha-Rambam. See, however, Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:84 who hesitates about reciting yotzer ha-adam after asher yatzar.
18. See Sova Semachos 4:26, based on Mishnah Berurah 65:4.
19. Since six berachos were recited over it.
20. In some communities, a separate borei peri ha-gafen is recited over the second cup.

21. Dating back to the days of the early Rishonim; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:69-1.

21. Since the Sheva Berachos ceremony is being held in their honor, it is fitting that they partake of the wine. They are, however, under no halachic obligation to do so.

23. Since it is a mitzvah min ha-muvchar to partake of any kos shel berachah. Whoever drinks the wine should not speak until after he has drunk. If he did, he must recite his own borei pri ha-gafen.

24. Kaf ha-Chayim 190:1. When pouring wine from the two cups into a third, one should be careful to leave at least a revi'is in the original cups (based on Mishnah Berurah 271:51).

25. Aruch ha-Shulchan, E.H. 62:18.

26. Sdei Chemed (Pe'as ha-Sadeh, Berachos 31), quoting the Aderes.

27. Depending on the various opinions and on the locality, bein ha-shemashos could be anywhere from nine minutes to thirty minutes past sunset.

28. Mishnah Berurah 299:14 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 24. If, however, the wedding took place on Sunday [before sunset], the Sheva Berachos must be recited before sunset.

29. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:69-1. See also Oholei Yeshurun 5:15.

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