

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Shabbos 114-120

Week of 25 Adar-2 Nissan 5758 / 23-29 March 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Mystery of the Stranger on the Platform

"I never went against the wishes of my colleagues," Rabbi Yossi prided himself. "Although I know that I am not a *kohen*, if they would ask me to go up to the platform to offer the blessings of the *kohanim* I would go up."

Tosefos raises the question as to whether there is any halachic problem in a non-*kohen* going up to the platform, and therefore finds it difficult to comprehend what was so courageous about Rabbi Yossi's action.

This position of Tosefos that there is nothing wrong with a non-*kohen* participating in *birkas kohanim* is challenged by a wide range of commentaries from a *gemara* (*Kesuvos 24b*) which clearly states that a non-*kohen* who blesses the congregation is guilty of violating Torah law because the Torah gave this mandate to *kohanim* only. A number of resolutions have been offered and we present a sampling of them:

- 1) Rabbi Moshe Isserles (RaMa) suggests that the ban on a non-*kohen* giving a blessing applies only when he does it by himself and not when he does so together with *kohanim* (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:1*).
- 2) Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (Bach - Bayis Chadash) writes that the ban applies only when the non-*kohen* lifts his hands in the manner which *kohanim* do when saying the blessing.
- 3) Maharsha explains that Rabbi Yossi only went up to the platform but did not actually say the blessing. Therefore, Tosefos, assuming that the Sage certainly did not say the blessing which he is not permitted to say, finds nothing special in his mere ascent to the platform.

A fourth approach, cited by *Mishna Berura* (128:3), has very practical halachic implications. In order for one to fulfill a mitzvah he must have *kavanah* — a positive intention to fulfill it. Since Rabbi Yossi as a non-*kohen* had no intention of fulfilling a mitzvah for which he was not eligible, his action is not considered a valid one and he was therefore not guilty of performing a mitzvah reserved for *kohanim* only.

Mishna Berura (in the *Biyyur Halacha* 128:3) raises the question about the blessings which one Jew gives to another using the text of the *birkas kohanim* even though the blesser is not himself a *kohen*. One resolution is based in the position of the Bach (#2 above), that the ban is only when one raises his hands in the manner of the *kohanim*. Another resolution is based on the fourth approach, which limits the ban to a situation in which the blesser has the intention of doing the mitzvah reserved for *kohanim*, not when he is simply wishing a friend or child well.

The only problem with this second resolution is that there is an opinion cited in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 60:4* that one can indeed fulfill a mitzvah even if his action was not accompanied by direct intention. This problem too is solved by introducing the concept that even if one is considered to have fulfilled a mitzvah without intention, he has not fulfilled it if he had express intention *not* to fulfill it. Since the blessings of the *kohanim* are done only during the prayer service, anyone saying them not in the context of prayer is considered as expressly declaring that he does not wish to do the mitzvah which is reserved for *kohanim*, and it is therefore permitted to do so.

Shabbos 118b

The Secret Ingredient

"Why does your Shabbos food have such a special fragrance?" the emperor asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania.

"We put in a special ingredient," he replied, "and it's called Shabbos."

"Give me some of that ingredient," asked the emperor.

"It works for someone who observes Shabbos," explained the Sage, "but it will have no effect for one who does not."

The climax of this famous dialogue is certainly appreciated by every Jew who finds a special delight in his Shabbos meal which cannot be duplicated during the weekdays. But a little analysis is required of the details of this exchange.

Why did the emperor, who assumed that Shabbos was the name of a spice, not ask the obvious question: "Why don't the Jews use this spice in their recipes throughout the week?"

This question did not bother the emperor, explains *Iyun Yaakov*, because he was aware that Jews did special things in regard to clothes and food in honor of their holy day of rest. He therefore suggested that since such a wonderful spice was set aside for honoring Shabbos it should also be presented to him as an expression of honor for the throne. Sensitive to his Jewish subjects' respect for Shabbos he was even willing to reserve use of this special spice to Shabbos alone, so that it would be used in honor of both the holy day and the august emperor.

At this point Rabbi Yehoshua was compelled to explain that Shabbos was not a natural spice but a supernatural ingredient which worked only for those who were commanded to observe Shabbos. As the Zohar, quoted by Eitz Yosef, puts it, the very essence of intangible Shabbos holiness takes on a tangible form in the special taste and fragrance of Shabbos food.

Shabbos 119a

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

info@ohr.org.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@aol.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

Somayach@MSN.com

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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

Issue #215 - Shabbos 114-120

For the week of 25 Adar-2 Nissan 5758 / 23-29 March 1998 (Parshas Vayikra)