

"Halacha Sources" Highlights - What Does One Look At During Kiddush?

Question: While saying the Shabbos evening *kiddush*, should one look at the Shabbos candles or at the cup of wine (or grape juice) in his hand?

Answer: The *minhag* (at least for *Ashkenazim*) regarding this issue stems from a principle (in the Halachos of a cup used for a *bracha*) and one explanation of a Gemara. We will discuss it in three steps:

- (1) the Gemara and most of its explanations and issues,
- (2) the explanation connected with looking at the candles - and the problem,
- (3) the rulings in practice.

Part 1: The Gemara and Most of its Explanations and Issues

The Gemara (*Berachos* 43b) states [in *Shabbos* 113b this is said by R' Yishmael son of R' Yose, and in *Ta'anis* 10b it is cited partially]:

Taking a long stride [i.e. more than one amah (Rashi to Shabbos 113b), which is between 19 in. / 48 cm. (R. Chaim Na'eh) and 22³/₄ in. / 58 cm (Chazon Ish), assuming an average (size) person (Mishnah Berurah 301 n3)] takes away one five hundredth [of what currently remains (see Tosafos to Ta'anis 10b)] of a person's eyesight. What is the correction for this? Let him return it by means of the kiddush said "between the suns" [i.e. Friday night (Rashi)].

When and in what sense it is improper to take long strides is discussed by the authorities in the Halachos of Shabbos and is not our subject (see the Tur and *Shulchan Aruch* volume *Orach Chayim* 301:1 and commentaries). Our question is: How exactly does one "return it by kiddush"?

Rashi writes: "*He drinks the cup*" [of wine or grape juice].

The Tosafos (to *Pesachim* 100b) write: "*It is written in the name of Rav Natronai Gaon in a responsum that kiddush is said in the synagogue and one places some of the wine into one's eyes for the sake of this cure. However, the Ra'avyah [Rabbeinu Eliezer ben Rabbeinu Yoel HaLevi, Germany (& France), ~1140 - ~1220] wrote that one can effect that cure by the kiddush which one says in his home.*" [The Tur (*Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Asher*, Spain, ~1280 - ~1345, volume *Orach Chayim*, *siman* 269) wrote that Rav Natronai was justifying saying *kiddush* in the synagogue for the sake of people who would not have wine at home. (He and the commentaries expand upon issues of *kiddush* in the synagogue in that *siman*.)]

The commentary of *Rabbeinu Yonah* ["of Gerona" (Spain - France in his youth), 1200 - 1263, 31b of the Rif to *Berachos*] says: "*One is cured in the merit of his being 'ragil' [i.e. regular and persistent (or careful and serious - see Tur O.C. 671:1)] with respect to the Shabbos kiddush.*" [Rabbeinu Yonah adds that it cannot mean placing the wine into one's eyes, because that would be *assur* on Shabbos. This issue is discussed by the authorities in the Halachos of *Kiddush* and is not our subject (see the Tur and *Shulchan Aruch* volume *Orach Chayim siman* 269 and commentaries).]

The *Me'iri* [*Rabbeinu Menachem ben Shlomo* of the house of Meir, France, 1249 - ~1315, *Shabbos* 113b] writes: "*As one enters into the sanctity of Shabbos, its rest heals him.*"

Having mentioned these explanations, we can now focus on the one explanation which seems to have been accepted (at least according to the *minhag* of *Ashkenazim*).

Part 2: The Explanation Connected With Looking at the Candles - and the Problem

The one explanation which seems to have been accepted (at least according to the *minhag* of *Ashkenazim*) is that of the Maharash [Rabbeinu Shalom ben Yitzchak of Neustadt, Austria, died 1413]: "When he was young he saw that his father Rav Yitzchak would always place his eyes upon the candles on the table when he would say kiddush, and he found the reason [in a source he refers to as the 'Seichel Tov']: Twice the numerical value of 'ner' [i.e. candle] is five hundred, and therefore two candles are used, and thus, when one gazes at the candles he will have this cure." [He also cites a (somewhat unclear) reason, also from the "Seichel Tov": "In a man there are 248 limbs, and in a woman four more, and this comes to five hundred - which corresponds to the twice 'ner' - which in turn corresponds to the basis of (the household:) man and woman."]

The *Darkei Moshe* [R. Moshe Isserles, Poland, ~1525 - 1572, volume *Orach Chayim* 671 n8] cites the Maharil [Rabbeinu Yaakov HaLevi (Siegel) Mullen, Germany, ~1360 - 1427] as writing that one should in fact do this. However, he then raises the following difficulty: The *Shulchan Aruch* [ibid. *se'if* 10] sets forth the principle that the cup used for *kiddush* shares all the requirements of a cup used for *Birkas HaMazon* (in other words, it is a standard "cup used for a *bracha*" [as the Vilna Gaon ibid. demonstrates from the *Yerushalmi* in *Berachos* 55b]). These are discussed by the Tur and *Shulchan Aruch* [and commentaries] under the Halachos of *Birkas HaMazon* [volume *Orach Chayim siman* 183], and one of the Halachos mentioned there [*se'if* 4] is that one should have his eyes on the cup [while saying the *bracha*].

How can one be look at the candles during *kiddush* if he has to be looking at the *kiddush* cup?

Part 2: The Rulings In Practice

The *Darkei Moshe* concludes that when one says "*Vayechulu*" [the section of *Bereishis* 2:1-3 said to introduce the Friday night *kiddush*, as is also discussed ibid. *se'if* 10] he should look at the candles, and during "the *kiddush* itself" [i.e. the "*bracha*" portion] he should look at the cup, and thus accomplish both; and he also writes similarly [i.e. *that one only looks at the candles "when beginning" kiddush*] in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch* [i.e. the "*Rema*" ibid.].

The *Magen Avraham* [R. Avraham HaLevi (Avli) Gombiner, Poland, ~1637 - 1683] claims that one could in fact look at both the cup and the candles [i.e. simultaneously, throughout the *kiddush*]; but the *Mishnah Berurah* does not cite - implying that he concurs with the *Rema* - except that he concludes the subject by citing the ruling of the *Eliyahu Rabbah* [R. Eliyahu Shapiro, Poland, 1660 - 1712] that being *overly* particular about this is not called for. [This ruling seems to be based on the fact that there is such a large number of explanations and approaches available, and especially the fact that according to most of these it is not necessary to do anything special *at all* to effect the cure for one's eyesight.]

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