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Shabbat Shorts

Sit or stand for Kiddush Friday night? Everybody stands, no?

Yeah, almost all of us do. Which makes the text of the Shulchan Aruch on this topic seem like it emerged from a somewhat parallel universe. Here it is (in its elegant ambiguity): "One recites ויכול [the opening paragraph] while standing, and then the bracha over wine, and then the Kiddush." To which Rama (representing Ashkenazic practice) adds, "One may recite the Kiddush too standing, but it is better to sit, and it our custom to sit even during ויכול ." Wow. What gives? If we can answer several key questions, we can hopefully emerge enlightened:

- (1) What distinguishes ויכול from the balance of the Kiddush, such that the Shuchan Aruch singles it out for standing?
- (2) Why does Rama believe that it is better to recite Kiddush while seated?
- (3) Whence does our familiar custom of standing for all of Kiddush derive?
- (4) Would there be a difference between Friday night Kiddush and Shabbat day Kiddush in this regard?

Let's begin with the second question. Rama prefers siting for Kiddush for two reasons. One is specific to Kiddush, namely the requirement that Kiddush be recited in the place that the meal will be eaten. This bond between the Kiddush and the meal is strengthened further when people are literally seated for Kiddush around the table at which they will be eating. The second reason

applies to any situation in which one person is reciting a food-related bracha for others. The bond between the "blesser" and the others is strengthened when they are all seated together, as opposed to their standing / wandering around in the same general space. (The same preference, believe it or not, is extended to Havdallah as well!)

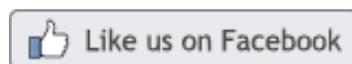
The answer to the ויכול question is a little less straightforward, but quite interesting. The Talmud (Shabbat 119b), illuminating the text of the Friday night Amidah, states that "Anyone who prays on Shabbat evening and recites the passage of ויכול, it is as if he has become a partner with the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the act of Creation.". But there was also apparently a variant on this Talmudic text in circulation (a variant that was in the possession of the medieval authority Rabbenu Asher) which read, "Anyone who prays on Shabbat evening and recites the passage of ויכול, it is as if he is testifying that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh". It was on the strength of this variant that the custom mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch (to stand during the ויכול portion of Kiddush) developed, as standing is the proper posture for the delivery of testimony (in court).

So we're halfway there. More to come!

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