



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

A Shabbat Short reader asked a very important question in our discussion of Havdalah: Who should say Havdalah? Are there any parameters?

To answer this question, we have to address the origin of the mitzvah itself. There is a disagreement between poskim as to whether Havdalah is biblical or rabbinic. The Rambam, by whom the Shulchan Aruch paskens, holds that Havdalah is biblical and is connected to the mitzvah of Kiddush-- we start and end Shabbat with wine. This means that according to this position, the same parameters that apply to Kiddush apply to Havdalah. As we have discussed previously, since women are obligated in shamor v'zachor, they are obligated in all of the positive and negative mitzvot of the day and share the same obligation as men do to say Kiddush. For Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch, this means that women can say Kiddush for both men and women and Havdalah for both men and women because they all share the same biblical obligations of the day (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 296:8).

But for those who hold that it is rabbinic, Havdalah is not a component of the mitzvah of Kiddush, and therefore defaults to the status of other time-bound mitzvot, from which women are exempt (Mishnah Berurah Orach Chayim 296:8:34). As such the Rama rules that men should be the ones to make Havdalah in mixed company (Shulchan Aruch 296:8). The Mishnah Berurah quoting the Bach emphasizes though that even though women are not officially obligated in Havdalah, they can take on the obligation to do so (just like with shofar and lulav) and should be encouraged to say Havdalah for themselves (Mishnah Berurah Orach Chayim 296:8:35). This means that if a woman is on her own, she should recite Havdalah for herself-- and certainly if she is with other women or with children-- she may be the one to lead Havdalah.

There is discussion in the Biur Halacha and the Zohar about whether a woman should say the bracha on the candle or drink the cup of wine, respectively. But the predominant practice is that if a woman is reciting Havdalah for herself, she should say all of the regular blessings and drink the wine כדי שלא לבטל מצות הבדלה "in order that she not nullify the mitzvah of Havdalah" (ibid). Note: For both men and women, this means drinking a revi'it-- enough to halachically be able to say a bracha achrona, which is why only the person reciting Havdalah drinks from the cup, ensuring that he/she will consume enough wine for the mitzvah.

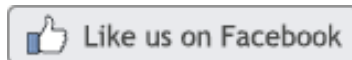
Practically: If we are in mixed company, a man should recite Havdalah. If a woman is alone or among other women, she should recite Havdalah. And additionally in a situation in which a man already said Havdalah, he does not say it again for a woman (with concern for a bracha levatala)-- instead the woman should say Havdalah for herself (ibid 36).

We wish you a Chag Kasher V'Sameach this Pesach and look forward to continuing our Shabbat Short learning with you after the chag :)

I love feedback!
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