

Laws Related to Bentching

The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU Kosher Halacha Yomis This Column is dedicated in memory of: Rav Chaim Yisroel ben Reb Dov HaLevi Belsky, zt'l Senior OU Kosher Halachic Consultant from 1987-2016

What is the proper way to hold the *kos shel bracha* (cup of wine used e.g., for Kiddush, Havdalah or *Bentching*)? I have seen some people hold the cup from the bottom while I have seen others hold it from the middle. Which is correct?

The Mishnah Berurah (183:14-16) writes that one should hold the cup in one's right hand, and lift the cup at least a *tefach* (approximately 3-4 inches) off the table. One should not support the cup with one's left hand. Mishnah Berurah quotes the Shelah who writes that according to Kabbalah the proper way to hold the cup is on the palm of the right hand with the fingers extending upwards around the cup. The source for this is the Zohar.

However, the Magen Avrohom (183:6) writes that the wording of the Zohar is inconclusive. It can also be interpreted to refer to wrapping one's fingers around the middle of the *kos*. The Bach (183:6) maintains that one may hold the *kos* in the middle. Indeed there were great *tzadikim* who specifically held the *kos* in this manner (see Va'yaas Avrohom p. 445). We see that both customs have a valid basis in *halacha* and everyone should follow his *mesorah* from his parents and ancestors.

In a previous Halacha Yomis you wrote that the *mezamen* (leader of the *zimun*) should recite the first *bracha* out loud. I am almost certain that Sephardim do not have this custom. Can you please clarify this point?

You are correct that there is a difference between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The custom of Sephardim is in accordance with the Mechaber (OC 183:7) who writes that everyone should *bentch* quietly word by word together with the leader, including even the end of each *bracha*. The Rama adds that everyone should hurry to finish the *bracha* before the *mezamen* so that they can answer Amen, which is the basis for the Ashkenazi practice. Yalkut Yosef (Dinei Zimun 4-5) explains that according to the Mechaber, it is inappropriate for the leader to say the end of the *bracha* out loud and cause the others to answer Amen, since this would constitute a *hefsek* (interruption) in the middle of one's *bentching*. According to the Mechaber, *bentching* is similar to *Shmoneh Esrei* and one is not permitted to interrupt in the middle of *bentching* even to answer Amen. However, if a Sephardi is leading a *zimun* for Ashkenazim, then Yalkut Yosef writes that he should end the *bracha* out loud, so that the Ashkenazim can answer Amen in accordance with the ruling of the Rama.

Could you please clarify when a *kos* (cup of wine) should be used for *zimun*?

Shulchan Aruch (OC 182:1) quotes three different opinions as to when a *kos* is required for *bentching*:

One opinion holds that anytime one *bentches* one must recite the *bentching* with a *kos*. This entails holding a full cup of wine during *bentching*, reciting *borei pri ha'gafen* at the end of *bentching* and

drinking the cup of wine. According to this view if two people ate together, since there is no *zimun*, each person must have their own cup of wine. The second opinion is that there is only a requirement of a *kos* when there is a *zimun*, i.e., three or more men *bentching* together. Only the leader needs to hold the cup of wine.

The third opinion is that there is no obligation to have a *kos* even if one is *bentching* with a *zimun*.

The Mishnah Berurah (182:4) writes that although the common custom is in accordance with the third opinion, that even if one *bentches* with a *zimun* they are not obligated to have a *kos*, if one wishes to fulfill the mitzvah in the optimal manner, they should arrange to *bentch* with a *kos*. However, if one is *bentching* without a *zimun* then the *minhag* is not to use a *kos*.