

In Hilchos Shabbos

You have heard the shaylos . . .
Now learn the issues & the opinions

Havdala for Women

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by Rabbi Shmuel Stein at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

The Mitzva of Havdala

At the conclusion of Shabbos there is a *mitzva* to recite *Havdala*. The Gemara¹ emphasizes the importance of the *mitzva* of *Havdala* by stating that “someone who is careful to beautify the *mitzva* of *Havdala* by being careful to recite it over wine will merit to have sons who will be worthy of rendering halachic rulings.” Rav Tzadok haKohen² explains that the *mitzva* of *Havdala* is so significant because it helps ensure that the goal that Shabbos is meant to accomplish is fulfilled. HaKadosh baruch Hu imbues Shabbos with holiness, and the task of Klal Yisrael is to connect the six days of the upcoming week with the holiness of Shabbos. By recognizing the difference between the holiness of Shabbos and Klal Yisrael, the recitation of *Havdala* helps accomplish this goal, because this recognition helps a person carry the holiness of Shabbos over into the days of the upcoming week.

Havdala for Women

It is well known that women are careful not to drink the wine from *Havdala*. For many women this is due to the widespread legend that a woman who drinks from the *Havdala* wine will grow a beard or other unwanted hair. Although this “*babba moyseh*” (old wives’ tale) is not found in any halachic or traditional source, there may be other reasons why it would be questionable for a woman to recite *Havdala* or drink from the *Havdala* wine. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the issues that may be involved with women reciting *Havdala*.

Are Women Obligated in the Mitzva of Havdala?

The first issue that needs to be clarified is whether women are obligated in the *mitzva* of *Havdala*. The *Shulchan Aruch*³ cites a dispute among the *poskim* about this question. To understand this dispute, we will first review a woman’s obligation to perform *mitzvos*.

Mitzvas aseh she’hazman grama (a positive, time-bound mitzva)

Any positive commandment that must be performed at a specific time is considered a *mitzvas aseh she’hazman grama*, and as a rule, women are exempt from such *mitzvos*.⁴ For example:

- Women are not obligated in the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, because it is a positive *mitzva* (to wear *tzitzis*) and is time-bound (only during the daytime, not at nighttime).⁵
- Women are not obligated to wear *tefillin*, because it is a positive *mitzva* (to wear *tefillin*) and is time-bound (only during the week, and not on Shabbos).⁶

Mitzvos lo sa’aseh (negative mitzvos)

Women are obligated to keep all *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* just as men are, even if they are time-bound.⁷ For example:

- Women may not eat on Yom Kippur.
- Women may not perform any of the thirty-nine *melachos* or other Shabbos prohibitions on Shabbos.

Since these *mitzvos* are *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* (restrictive *mitzvos*), women are obligated to keep them, even though they are time-bound.

The positive mitzvos of Shabbos

The *Shulchan Aruch*⁸ writes that “women are obligated in all the *mitzvos* of Shabbos - even the positive commandments - just as men are. For example, women are obligated in the *mitzva* to recite *Kiddush* on Shabbos.” The *Shulchan Aruch* explains that although *Kiddush* on Shabbos is a *mitzvas aseh she’hazman grama* women are still obligated because the *mitzvos aseh* of Shabbos are linked to the *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* of Shabbos. Meaning, that anyone who is obligated to keep the *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* of Shabbos (e.g., the thirty-nine *melachos*) must also keep the *mitzvos aseh* of Shabbos. Therefore, since women are obligated to refrain from performing the thirty-nine *melachos* on Shabbos, they are also obligated to perform all the *mitzvos* of Shabbos, including the *mitzvas aseh* of reciting *Kiddush*.

Women and the mitzva of Havdala

With these basic rules, can understand the two opinions discussed in the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding a woman’s obligation of *Havdala*:

Opinion #1- Women are obligated in the mitzva of Havdala: The first opinion rules that women are obligated in the *mitzva* of *Havdala*. Although reciting *Havdala* is a positive, time-bound *mitzva*, women are still obligated, because it is a “Shabbos *mitzva*” and is therefore linked to the thirty-nine *melachos* of Shabbos (like the *mitzva* of *Kiddush*).⁹

Opinion #2- Women are exempt from the mitzva of Havdala: The second opinion rules that women are exempt from the *mitzva* of *Havdala*. This opinion argues that only *mitzvos* that take place during Shabbos, such as the *mitzva* of *Kiddush*, can be linked to the *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* of Shabbos. *Havdala* which takes place after Shabbos has already ended cannot be considered a “Shabbos *mitzva*” and therefore cannot be linked to the *mitzvos lo sa’aseh* of Shabbos. As a result, *Havdala* remains a positive, time-bound *mitzva*, which women are generally exempt from performing.¹⁰

Is it permissible for a woman to recite her own Havdala?

Based on these two opinions the *poskim* discuss whether a woman may recite her own *Havdala*. There are two opinions:

1. The opinion of the Rema. The Rema¹¹ writes that a woman may not recite her own *Havdala*, but instead should make sure to hear it recited by a man. He explains that since, as we discussed, it is uncertain whether a woman is obligated to recite *Havdala*, she must follow the stringencies of both opinions. Meaning, although a woman must be careful to fulfill the *mitzva* of *Havdala* to comply with the first opinion, she should nevertheless not recite it on her own. Since according to the second opinion she is not obligated in the *mitzva* of *Havdala*, reciting the *beracha* of *Havdala* would be a *beracha levatala* (a blessing made in vain). The Rema therefore rules that a woman may not recite her own *Havdala*, but rather must make sure to hear it recited by a man.

2. The opinion of the other poskim. The *Mishna Berura*¹² cites other *poskim* that rule that it is permissible for women to recite *Havdala* on their own. They argue that even according to the second opinion that women are indeed exempt from performing *Havdala*, a woman may nevertheless choose to perform the *mitzvah* and recite the *berachos*. This is because although women are exempt from *mitzvos aseh she’hazman grama*, a woman may take upon herself to perform these *mitzvos* and may even recite a *beracha* when performing them.¹³ For example:

- Although women are exempt from the *mitzva* of *lulav* and *esrog*, as they are positive, time-bound *mitzvos*, a woman may perform the *mitzva* of *lulav* and *esrog*, and even recite the *beracha* when performing the *mitzva*.
- Although women are exempt from the positive, time-bound *mitzva* of *shofar*, a woman may perform the *mitzva* of *shofar*, and even recite the *beracha* when performing the *mitzva*.

Accordingly, these *poskim* rule that a woman may choose to recite *Havdala* and recite the *berachos*, even if they are indeed exempt from the *mitzvah*. The *Mishna Berura* concludes that the *halacha* follows these *poskim*, and therefore it is permitted for a woman to recite *Havdala* on her own. In fact, if a woman cannot hear *Havdala* recited by a man she is required to recite *Havdala* on her own to comply with the opinions that rule that women are indeed obligated in *Havdala*.

A woman drinking the wine of Havdala

Although we have concluded that it is halachically permissible for a woman to recite *Havdala*, the *poskim*¹⁴ write that according to Kabbala there is an issue with a woman drinking from the wine of *Havdala*. The Shelah haKadosh¹⁵ writes that a woman should not drink from the wine of *Havdala*, based on the following reason: According to one opinion in the Gemara,¹⁶ the fruit of the *eitz hada’as* (the tree of knowledge) which Chava gave to Adam haRishon was a grapevine. She squeezed the grapes of the *eitz hada’as* and gave its wine to Adam to drink. Chazal teach us that the sin of the *eitz hada’as* created a separation between Adam haRishon and Chava.¹⁷ Since Chava sinned by the means of wine which caused a separation, women should not drink from the wine of *Havdala* (which means “separation”). When a woman refrains from drinking the wine of *Havdala* it serves as a *tikkun* (a reparation) for the sin of Chava. Therefore, the *poskim* write that the custom is for women not to drink the wine of *Havdala*.¹⁸

The *Mishna Berura*¹⁹ wonders, how is it ever be permissible for a woman to recite *Havdala* on her own if the custom is for women to refrain from drinking the wine of

1 Shevuos 18b 2 Pri Tzadik, end of Teruma 3 296:8 4 Mishna Kiddushin 29a. Rav Shimshon Pincus (Nefesh Chaya, p.45) gives a deeper understanding as to why women are exempt from positive, time-bound *mitzvos*: the uniqueness of women and their approach to getting close to haKadosh baruch Hu differs from that of a man. The Jewish man can be compared to the sun, which constantly needs to generate its own energy in order to produce light. A Jewish man must perform all the *mitzvos* of the Torah in order to produce his spiritual energy. The Jewish woman, however, can be compared to the moon, which produces light by means of reflection. A Jewish woman can produce spiritual energy by reflecting the spiritual light of G-d. Therefore, a Jewish woman does not need to perform all the *mitzvos* of the Torah in order to produce spiritual light. As long as she makes sure she is pure enough to reflect the spiritual light of haKadosh baruch Hu, she can produce the same light as man without needing to perform all the *mitzvos* of the Torah. 5 Shulchan Aruch 17:2, Mishna Berura 17:3 6 Shulchan Aruch 38:3, Mishna Berura 38:11 7 Mishna Kiddushin 29a 8 271:2. See Mishna Berura 296:34 9 As explained by the Mishna Berura ibid. 10 As explained by the Mishna Berura ibid. 11 296:8 12 296:35 (citing Bach, end of siman 296, and Magen Avraham 296:11) 13 The custom of Sephardim is that women do not recite a *beracha* when performing a *mitzvas aseh she’hazman grama* (Yalkut Yosef, Hilchos Lulav) 14 Magen Avraham 296:4, quoted in Mishna Berura 296:35. 15 Sinei Luchos Ha’bris Mesechta Shabbos Torah Ohr 99 16 Berachos 40a 17 Chava began having the blood of nidda as a punishment for giving Adam to eat from the *eitz hada’as*, which ultimately created a separation between husband and wife (Kaf haChaim 296:14).

Havdala? Even if it is halachically permitted for a woman to recite her own *Havdala*, wouldn't it still be inadvisable to drink the *Havdala* wine based on this kabbalistic concern?

Therefore, the *Mishna Berura* explains that a woman should always try to listen to a man reciting *Havdala* so that she can avoid drinking the *Havdala* wine. However, if a woman finds herself in a situation where she is unable to listen to a man reciting *Havdala*, she must recite her own *Havdala* and drink the wine. Since the only way for her to fulfill her obligation of *Havdala* is by reciting it on her own, she must do so – even if it means overriding this kabbalistic concern. Accordingly, as we discussed earlier, if a woman is not able to listen to *Havdala* recited by a man, she must recite *Havdala* on her own, and drink the wine herself.

With regard to the widespread legend that a woman who drinks from the *Havdala* wine will grow unwanted hair, there is no mention of it in the *poskim*, and no known source upon which to base this supposed consequence.²⁰ The Chazon Ish²¹ said: "It is a mistake what people say that 'a woman who drinks from the *Havdala* wine will grow a beard,' rather the saying is supposed to say 'only someone who has a beard (i.e., a man) should drink from the *Havdala* wine (due to the Kabbalistic reasoning of the Shelah haKadosh).'"

If a woman is still hesitant to drink the *Havdala* wine. Although a woman who cannot listen to a man reciting *Havdala* is supposed to recite her own *Havdala* and drink the wine, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky²² gives a couple of alternatives for a woman who is still hesitant to drink the *Havdala* wine:

- She may recite *Havdala* on *chamar medina* (e.g., beer, coffee, tea).** Based on the reason given by the Shelah haKadosh above, the custom for women not to drink from the cup of *Havdala* applies only to wine or grape juice. Chava gave Adam wine made of the grapes from the *etz hada'as*, and therefore no other drink is included in this custom. Accordingly, a woman who is concerned about drinking the *Havdala* wine may recite *Havdala* over *chamar medina* instead of wine²³ (replacing the *beracha* of *hagafen* with *she'hakol*).
- She may give the wine to a child to drink.** After reciting *Havdala*, a woman may give the *Havdala* wine to a child²⁴ (over five years old²⁵) who listened to her recital of *Havdala* to drink.²⁶

Listening to *Havdala* over the Telephone

The majority of *poskim* rule that one may not fulfill the obligation of *Havdala* by listening to it recited over the telephone. Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky writes,²⁷ "A woman may not fulfill her obligation of *Havdala* over the telephone, since it is not the actual voice of the one reciting *Havdala*." However, Rav Moshe Feinstein²⁸ ruled that if a woman is in a situation where it is impossible to hear *Havdala* (or recite it on her own), she should listen to *Havdala* over the telephone.

To Summarize

There is a dispute among the *poskim* whether women are obligated in the *mitzva* of *Havdala*. A woman must follow the stringent opinion and fulfill the *mitzva* of *Havdalah*. A woman may recite *Havdala* on her own. However, due to a kabbalistic reason, women refrain from drinking the wine of *Havdala*. Therefore, to avoid drinking from the *Havdala* wine a woman should try to listen to a man recite *Havdala*. However, if a woman is in a situation where she cannot listen to a man recite *Havdala*, she must recite *Havdala* on her own and drink the *Havdala* wine.²⁹

If one's husband already heard *Havdala*

The *Mishna Berura*³⁰ writes that a man who already fulfilled the *mitzva* of *Havdala* should not recite *Havdala* again for a woman. Since it is uncertain whether women are obligated in *Havdala*, a man may not repeat *Havdala* for them because by doing so he might be making a *beracha levatala*. Accordingly, a woman should recite *Havdala* on her own rather than listen to *Havdala* from a man who already fulfilled the *mitzva* of *Havdala*.³¹ If a husband hears *Havdala* in *shul*, he should make sure that he does not have in mind to fulfill his *Havdala* obligation with that recitation. If he were to fulfill his *Havdala* obligation in *shul*, it would be inadvisable for him to recite it again at home for his wife. *B'dieved*, if a husband

(or any other man) who already fulfilled his obligation of *Havdala* did repeat *Havdala* for a woman, the *Havdala* is valid, and she does not need to repeat *Havdala*.³²

Eating and Performing *Melacha* before *Havdala*

A woman waiting for her husband to arrive home from *shul* must also be aware of the *halachos* of eating and performing *melacha* before fulfilling the *mitzva* of *Havdala*.

Eating before *Havdala*

The *Shulchan Aruch*³³ rules that once the time to recite *Havdala* arrives, it is prohibited to eat or drink anything (besides water³⁴) before fulfilling the *mitzva* of *Havdala*. The first thing that one should perform immediately after Shabbos ends is recite *Havdala*, therefore *Chazal* instituted that once it turns dark (and one's obligation to recite *Havdala* begins), one may not eat or drink before fulfilling the *mitzva* of *Havdala*.³⁵ Accordingly, a woman who is waiting for her husband to recite *Havdala* may not eat or drink until she hears or recites it.³⁶

Performing *melacha* before *Havdala*

The *Shulchan Aruch*³⁷ rules that it is prohibited to perform any *melacha* until one recites *Havdala*. The *Mishna Berura*³⁸ adds that this includes performing any prohibited activity whether it is forbidden *mid'Oraisa* or *mid'Rabbanan*.

The *Shulchan Aruch*³⁹ adds, that one may begin performing *melacha* before reciting *Havdala* in one of the following two ways:

- By reciting "Ata *chonantanu*" when davening *ma'ariv*.
- By saying "Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol."

The *Mishna Berura*⁴⁰ explains that reciting these phrase serves as a recognition of the fact that Shabbos has ended, and by doing so one "escorts" the Shabbos out. Therefore, after one has escorted the Shabbos, he may begin performing *melacha*.

Accordingly, the Rema⁴¹ writes that "one should be careful to tell the women (who are waiting for their husbands to recite *Havdala*) that they may begin performing *melacha* only after [tzeis *hakochavim* (halachic nightfall) has arrived and] reciting "Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol."⁴² The *Mishna Berura*⁴³ emphasizes that reciting these phrases one permits performing *melacha* after Shabbos has ended, but one may only begin eating and drinking after the full *Havdala* is recited.⁴⁴

Gazing at one's fingernails during the *beracha* of *Borei Me'orei Ha'Eish*

The *Shulchan Aruch*⁴⁵ writes that when reciting the *beracha* of *borei me'orei ha'eish* over the *Havdala* candle the custom is to look at one's fingernails. The *Mishna Berura*⁴⁶ explains that this is because one must derive enough benefit from the light of the *Havdala* candle that he can differentiate between two different objects. We look at our fingernails to determine whether there is enough light to differentiate between our fingernails and the skin that surrounds them.

The *poskim* question why the custom is to specifically use one's fingernails as the indicator and not a different object. There are two reasons given:

- The *Mishna Berura*⁴⁷ explains that because fingernails are always growing and multiplying, we look at our fingernails in the beginning of the week as a good sign.
- The *Pri Megadim*⁴⁸ explains that *Chazal* teach us that before Adam haRishon sinned his entire body was covered with the material of fingernails. When he sinned, this material contracted to cover only the ends of his fingers, and the rest of his body was covered by skin. To remember the sin of Adam we look at our fingernails during *Havdala*.

Should women gaze at their fingernails during *Havdala*? The *Ketzos haShulchan*⁴⁹ writes "I have noticed that women do not gaze at their fingernails when the *beracha* of *borei me'orei ha'eish* is recited over the *Havdala* candle, and I wonder this is so? Perhaps the reason for this is because, according to the *Pri Megadim* we look at our fingernails in order to remember the sin of Adam, women do not partake in this custom since it was Chava who caused Adam to sin."

The majority of *poskim*⁵⁰ do not agree with the explanation of the *Ketzos haShulchan*. They rule that women too should adhere to this custom and look at their fingernails when the *beracha* of *borei me'orei ha'eish* is recited. This seems to be the accepted practice among women nowadays.⁵¹

The intention of this summary is to discuss common practical *shaylos*. One should consult a Rav concerning *p'sak halacha*.

18 The *Nishmas Shabbos* (2:544) writes that if a young girl wishes to drink from the wine of *Havdala* one may allow her to do so, as young children do not need to adhere to kabbalistic concerns. Furthermore, he argues, that based on the reason given in the previous footnote this kabbalistic concern would apply only to a girl that has begun to see *dam nidda*. 19 296:35 20 See *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:544 21 *Sefer Ma'aseh Ish* 5, p. 93 22 *Emes l'Yaakov* 296, note 325 23 See *Nishmas Shabbos* (2:544) where he questions whether using beer made of wheat would avoid this issue, since according to one opinion in the Gemara (Berachos 40a) the food that Chava gave Adam haRishon to eat was wheat. 24 See *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:540, where he writes that a woman many give the wine only to a young girl to drink but not to a young boy. Since it is questionable whether a woman may be *matzi* a young boy with her recitation of *Havdala*, he may not be included in her recitation and consequently may not drink the wine. See also *Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa* 58, note 82, and Rav Chaim Kanievsky, *Sefer Shabbos Yisrael*, p. 477 25 See *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:540; *Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa* 60:15 26 See *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:539 27 *Emes l'Yaakov* 296, note 325 28 *Igros Moshe*, O.C. 4:91:4 29 Until this point, we have determined that a woman who cannot listen to a man recite *Havdala* may recite the *beracha* of *Havdala* ("Baruch Ata... Hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol") on her own. The *poskim* discuss the other *berachos* of *Havdala* (wine, *besamim*, candle) as well; is it permitted for a woman to recite these *berachos* on her own? The *Biur Halacha* (end of 296, *d'h lo yavdil*) explains as follows: Regarding the *beracha* over wine – A woman may recite the *beracha* of *hagafen* over the wine because it is a *birkas hanehenin* (a *beracha* recited when deriving enjoyment from food, drink, or other pleasures). Therefore, there is no reason for a woman not to recite this *beracha* during *Havdala*, just as she would recite it any other time she drinks wine. Regarding the *beracha* over *besamim* – A woman may recite this *beracha* as well, since it is also a *birkas hanehenin* (a *beracha* made on enjoying the pleasant smell). Regarding the *beracha* over the candle – The *Biur Halacha* writes that according to all opinions the *beracha* over the candle is a *mitzvas aseh she'hazman grama*, and women should not recite it. The *beracha* over a candle is recited on *matza'ei Shabbos* in order to commemorate the first fire, which was made by Adam haRishon on *matza'ei Shabbos*, and is therefore not linked to Shabbos; consequently, women are exempt from making this *beracha*. This would mean that according to the Rema they should not recite a *beracha* over the candle as well. However, the custom seems to be that a woman who must make her own *Havdala* does recite the *beracha* over the candle (Tzitz Eliezer 14, beginning of 4). The *poskim* (*teshuva* from Rav Moshe Feinstein cited in *The Radiance of Shabbos*, p. 183) give a number of reasons why it is permitted for women to recite a *beracha* over the candle. One is that even if reciting the *beracha* over the candle is a *mitzvas aseh she'hazman grama*, a woman can still accept the *mitzva* on herself and recite a *beracha* (just like with regard to *lulav* and *shofar*). 30 296:36. However, the *Aruch haShulchan* 296:5 writes that a man may repeat *Havdala* for a woman even if he has already fulfilled his obligation, since according to the majority of *poskim* women are obligated in *Havdala* (see also Rav Shmuel Vosner, *Kovetz miBeis Levi* 9, p. 28, and *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:550) 31 However, Sephardim who follow the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* may recite *Havdala* for a woman even if they already fulfilled their *Havdala* obligation in *shul*. Since the *Shulchan Aruch* rules conclusively that women are without question obligated in *Havdala*, a man may therefore repeat *Havdala* for a woman even after he has already fulfilled his obligation (*Yalkut Yosef* 296, note 14) 32 *The 39 Melochos*, p. 167 (based on *Mishna Berura* 296:36); see *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:550 33 299:1 34 However, based on kabbalistic reasons, one should refrain even from drinking water (*Aruch haShulchan* 299:1, based on Rema 291:2; *Mishna Berura* 291:8) See, however, *Kaf haChaim* 291:17, where he writes that this reason may only apply until tzeis *hakochavim* even if one has not yet recited *Havdala*. 35 *Shulchan Aruch* haRav 271:9 36 *Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa* 59, note 33; *Halichos bas Yisrael* 15:85; and however *Nishmas Shabbos* 2:605 37 299:10 38 299:32 39 299:10 40 299:34 41 299:10 42 If a woman said "Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol" and then remembered that she did not yet recite *birkas hamazon* for *Shalosh Seudos*, she must recite *birkas hamazon* with *retzei* (see *Mishna Berura* 263:7, *The Radiance of Shabbos* p. 92, note 14). Still, someone who actually made *Havdala* or davened *ma'ariv* no longer says *retzei* when reciting *birkas hamazon* for *Shalosh Seudos* (see *Mishna Berura* 186:32, *The Radiance of Shabbos* p. 92). 43 299:35 44 See *Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasa* 59, note 33; *Halichos bas Yisrael* 15:85 45 298:3 46 298:9 47 298:9 48 *Eishel Avraham* 298:5 49 *Ketzos haShulchan* 96:12 50 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (*Kovetz Halachos*, Shabbos 1, p. 757, note 28) 51 *Ibid*.