

נשיאת כפים כהלכה

The Proper Procedure For Birkat Kohanim

Summary of the Basic Halachot




The Ribbono Shel Olam invested in the Kohanim the ability to serve as the pipelines for His ultimate Shefa (Blessing), through Birkat Kohanim, the only remaining Mitzvah we have nowadays from the Beit HaMikdash itself! As The Chosen within The Chosen Nation, the Kohanim have the power to help Am Yisrael achieve its potential and reap the benefits of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's Blessings. The Pele Yoetz writes that if he had only been a Kohen, he would have blessed Am Yisrael every day! (פלא יועץ: מערכת כהן)

The Shaliach Tzibbur (Chazzan):

1. One should say the words from the Siddur and out loud for everyone to hear, not quietly.
2. Before beginning the next word, the Shaliach Tzibbur should wait for the Kohanim to finish the previous word and for the Tzibbur to finish answering (אמן ובהרוב"ש). He himself should not answer anything, since he's calling them.
3. If the Shaliach Tzibbur reaches *Retzeh* and the last Kohen has not yet started walking towards the *Duchan* (from the sink), he should wait before saying *HaMachazir Shechinato LeTzion*.

The Kohanim:

1. Even though they already did *Netilat Yadayim* that morning, during the Chazara, the Kohanim must wash their hands **all the way to their wrists**,  except in extenuating circumstances (i.e. if they would have to pass in front of someone praying Amidah), when they may rely on the original *Netilah* if they had washed their hands up to their wrists and kept them clean since. On Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, however, one cannot rely on the minimal morning washing of the fingers alone and must wash his hands to the wrists.
2. When the Chazzan reaches *Retzeh*, the Kohanim who have already washed their hands must move towards the *Duchan*; if a Kohen doesn't start moving before the Chazzan starts *Modim*, he may no longer participate and must leave the room. *Bediavad*, in extenuating circumstances, if he moved towards the sink and not towards the *Duchan* at that time, it's also ok; however, if he did not move at all after the Chazzan started *Modim* he may not participate and must leave the room before the Chazzan says "Kohanim."
3. A Kohen who refuses to go up without a valid reason is in violation of one positive commandment from the Torah, though it's equivalent to three.
4. Before going up, Kohanim must put on a Tallit, and remove their shoes, and must leave them in a hidden place or even under a chair less than ten Tefachim (~2.5ft) off the ground in order to preserve the sanctity of the *Beit HaKnesset*.
5. While on the *Duchan*, the Kohanim should say the "*Yehi Ratzon*" prayer printed in the Siddur and complete it with one of the Chazzan's *Berachot*, so the Tzibbur essentially answers Amen to them, as well.
6. Until the Shaliach Tzibbur calls out "Kohanim!" they must stand facing the Aron Kodosh with their Tallitot over their heads; the Minhag is that they raise their hands to shoulder height even before they start the *Beracha*.
7. All turns in Halacha are made to the right, and Birkat Kohanim is no exception. The Kohanim must turn clockwise while saying the *Beracha* so that they should finish saying "באהבה" while facing the Tzibbur. They again turn clockwise after the Chazzan starts *Sim Shalom*.

The Proper Position During Birkat Kohanim:

8. Birkat Kohanim must be said loudly in Hebrew - so at least nine people (*Lechatechilah*, the entire Tzibbur) can hear, while standing up with raised hands, all of which are necessary even *Bediavad*. Any Kohen who cannot fulfill these requirements may not go up to the *Duchan*.
9. According to the Shulchan Aruch, the Kohanim must raise their outstretched arms in a straight line (i.e. no bent elbows, fingers, etc.) at shoulder height.

10. The right hand should be a little bit higher than the left with spaces in between the middle and ring fingers so that the middle and index fingers are held together and the ring and pinky fingers are held together. The thumbs should be spread out, as well, and not touching. The fingers should all be held straight, parallel to the ground. If a Kohen can't hold his fingers in this position, he should just spread them all out. (See **Pictures #1-3** below)
11. Even though there are various Minhagim regarding how to spread one's fingers, everyone agrees the hands must be at shoulder height while saying the words! Therefore, one may not "*shuckle*" back and forth with his hands going up and down. Also, if a Kohen gets too tired, he may briefly rest his hands in between words, as long as he raises them up again before saying the next word.
12. The Kohanim should have in mind to fulfill the *Mitzvat Aseh Min HaTorah* (Positive Torah commandment) of blessing Am Yisrael.
13. The Kohanim must be vigilant to stay in sync, to say each word together in unison, starting each word after the Chazzan finishes saying it and not elongating the words more than the other Kohanim.
14. While saying the words ending in a *Chaf Sofit* (יברכך, וישמרך, אליך, ויהנך, אליך, לך) and "שלום," the Kohanim turn to their left and right to spread out the *Beracha* to the people on their sides.
15. Only when the Shaliach Tzibbur begins *Sim Shalom* may the Kohanim turn back clockwise, and once they have turned all the way around may they put their hands down. Afterwards, they should say the "Ribbono Shel Olam" prayer printed in the Siddur, making sure to finish it as the Chazzan finishes *Sim Shalom*. In order to avoid people speaking and thanking them during the *Tefillah* when they come down, the Kohanim should make sure to stay on the *Duchan* until *Tachanun* or after *Kaddish*.
16. If there is irresolvable hatred between a Kohen and the congregation, the Kohen must leave the room before *Retzeh*, because Birkat Kohanim must be done "BeAhavah," as indicated in the *Beracha* itself.

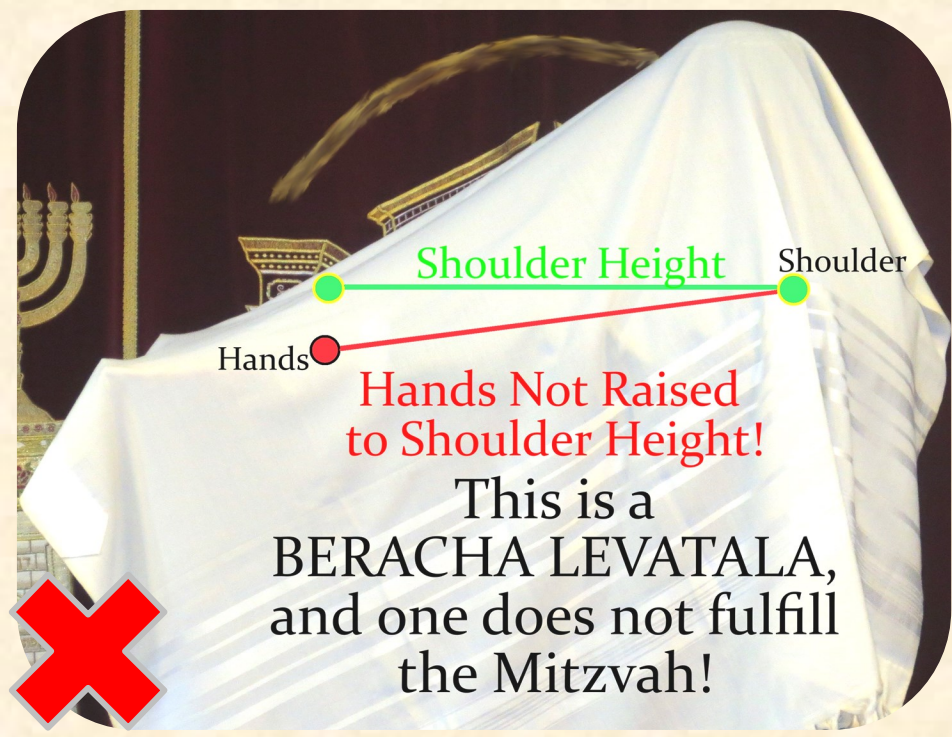
The Tzibbur (Congregation):

1. During Birkat Kohanim, the Tzibbur is to stand facing the Kohanim (even those who take their children under their Tallit, should make sure the children are also facing the Kohanim), while looking down; only the sick or elderly sit.
2. The Tzibbur must stand either in front of the Kohanim or to their sides in order to be included in the *Beracha*. The Ben Ish Chai recommends standing opposite the Kohanim and not to the sides, whenever possible, but, if one does stand to their side, he should turn to face the Kohanim and not the wall.
3. It is inappropriate to say any *Pesukim*, look in a *Sefer*, or do anything other than listen carefully to each and every word of the *Beracha*, and answer "*Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo*" to the name of Hashem mentioned by the Kohanim and "Amen" to the end of each *Pasuk/Beracha*, especially since many *Poskim* hold that there is a מצות עשה for Non-Kohanim to hear Birkat Kohanim every day. *Reviewed and approved by Rabbi H. Schachter and Rabbi M. Willig*

For Mekorot, questions, comments, or to order a free poster for your synagogue, contact us at ToratKohanim@gmail.com

This poster has been dedicated by:
Dr. & Mrs. Eliyahoo Bral
Mr. & Mrs. Yehuda Goltche
Mr. & Mrs. Shimon Saraf
 May they and their families be *zoche* to all the Hashpaot that come through Birkat Kohanim and all the *Berachot* of the Torah

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Hand Positions