

STANDING INSTRUCTIONS

Standing, Leaning and Sitting when Performing Mitzvos

The Mishnah at *Zevachim* 15b teaches that that *avodah* in the Beis HaMikdash must be done standing and if a Kohen was sitting while he performed the *avodah*, the *korban* becomes invalidated. Rav Nachman later (23b) provides a scriptural source for this restriction. *Devarim* 18:5 says לַעֲמֹד לְשִׁרָתָהּ, to stand and to serve, that HaShem chose the Kohen from among all the tribes for standing and not for sitting. Rashi explains that the *pasuk* implies that a seated Kohen is not “chosen,” and is tantamount to a non-Kohen, and accordingly his *avodah* is invalid, just like the *avodah* of a non-Kohen. There is another manuscript version of Rashi’s commentary printed as a gloss in *Shitah Mekubetzes*, which has a different approach suggesting that it is improper for a Kohen to perform the service seated. The Baraisa that follows instructs that it is indeed essential for the *avodah* to be done in a standing position, derived from repeating the standing requirement two *pesukim* later by saying הֶעֱמַדְתִּי - who stand before HaShem. Rashi’s assertion that it is unbecoming to do the *avodah* while sitting, would appear to be based on a requirement to perform *mitzvos* respectfully, but is this principle applied generally to other *mitzvos*?

DOES SUPPORT INVALIDATE STANDING?

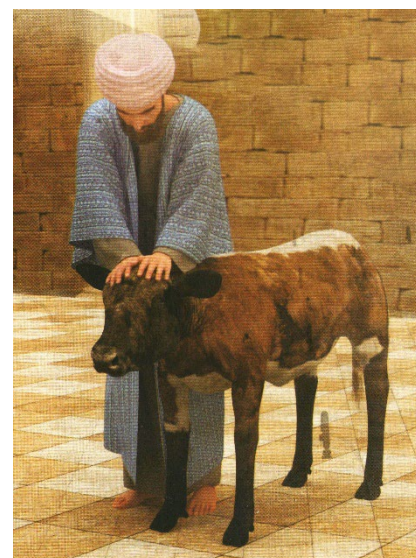
The Gemara later (19b) discusses the proper procedure for washing the Kohen’s hands and feet, as required by the Torah before doing the *avodah* (*Shemos* 30:19-21). A Baraisa describes the placement of the Kohen’s right hand upon his right foot, and his left hand upon his left foot while he turns on one of the taps of the *kiyor*, sanctifying both hands and feet simultaneously. Rabbi Yose the son of Rabbi Yehudah has a more complex arrangement. He places both his hands one upon the other, and then places his hands upon his two feet, which are also placed one upon the other. The Rabbis objected that it was impossible to do that without falling. Rav Yosef explains that it would be possible if a colleague supports him. The Gemara then explains the *machlokes* between the two opinions to be based on the question whether an act of standing that is accomplished by support from the side complies with the standing requirement for Temple service, as the *pasuk* compares the sanctification of the hands and feet to the *avodah*. Thus, we see that the Rabbis hold that an act of standing that is dependent on external support is not called standing.

LEANING AT KERIAS HATORAH

Tosafos (s.v. *amidah*) picks up on this and applies this halachah to the public reading of the Torah, where *Megillah* 21a requires it to be done standing without leaning on anything. Tosafos’s comparison of *kerias hatorah* with Temple service indicates that he follows Rashi’s second approach explained above that standing was necessary because *mitzvos* had to be performed respectfully. This principle can therefore be applied to other *mitzvos*. Tosafos draws support from the Yerushalmi (*Megillah* 4:1) where the *metargem*, the translator who chanted the Torah in Aramaic, was also forbidden to lean during reading. Shulchan Aruch rules that the public Torah reading must be done standing and it would be forbidden for the reader to support himself on a wall or the reading desk (*Orach Chaim* 141:1). The Mishneh Berurah comments that even slight support, meaning that if the support was removed he would not fall, is also forbidden. He compares this to the situation where Moshe Rabbeinu stood in awe when he received the Torah on Har Sinai and we have to read the Torah with comparable awe and dignity without leaning.

LEANING DURING VIDUY

Other halachos which require standing but do not have the additional dimension of the awe of Sinai, permit leaning on the *shtender* if its removal would not cause the person to fall. This is found in connection with saying *viduy* on Yom Kippur (*Orach Chaim* 607) where Shaar HaTzion (8) explains that leaning is considered like sitting. The Birkei Yosef writes that if a person is elderly or unwell and cannot stand, then his *viduy* said while sitting is valid where he has no other option. Rav Zvi Pesach Frank brings an interesting discussion concerning the *viduy* recited by the Kohen while doing *semichah* on the animal. How can he lean on the animal while saying *viduy*? Quoting *Sefer Avodah Tamah*, commentary on *tefillas אֶתָּה כֹּהֵן*, the Yom Kippur *avodah*, that even though *viduy* was said at the time of *semichah*, he relaxed his hands for the duration while he recited *viduy*. However, Rav Frank brings that it is understood from Chazal and the Rambam that the *viduy* was recited while leaning on the animal, and that would support the argument that in a *bedieved* situation where there was no other option, *viduy* is valid even if recited while leaning.



Performing *semichah* – leaning on the animal while saying *viduy*.

Picture credit: Kol Halashohon

STANDING FOR OTHER MITZVOS

The Rosh writes in connection with Sefiras HaOmer that the *berachah* should be recited standing derived from *Devarim* 16:9 - בְּקוֹמָהּ - בְּקָמָהּ - מְהֵרָה לְחַמֵּשׁ בְּקָמָהּ - when the sickle is first put to the standing crop, and Chazal *darshen* that it refers to the person standing. Rishonim bring that five other *mitzvos* are learned with a *gezeirah shavah* using the word לָקַח from Omer. The five that must be performed standing are *kiddush levanah*, *tzitzis*, *shofar*, *lulav* and *milah*. The *mefarshim* explain that although this Chazal is not found in Talmud Bavli, its source is a Yerushalmi that has been lost but was known to the Rishonim. Some understand this *gezeirah shavah* as implying that standing is a torah requirement for these mitzvos, but others regard it as an *asmachtah* and it is a Rabbinic requirement. The Beis Yosef cites the Orchos Chaim who quotes this Yerushalmi as a proper teaching, and it is also brought by the Abudraham. However, the Mamar Mordechai notes that although the Beis Yosef brings the standing requirement in relation to just these six *mitzvos*, the Orchos Chaim which is his source, quotes an alternate opinion from another Yerushalmi (also lost) which states that all *birkas hamitzvos* are required to be recited standing, but not *birkas hanehenin*. Rav Yakov Emden comments that any *berachah* which is a praise and thanks to HaShem must be recited standing, but other *berachos* where the mitzvah itself is done sitting would also be made sitting. This leads Acharonim to extensive discussion concerning whether various *berachos* must be made standing and as a result there are varying customs.

MOHEL ACTING AS SANDEK

Milah is one of the six *mitzvos* indicated above that must be performed standing and accordingly the Pri Megadim writes that the *mohel* cannot also act as the *sandek* who must be seated (*Orach Chaim* 585:1). The Minchas Elazar proves from a *Targum Yehonason* translation of the words עַל בְּרַכֵּי יוֹסֵף (*Bereishis* 50:23) as גְּזִירָתוֹ יוֹסֵף which the Radal in his commentary on *Vayikra Rabbah* (21:5) explains to mean that Yosef performed *milah* of his grandchildren while they were on his knees. The Minchas Elazar argues that the reason that the *berachos* on *milah* have to be recited by the *mohel* and father while standing is because sitting is unbecoming for the mitzvah and demonstrates lack of fear of HaShem. However, where it is obvious to all that the *mohel* has no choice but to sit, it is permitted *lechatchilah* (*Teshuvos Minchas Elazar* 1:48). *Sefer Chut HaMeshulash* writes that Rabbi Akiva Eger would travel great distances to participate in mitzvas milah, provided he could do both the cut and the *periyah*, and sometimes he would also request to be *sandek* as well. This demonstrates the two approaches indicated above of regarding the standing requirement of *milah* as a scriptural derivation or based on an *asmachta* and permitted where there is no disrespect.

BIRKAS KOHANIM

Where the standing requirement is an essential part of the mitzvah, a stricter view is taken where standing is not possible. Sotah 38a applies a *gereirah shavah*, or according to another view a *hekesh*, from the blessings at Mount Gerizim, to derive the *halachah* that *Birkas Kohanim* must be performed while standing. Tosafos (*Sotah* 38a s.v. *harei*) states that Birkas Kohanim recited seated has not achieved anything. Comparing *Zevachim* 23b which states that sitting invalidates Temple service, he rules that such a blessing would have to be repeated while standing. The Mishneh Berurah (128:51) writes that a Kohen who is weak and cannot stand without support may not raise his hands because leaning on something for support is tantamount to sitting. Rav Shmuel Vosner was consulted about an overweight Kohen who could not stand without support and it was suggested that he *duchen* without making the *berachah*. He ruled against that, stating that the transgression is not only regarding the *berachah*, but he is considered like a non-Kohen, as we saw above, and the *issur* applies the blessing verses as well (*Shevet HaLevi* 10:28). Similarly, a Kohen confined to a wheelchair should go out of the shul during Birkas Kohanim to avoid any transgression (*Meishiv Nevonim* vol. 9, *Orach Chaim* s. 3). Thus, we see that even in a *bedieved* situation there is no leniency where the need to stand is derived as a Torah requirement, but the *gezeirah shavah* in the Yerushalmi concerning the six *mitzvos* is only regarded as an *asmachta*. Therefore, in *bedieved* situations *poskim* may be lenient.