

Sitting or Standing for Kiddush

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- I. Introduction.** One of the most basic obligations of *Shabbat* is the *mitzvah* of “*zachor et yom ha’shabbat l’kadsho*” – to mention the day of *Shabbat* in order to sanctify it. On a biblical level, most *rishonim* understand that one is only required to mention something about the fact that it is *Shabbat* (see *Magen Avraham* 271:1 who says that one fulfills his biblical obligation of *kiddush* by reciting the Friday night *shemoneh esrei*. See also Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his glosses to the *Sulcahn Aruch* *ibid.*, who suggests that merely saying “good shabbos” would suffice.) The rabbis, however added to the requirements of *kiddush* and mandated that it be recited over a cup of wine, and in conjunction with the *Shabbat* meal. (See *Tosafot Pesachim* 106a for two opinions regarding which aspects of *kiddush* are biblically mandated and which are rabbinically mandated.) Over the years many customs have developed regarding whether one should sit or stand for *kiddush*. A number of *minhagim* maintain some sort of compromise where people stand for certain parts of *kiddush* but sit for other parts of *kiddush*. In this essay we will explore the various sources for each custom in the hope that a greater understanding of each custom will lead to an appreciation of the many aspects of the *mitzvah* of *kiddush*.
- II. The Reasons to sit for *kiddush*.** There are a number of sources that would indicate a preference for sitting during the recitation of *kiddush*:
- A. *Tosafot* (*Berachot* 43a) states that in order to include others in your recitation of *kiddush* it is necessary for everybody to sit, as an indication that they are all joining together to discharge their obligation through the *kiddush* of one of them. *Tosafot* even wonders why we have the custom to stand for *havdalah* when we are *motzi* others. They therefore suggest that it is best to sit for *havdalah* as well. (Regarding sitting during *havdalah* see *Rama* 296:6, *Biur Hagra* *ibid.*, and *Ma’aseh Rav* 103.)
- B. The *gemara Pesachim* 101a records the comment of *Shmuel* that one must recite *kiddush* in the same place that he will have his meal. It is clear in the *gemara* that this requirement does not only involve reciting *kiddush* in the same house that one will have his meal, but even in the same room where the meal will take place. The *Mishnah Berurah* (271:46) cites *poskim* who suggest that one should also recite *kiddush* in the exact spot that he will have his meal. As such, one who will eat sitting down should recite *kiddush* while sitting down as well.
- C. The *gemara* and *rishonim* do not openly discuss that issue of standing versus sitting for *kiddush*. In all likelihood, there was only one custom during those times in history, thereby obviating the need for any debate about this matter. The question though remains, what was the custom that everybody had accepted without any opposition voiced against it. The *Rambam* (*Hilchot Succah* 6:12) writes that on the first night of *Succot* one should recite *kiddush* while standing, because the *beracha* of *leshev b’succah* should be recited prior to performing the *mitzvah* (of sitting in

the *succah*). The *Ra'avad* comments that he had never heard of such a custom. Additionally, he argues, even if the *berachah* is recited while seated, it will still precede the primary aspect of the *mitzvah* of *succah*, the eating in the *succah*. *Magid Mishnah* adds that the words “*leshev b’succah*” do not reflect an obligation to sit in the *succah*. Rather, it reflects an obligation to dwell in the *succah*. After all, one who spends his entire day in the *succah*, eating and drinking standing up has certainly fulfilled his obligation of *yeshivat succah*. Based on this discussion, it seems that all of these *rshonim* took for granted that normally *kiddush* was recited while sitting down. The only debate revolved around the first night of *Succot* because of factors that are unique to that holiday.

III. The Reasons to Stand. In spite of the sources that suggest sitting for *kiddush*, large segments of the Jewish people stand for *kiddush*. Those who stand point to the following sources to validate their custom:

- A. The *gemara Bava Kama* 32b refers to *Shabbat* as a *kallah* and records that various *amoraim* would stand to greet the *Shabbat kallah*. Based on this reference many of the great kabbalists had the custom to stand during *kiddush* out of reverence for the *kallah* that we greet when we recite *kiddush*. This, in fact was the custom of the *Arizal*.
- B. A second reason to stand during the recitation of *kiddush* is offered by the *Mishnah Berurah* (271:45) who states that the paragraph beginning “*vayechulu*” is a testimony of sorts that God created the world. One who testifies in a Jewish court is obligated to stand for his testimony. Rav Moshe Feinstein (in explaining the position of the *Rama*) writes that once one is standing for *vayechulu* he need not sit for the remainder of *kiddush*.

IV. Explanations for Each Custom.

- A. Standing the entire time. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (271:24) cites the custom of the great kabbalists, including the *Arizal* to stand for the entire *kiddush*. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe Orach Chaim* V #16:7) points out that this custom is based in the *gemara Bava Kama* mentioned above which identifies *Shabbat* as a *kallah*. Some of the leading *poskim* point out that the logic to stand does not apply in all circumstances.
 - 1. Rav Moshe Shternbuch (*Teshuvot V’hanhagot* #254) writes that even those who stand for the Friday night *kiddush* should sit for the *Shabbat* day *kiddush* when neither of the above mentioned reasons to stand applies. In fact, the *Birkei Yosef* (289) states that even the *Arizal* would sit for the daytime *kiddush*. Those who stand even for the daytime *kiddush* do so because they understand that the *beracha* is considered to be a *shirah al hayayin*, which is most appropriately recited while standing.
 - 2. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe* *ibid.*) adds that since the logic for standing during *kiddush* is that once we are standing for the paragraph of *vayechulu* we may remain standing for the remainder of *kiddush*, there should be no reason to stand for the *kiddush* on *Yom Tov* when *vayechulu* is not recited. Based on this, Rav Moshe adds, if one’s family custom is to stand even for

the *Yom Tov kiddush*, he should change the *minhag* because it is based on a mistake.

- B. Standing for the first half and sitting for the rest. The *Shulchan Aruch* (271:10) writes that one should recite *vayechulu* standing, and the rest of *kiddush* sitting. This approach would seem to satisfy all of the considerations. On the one hand we are standing to greet the *Shabbat* and say the *edut* of *vayechulu*. On the other hand, we are seated for the main text of the *kiddush* fulfilling *kiddush b'makom seudah*, and allowing others to fulfill their obligations through establishing themselves as part of a single group with the one who recites *kiddush*. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that this would be the ideal custom to choose if one does not have a clear family custom. Even when the *Rama* writes that one may remain standing for the duration of *kiddush* on Friday night, he is only saying that it is permissible to do so, but not that it is recommended to do so.
- C. Standing for the first few words and sitting for the rest. The *Rama* records a custom to sit for the entire *kiddush* with the exception of the opening words “*yom hashishi vayechulu hashamayim*” because the first letters of those words spell the name of God, and it is customary to stand out of respect for the name of God. The *Mishnah Berurah* points out that we are not concerned with greeting *Shabbat* while standing because we have already greeted the *Shabbat* properly in *shul*.
- D. Interestingly, there is no custom recorded in *Shulchan Aruch* to remain seated for the entire *kiddush* of Friday night.

V. Conclusion. We have outlined the various considerations to be taken into account when deciding whether to sit or stand for *kiddush*. As a practical matter, most *Chassidic poskim* have followed the custom of the *Arizal* to stand, and the *Rama* sanctions this custom. However, some later *poskim* have pointed out that this ruling should not apply to *Yom Tov* or daytime *kiddush* where it is preferable to sit. Rav Hershel Schachter *shlit”a* once told me that even one who plans to change his family custom in favor of a custom that he believes to be more halachically viable, he should maintain the old custom when reciting *kiddush* in front of his parents.