

K'rias HaTorah and Birkas Kohanim on Porches

Translated by Elli Fischer

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I HAVE BEEN ASKED whether those who are davening on porches can join together for *K'rias HaTorah* and *Birkas Kohanim*, since one rabbi noted that since the view on which we rely to make *minyanim* in this way is based on a *teshuvah* of the *Rashba* that is subject to dispute, perhaps it is better not to recite *berachos* on these mitzvos.

In truth, I see no practical difference between the *berachos* on these mitzvos and the *berachos* of *chazaras ha'shatz*; if there is no *minyan*, then the *berachos* of the *shatz* are also *berachos l'vatalah*, and with respect to these *berachos*, as well, we say "*safek berachos l'kulah*." (It does not make sense to say that one must have *kavanah* for it to be a *tefillas nedavah*; we will not discuss that here.) Rather, I wrote what seems correct in my humble opinion: Since *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Nosei Keilim*, and most major *poskim* ruled in accordance with *Rashba*, one should rely on them, especially when we cannot gather together, as I have written. The same rationale applies to *Birkas Kohanim* and *K'rias HaTorah*.

But there is another reason to discuss *Birkas Kohanim* and *K'rias HaTorah*, as I will explain.

With regard to *Birkas Kohanim*, there is a straightforward *halachah* that the *Kohanim* must stand facing the

congregation, as explained in *Sotah*¹ and in *Shulchan Aruch*.² However, it seems that we can be lenient on this matter, and the *Kohanim* on one porch should turn to face the other porches where some of the other *mispa'elim* are standing. Moreover, when an entire congregation is comprised of *Kohanim*, they still recite *Birkas Kohanim* and bless the people who are out in the fields,³ and the same applies to the present case. It therefore seems that *Kohanim* should certainly raise their hands and recite *Birkas Kohanim*.

K'rias HaTorah, however, requires further study. The *Gemara* explains⁴ that even though it would technically be enough to recite one *berachah* at the beginning of the reading and one at the end, the *Chachamim* ordained that each of the seven *olim* recited the *berachos*, out of concern for those who come late and leave early. The main institution is that seven people are called up, but only the first *oleh* makes the first *berachah* before the beginning of *K'rias HaTorah*, and the seventh *oleh* makes the second *berachah* at the conclusion of *K'rias HaTorah*.

1 38a.

2 *Orach Chayim* 128:10.

3 *Orach Chayim* 128:25.

4 *Megillah* 21b.

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Nevertheless, it is still necessary for seven people to be called up to the Torah, and it seems quite clear that when each person is standing on his porch, it is impossible to go up, “la’alos,” to the Torah.

One of the *gedolim* wrote that since Ashkenazic practice is to give an *aliyah* to a blind person, as *Rema* writes,⁵ the same applies to someone standing on a different porch. I completely disagree, because one nevertheless must go up to the Torah and stand next to the *Sefer Torah*, which is impossible from a distance. Even if we offer a constrained explanation that calling a person up with “*ya’amod Ploni ben Ploni*” is itself the *aliyah*—which does not seem correct at all, in my opinion—it still seems that he may not recite the *berachah*, and even though the *min-hag* is for a blind person to go up to the Torah and say the *berachah*, this is a *chiddush*, and we should not expand it; indeed, *Magen Avraham*⁶ wrote that a blind *am-ha’aretz* should not get an *aliyah*. In my view, the same principle should apply in the present case.

Yet even though someone who is at a distance cannot be called up to the Torah, there are two ways to have *K’rias HaTorah* with *berachos*:

- If there is a family with three adults, such as a father and two sons, we may be lenient and call them up one after another. *Shulchan Aruch* states:⁷

One can call two brothers one after another or a son after a father, but only because of ayin hara we do not allow them to ascend [to the Torah].

Rema: Even if one is the seventh aliyah and the other is the maftir, the latter is not called up by name, because of ayin hara (Maharil)

As a technical matter of *halachah* there would be no problem, but there is *ayin hara*. *Mishnah Berurah* writes⁸ that if the brother or son was *oleh*, they should not go back down, because the concern is only *l’chatchilah*. *Sha’ar HaTziyun* cites this⁹ from

Derech Chayim, in the name of several *Acharonim*. *Aruch HaShulchan*¹⁰ writes that one who is not concerned about *ayin hara* can get an *aliyah* right after a brother or father, but this contradicts the language of *Shulchan Aruch*: “*Ein menichin lahem la’alos*—We do not allow them to do so.” Nevertheless, it seems that under pressing circumstances, so that the main institution of *K’rias HaTorah* is not neglected, one may be lenient about this matter. We should not be astonished that there is no discussion of this in the *poskim*, because it is very uncommon that there would be a need to call up two brothers one after another. *Mimah nafshach*: If there is no *minyan*, there is no *K’rias HaTorah*, and if there is a *minyan*, why would it be necessary to call up brothers consecutively? However, in the present case, it seems that it is proper to be lenient. Moreover, in the present case, since there is no other way to have *K’rias HaTorah*, it would seem that there is no *ayin hara*.

- In truth, it seems that all of this is unnecessary. Rather, the *ba’al korei* should ascend to the Torah, make the *berachos*, and then repeat the process seven times. As explained in *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*,¹¹ this is the practice where there is no one who knows how to read. And even though the *poskim* write that according to our custom, even a blind person or an *am-ha’aretz* who cannot read along with the *ba’al korei* can get an *aliyah*, they did not question the essential, underlying *halachah*. It therefore seems that this is what should be done in the present situation.

B’yakra d’Oraysa v’ahavas olam,
Asher Weiss

These essays were written during various stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Facts and knowledge about this virus change daily. Torah is forever.

5 Orach Chayim 139:3.

6 139:4.

7 141:6.

8 141:18.

9 17.

10 141:8.

11 143:5.