יג. מגביה הכוס של ברכה, טפח (שמונה ס"מ) מעל השלחן. [ש"ע ס"ד], כדי שיהא נראה הכוס לכל המסובין, ויסתכלו בו [טור]. ובברכות (נא ע"ב) הסמיכוהו על הפסוק: "כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא". [משנ"ב ס"ק טז]

יד. המברך צריך שיתן עיניו בכוס של ברכה, כדי שלא יסיח דעתו [ש"ע שם] מן הברכה [על הכוס].

Raising the cup

13) One must raise the *kos shel berakha* at least a *tefah* (8 centimeters/3 inches) above the surface of the table so that all those seated at the table can see the cup. Our Sages (*Berakhot* 51b) suggested that this is hinted to by the verse (*Tehillim* 116:13), "כוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא וּבְשֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא – I lift the cup of salvation and I call in the Name of God."[181]

Watching the cup

14) The leader of the *zimun* must watch the *kos shel berakha* throughout *Birkat Hamazon* so that he does not forget about reciting the blessing over it.[182]

Efrayim Hakohen, held the *kos shel berakha* in the same manner that anyone would hold a cup of water, ignoring all these teachings. Apparently, he followed the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* (183:6) who argued that as long as one's fingers surround the cup in any manner one fulfills the teaching of the *Zohar*. It is strange, however, that he chose to practice in this way and not like the teaching of the Arizal. Interestingly enough, the *Ben Ish Hai* did not mention this halakha at all. This matter needs more research.

181. The *Arba'a Turim* and the *Shulhan Arukh* both state that the cup must be raised a *tefah* above the ground. This is because in the Talmudic era it was common to eat meals on the floor while reclining on pillows and mattresses. When people are seated at a table, it is necessary to raise the cup a *tefah* above the table. The Ritba (commentary to *Berakhot* 8:3) wrote that it is unclear to him whether or not it is necessary to raise the cup at all when seated at a table. See the *Yafe Lalev* (183:4).

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Shelah* halakha 18) wrote that one must raise the cup "at least" a *tefah* above the table. This means that it is permissible to raise it more than a *tefah* above the table.

How to measure the *tefah*

The *Av Bet Din* of the city of Mir (*sefer Shulhan Shelomo*) wrote that if the cup one uses has a tall stem, it is not necessary to raise the cup so that the bottom of the stem is a *tefah* above the table. It is necessary only that the basin of the cup is a *tefah* above the table.

The *Tehilla leDavid* (183:3) wrote that only the cup needs to rise a *tefah* above the table; the hand holding it can be within a *tefah* of the table. The *Halakha Berura* (page 352) pointed out that Harav Elazar Azkari (*Haredim* commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi) explained that the cup must be raised until it is obvious that it has been raised. According to the rulings of the *Shulhan Shelomo* and the *Tehilla leDavid*, however, one needs to raise it just a bit.

The explanation of the *Haredim* does not contradict that of the *Arba'a Turim*. It is necessary to raise the cup so that it is obviously raised and visible to everyone at the table.

Must one raise the cup or simply hold it high?

The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (183:23) wrote that if the cup is handed to the leader of the *zimun* at a height that is more than a *tefah* above the table, that is sufficient. It is not necessary for him to raise it any higher. The halakha discussed here is about the level at which the cup is held, but it does not demand that one raise the cup from a low level to a higher level.

182. The spiritual gains of staring at the *kos shel berakha*

The holy *Zohar* (*parashat Teruma*, cited by the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 183:24) states that "one must keep one's eyes on the *kos shel berakha*, based on the verse (*Devarim* 11:12), 'the Eyes of God your Master are on it.' One must not take one's eyes off the cup, but rather he must watch it carefully. The *kos shel berakha* is blessed through the act of man's blessing the Blessed Holy One. This is the secret of faith and it must be guarded carefully for it parallel's one's regard for the King. It is because of this that one's table is blessed while one recites *Birkat Hamazon*."

The *sefer Kav Hayashar* (chapter 64) states that one must watch the *kos shel berakha* and have in mind that God will watch over the holy nation of Yisrael constantly as a result, fulfilling the verse, "the Eyes of God your Master are on it from the beginning of the year till its end."

ויש אומרים שלכן אין ליקח לברכה כוס שפיו צר, כיון שלא יוכלו להסתכל ביין שבתוכו. [רמ"א שם]. ויש אומרים שאין קפידא בזה, כיון שהעיקר הוא שיתן עיניו בכוס ולא במה שבתוכו. ואין להקפיד על זה אם אינו יכול להשיג בקל כלי אחר. [ט"ז, משנ"ב ס"ק יח, כה"ח ס"ק כה]

Based on this, some *Poskim* suggested that it is wrong to use a narrow cup since one can see barely any of the wine it contains. Others claimed that it does not matter; the halakha demands that one see the cup but not necessarily its contents. If someone has only a narrow cup to use and it would take some effort to get a wider cup, he may rely on the second opinion.[183]

Not to forget

Our Sages taught (*Berakhot* 51b): "He must watch it so that he will not forget it." This means that he must not forget about the cup, but Rabbenu Asher (*Berakhot* 7:35), the *Arba'a Turim* and the *Mishna Berura* wrote it means that he will not forget the blessing. Since he watches the cup throughout the time that he recites *Birkat Hamazon* so that he will remember to recite the blessing of *bore peri hagefen* in the end. Harav Elazar Azkari (commentary to *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 7:5) offered an alternative explanation – that one must keep one's eyes on the cup so that one does not drop it or spill out its contents.

Rabbenu David Abudarham (*Shalosh Se'udot*, cited in *Eliya Rabbah* 183:9) explained that one must keep one's concentration on the cup to demonstrate that the halakha permits one to drink this wine for the sake of this mitzvah of blessing God. With this in mind, the person will make sure not to drink so much that he becomes drunk.

In light of this, it is difficult to understand why the *Halakha Berura* explained that one must keep one's eyes on the cup in order not to forget *Birkat Hamazon*. First of all, why does anyone need a reminder about *Birkat Hamazon* while he is reciting it? Second, how does staring at the cup remind him of *Birkat Hamazon*? The Talmud states, "so that his mind will not leave it – *mineh*," referring to a noun that is conjugated in the masculine form. Obviously, it refers to *kos* – cup – and not *Birkat Hamazon*, which is conjugated in the feminine form.

Reading *Birkat Hamazon*

Harav Yaakov of Emden (*Mor Uktzi'a*) wrote that it is improper to shut one's eyes to concentrate on the words of *Birkat Hamazon* as is proper when reciting other prayers, since one must keep one's eyes on the *kos shel berakha*. In fact, the Arizal instructed us (*Sha'ar Hamitzvot parashat Ekev*, cited in *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 183:30) that when a person recites *Birkat Hamazon* without a cup he should keep his eyes shut in concentration. Obviously, when using a cup one must keep one's eyes open.

The *Piske Teshuvot* (footnote on page 582) ruled that it is clear from the *Arba'a Turim* and the *Shulhan Arukh* that all those who participated in the meal must watch the *kos shel berakha* during *Birkat Hamazon*, not only the leader of the *zimun*, since they wrote that the cup must be raised so that everyone can see it.

Nevertheless, this is not the common custom. Originally, everyone at the table listened to the leader of the *zimun* reciting *Birkat Hamazon* on their behalf; their task was to concentrate on his words while watching the *kos shel berakha*. Nowadays, when everyone recites *Birkat Hamazon* for himself, people are likely to become confused and recite *Birkat Hamazon* incorrectly unless they concentrate on its words. Therefore, it is no longer the custom to watch the cup in the leader's hand. Certainly, according to the explanations of Harav Elazar Azkari and Rabbenu David Abudarham, it is not necessary for anyone other than the person holding the cup to keep his eyes on it. Even according to the *Arba'a Turim* it could be that the others must keep their eyes on it during the introductory *zimun* but not during the entire *Birkat Hamazon*. Besides, Harav Zalman and the *Ben Ish Hai* did not mention anything about the others staring at the cup. It is best, therefore, that the leader of the *zimun* recite *Birkat Hamazon* while watching the *kos shel berakha* in his hand, but the others should recite it while looking in their prayer books.

Bread on one's left

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Shelah* halakha 17) cited the practice of the kabbalists that the leader of the *zimun* places some bread on the table to his left while he holds the *kos shel berakha* with his right hand.

183. This is the ruling of the *Aharonim*. The *Arukh Hashulhan* (183:5) argued that it is clear from the *Zohar* that one must see the wine in the cup. The *Halakha Berura* (page 354) suggested that this issue was debated among the *Rishonim*.