

Laws of Lefties



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The right hand plays a prominent role in many areas of *halachic* observance – priestly service in the *Beis Hamikdash* (see *Zevachim* 11a and *Menachos* 9b-10b), *chalitzah* (*Yevamos* 104a), and holding an item while reciting *birchas hanehenin* (*Brachos* 43b), to name a few. Whenever we grant preferential treatment to the right hand, our Sages, as well as contemporary authorities, discuss best practice for a left-handed individual. After all, sometimes the requirement for the right hand is a function of general significance often associated with the right (see *Zohar Parshas Naso*), and sometimes it relates to the quality of a particular performance, where the right hand signifies strength of action (see *Shemos* 15:6). Accordingly, sometimes standard performance of certain rituals or actions is done with the right hand simply because it is the dominant hand and will yield better results. In such instances, logic would dictate that a left-handed person should perform such rituals with his or her left hand. Other times, the desire for right-handed action may relate to the prestige associated with the right in which case, a lefty would also use his or her right hand. How this plays out in various areas of *halacha* is an important and relevant topic, that has been summarized in *Yad Eliezer: Halachot for Lefties* by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, as well as *Kuntres Ish Itair* by Rav Chaim Kanievsky. This article will elaborate on two areas specifically relevant to the Pesach *Seder*.


Before addressing the *halachic* ramifications of left-handedness at the *Seder*, we should note that for the most part one is considered left-handed if the majority of his or her activities are performed with greater comfort and accuracy with the left hand (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 27:6 and *Mishnah Berurah*, 23).

The first issue arises at the very beginning of the *Seder* with the recitation of *Kiddush*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 183:4) rules that we hold a *kos shel bracha* (wine-filled cup used for religious ritual) in the right hand and recite the *bracha*. He then writes (183:5) that there are those who rule that a lefty should grasp the cup in the left hand. As a *kos shel bracha*, it would follow that a lefty who follows the Sephardic tradition of the *Shulchan Aruch* should hold the *Kiddush* cup in the left hand. The Rama's silence implies that he agrees with this ruling, and a lefty following Ashkenazic tradition would also hold the *Kiddush* cup in the left hand. The *Magen Avraham* (183:9) indeed cites the Rama (OC 651:3) who, in the context of fulfilling the mitzvah of *lulav* on *Sukkos*, rules that a lefty should hold the *lulav* in the left hand as well.

It is noteworthy that the custom amongst Sephardim is mixed,

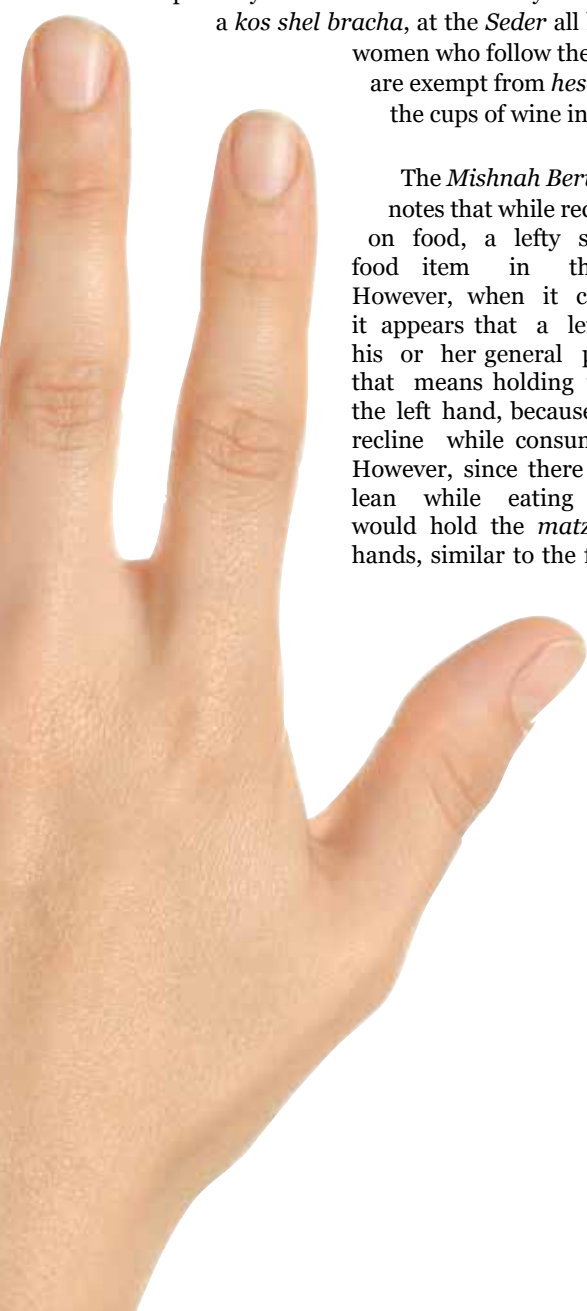
because in *Hilchos Lulav* the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 651:3) rules that even a lefty should hold the *mitzvah* item in the right hand when making the *bracha* and performing the *mitzvah*. Therefore, Rav Simcha Rabinowitz (*Piskei Teshuvos* OC 183:13) cites authorities who rule that a lefty should still hold the *kos shel bracha* in the right hand, and that many do have this practice. Such a position emphasizes the general prestige associated with the right, as opposed to the quality of the action. However, Rav Rabinowitz does qualify this ruling by stating that if a lefty is concerned that holding the cup in the right hand will lead to spillage, it is preferable according to everyone to use the stronger, more adept left hand.

The second relevant issue at the Pesach *Seder* has to do with *heseibah* (reclining). This not only complicates the question about which hand to hold the *kos shel bracha* for *Kiddush* (and the rest of the four cups), but also impacts the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah*. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 108a) states that reclining to the right is not considered to fulfill the requirement of *heseibah* at the *Seder*. The *Mishnah Berurah* (OC 572:10) offers two potential explanations for this ruling. The first, is that the right hand is used for eating so leaning on it would interfere with your ability to use it for eating. The second reason is that leaning to the right could lead to choking (based on placement of windpipe and esophagus), which, of course, poses potential danger. According to the first reason, it would follow that a lefty should lean to the right, because leaning on the left side (like the rest of the population does) would interfere with his or her ability to eat. However, according to the second explanation, the lefty should also lean on the left side, even if that will impact his or her ability to use the stronger hand for eating and drinking. After all, the biological positioning of the windpipe and esophagus does not differ based on which hand is dominant. The *Mishnah Berurah* (OC 572:11), therefore, rules that both the righty



and the lefty should lean to the left, because the concern for danger is taken very seriously in *halacha*. However, the *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid.) concludes that if the lefty leaned to the right, it suffices after the fact, because, according to the first line of reasoning mentioned above, the lefty could lean on the right in order to free the left hand for eating and drinking.

After having addressed the question of *heseibah* for the left-handed, it would appear that the first issue regarding the appropriate hand to hold the *kos shel bracha* is moot. After all, even if we adopt the simple understanding that both Ashkenazim and Sepharadim hold that a lefty should ideally grasp the *kos shel bracha* in the left hand for *Kiddush*, one must recline while drinking the four cups of wine (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 472:7). Once we establish that *heseibah* takes place towards the left even for a lefty, then the left hand is not available to hold the *kos shel bracha*. It would, therefore, appear that regardless of what opinion you follow the rest of the year regarding holding a *kos shel bracha*, at the *Seder* all lefties (other than women who follow the opinion that they are exempt from *heseibah*) would hold the cups of wine in their right hands.



The *Mishnah Berurah* (OC 206:18) notes that while reciting any blessing on food, a lefty should hold that food item in the left hand. However, when it comes to *marror* it appears that a lefty could follow his or her general practice, even if that means holding the food item in the left hand, because one does not recline while consuming the *marror*. However, since there is a *mitzvah* to lean while eating *matzah*, lefties would hold the *matzah* in their right hands, similar to the four cups of wine.