

Halacha Highlight

Overview

Something between one's self and the wall

Shulchan Aruch Siman 90 Seif 21
צריך שלא יהא דבר חוצץ בינו הבין הקיר

There may not be something that interposes between one's self and the wall
Shulchan Aruch (סעי' כ"א) writes that one should make sure that there is nothing that interposes between oneself and the front wall. Mishnah Berurah (ס"יק ס"יד) notes that there is a dispute if the intervening object is more than four *amos* away if it constitutes an interposition. This *halacha*, however, is only an enhancement of the *mitzvah* but one who is not particular about this matter does not violate any sort of injunction. Therefore, in a place that is cramped and the only place for one to *daven* will be in a place with an intervening object he should *daven* there rather than go to another room to *daven*. In such a circumstance it is preferable for one to close his eyes or *daven* from a *siddur* so that he will not be distracted by what is around him. *Poskim* note that anything that has a set place does not constitute an interposition. Therefore, one may *daven* even if there are chairs, tables, benches and *shenders* between himself and the wall (עי' מ"ב ס"יק ס"ו ופסקי תשובות אות כ"ו).

Mishnah Berurah (ס"יק ס"ג) cites the *pasuk* in Sefer Yechezkel that is the source for this *halacha*. Two reasons are given for this *halacha*. Levush writes that it is based on the concern that the intervening object will distract a person from *davening* with proper concentration. Shulchan Aruch (ס"י צ"ח סעי' ד') explains that *davening* is a replacement for *korbanos*. As such he connects a number of *halachos* related to *davening* that could be traced back to *halachos* that apply to *korbanos*. One of the *halachos* that he mentions is the *halacha* that there should be nothing intervening between one's self and the wall and he bases that on the *halacha* that when someone serves in the *Bais HaMikdash* there may be nothing that intervenes between the hand of the *kohen* and the utensil that he is to hold in his hand.

Stories to Share

A Fixed Place

ש"ע ס' צ"י י"ט: "יקבע מקום לתפילתו שלא ישנהו אם לא לצורך..."
A certain man was very proud to have found an excellent regular space in which to pray. As we find on today's amud, it is preferable to find a set place to daven in and to refrain from changing it in the absence of a pressing need. With few exceptions, this man davened in the same place in shul for an entire decade. He even hardly missed davening with his regular minyan and in his usual space during the time that his father was ill.

After his father died, the devoted son wished to daven for the amud. The only trouble was that the shul which he had davened in for so long had a set chazzan. Although there was a shteibel in his town, he was loathe to daven there. How could he ignore the halachah that one should pray in a set place? On the other hand, how could he refrain from davening for his father? He knew that in certain circumstances it was preferable to forgo praying for one's parent's soul, for example, if this would cause strife. He wondered whether keeping one's makom kavuah also constituted a good reason to abstain.

When this question reached Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, he ruled that the man should forgo his makom kavuah and pray with the other minyan. "The halachah is that if there is a pressing need one should change his place. Leading the prayers for the benefit of a parent's soul fulfills the mitzvah of honoring one's parents (עי' שו"ת רע"א, ס' ס"ח). Clearly there is no need more pressing than this! As the Rema writes, 'One who knows how to lead the prayers should do so. This is more efficacious than the mourners kaddish which was primarily instituted for minors.'"
רמ"א ביו"ד, ס' שע"ו

Siman 90 Seif 19:

A person should establish for himself a place for *davening* and he should not move unless there is a need. It is not sufficient to establish a *Bais HaKnesses* in which one *davens* but even in one's set *Bais HaKnesses* he must have a set place.

- ❖ One should set aside a place in his house to *daven* so that his family members will not distract him. (M.B. 59)
- ❖ Within four *amos* is considered a person's place. (M.B. 60)

Siman 90 Seif 20:

A person must enter the length of two doorways before he begins to *daven*. Some explain that the length of two doorways means he should walk eight *tefachim* into the *Bais HaKnesses*, meaning he should not sit right next to the door since it gives the appearance that being in the *Bais HaKnesses* is burdensome. According to this approach if he has a set seat by the doorway it is acceptable. Some explain that the concern is that he will look outside and will not be able to properly concentrate. According to this approach if the doorway does not open to the street there is no problem. Another explanation is that a person should not rush to *daven* as soon as he enters; rather he should pause the amount of time it takes to walk through two doorways. It is best to follow all three opinions.

- ❖ Bach writes that there should be a room before the sanctuary similar to the *ulam* that was in front of the *heichal* and this is common practice nowadays and consequently one should not *daven* in the front room. (M.B. 61)
- ❖ When a person *davens* immediately upon entering the *Bais HaKnesses* he will not have proper concentration. (M.B. 62)
- ❖ One should allow a greater person to enter the *Bais HaKnesses* first. (M.B. 62)

Siman 90 Seif 21:

One must assure that there is nothing that interposes between himself and the wall. Something that is permanent like the *aron* or *teivah* is not an interposition. (Only large items constitute a barrier meaning something that is ten *tefachim* tall and four *tefachim* wide but something small is not an interposition.) **Similarly, living creatures, including people are not an interposition.** It appears to me that animals are an interposition but people are not and this appears to be the position of the *Poskim* and it is possible that there is a mistake in earlier *sefarim*.

- ❖ There is no prohibition involved in this, it is merely a more enhanced way of *davening*, however, when there will be something that interposes it is preferable for one to close his eyes or read the words from a *siddur*. (M.B. 63)
- ❖ Even if one is distant from the front wall one should make an effort that something does not interpose. Pri Megadim contends that if the interposition is outside of one's four *amos* it is not an issue. (M.B. 64)
- ❖ Taz maintains that something that is needed for *davening* does not constitute an interposition. (M.B. 66)
- ❖ Some authorities maintain that even small objects could be an interposition but benches in the *Bais HaKnesses* are not an interposition according to all opinions. (M.B. 68)

Siman 90 Seif 22:

There is an opinion who maintains that one should not *daven* while standing behind another person and it is appropriate to be concerned with this opinion.

- ❖ There is no prohibition involved if one *davens* behind another person and it is merely something that one should avoid if possible. In a *Bais HaKnesses* where it is not possible to avoid this issue it is permitted to *daven* while standing behind another person but those who are meticulous in their observance will *daven* in front of the wall. (M.B. 69)

Siman 90 Seif 23:

It is not correct to *daven* in front of garments that have a drawing on them even if the image is not embroidered. If one will have to *daven* in front of a garment or wall that has an image on it he should close his eyes. Therefore it is prohibited for one to draw pictures on the *siddur* he uses for *davening* so that he should become distracted. Garments that have inappropriate things drawn on them may not even be used for sitting in a *Bais HaKnesses*.

- ❖ Looking at the picture will be distracting. (M.B. 70)
- ❖ One should not paint pictures on the walls of the *Bais HaKnesses* unless they are higher than the height of the congregants. It is prohibited to *daven* facing a mirror even if one's eyes are closed. (M.B. 71)