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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן צ' סעיף כ"ד-כ"ז

Halacha Highlight

Standing behind one's *rebbi* for *davening*

Shulchan Aruch Siman 90 Seif 24

לא יתפלל בצד רבו ולא אחורי רבו ולא לפניו

One should not stand next to, behind or in front of his *rebbi*

The Gemara Berachos (27b) teaches that one is not permitted to *daven* while standing next to or behind his *rebbi*. Rambam (פ"ה מהל' תלמוד תורה ה"ו) adds that one is not allowed to *daven* while standing in front of his *rebbi* as well. Tur explains that although *davening* in front of one's *rebbi* is not mentioned in the Gemara, it is an obvious extension of the *halacha* that one may not stand next to or behind his *rebbi* while *davening*. Rashi explains the reason that it is prohibited to stand next to one's *rebbi* for *davening* is that it gives the appearance that one is equal to his *rebbi* and standing behind him also is a display of haughtiness. Tosafos (ד"ה ולא) writes that the reason one may not stand behind his *rebbi* while *davening* is that it appears as though he is bowing to his *rebbi*. Meiri suggests another reason and that is so that one does not trouble his *rebbi* in the event that his *rebbi* finishes *shemone esrei* before him and is will have to wait for his student to finish before he can take his three steps back.

A practical difference between some of the reasons for the prohibition against standing behind one's *rebbi* relates to the dispute between Shulchan Aruch and Rema whether the prohibition applies when *davening* in the *Bais HaKnesses*. Bais Yosef writes that if one follows the explanation that standing behind one's *rebbi* will trouble him in that he may not be able to take three steps back there is no difference whether they are in the *Bais HaKnesses* or not. He then adds that one should take that opinion into account; therefore in Shulchan Aruch he does not distinguish between *davening* with a *minyan* or not. Rema, however, draws this distinction and it is based on the explanation of Tosafos that standing behind one's *rebbi* gives the appearance that one is bowing to him and when standing in the *Bais HaKnesses* no one will have that mistaken impression.

Stories to Share

Where One Stands

ש"ע סי' צ', כ"ד: "לא יתפלל בצד רבו..."

Chassidim often surround their rebbe during davening. Although they often appear very inspired by this, perhaps it is still incorrect. After all, we find on today's amud that under certain circumstances it is forbidden to daven near one's rebbe.

Of course, it is possible to explain that one is only prohibited to stand near his rebbe muvhak. As the Chochmas Adam writes, "I did not explain all of the details of the halachos of how one should comport himself in front of his rebbe since they are only relevant to a rebbe muvhak—a rarity in our times."

Although we may have thought that one should still avoid davening near a great person since he may be a very great person in his generation who has the halachah of a rebbe muvhak, the Chasam Sofer explains that it is worthwhile to pray near a tzaddik if possible.

He said, "We cannot fathom to special merit of praying near a tzaddik. Under the circumstances that davening near tzaddikim is permitted, there is a great advantage to doing so. This is a wondrous segulah to ensure that one's prayers are accepted."

חתם סופר, בהגהותיו על ש"ע, סי' ק"ב

Interestingly, we find that the opposite is also true. In the words of the Sefer Chasidim: "One should not sit or even stand next to a wicked person during prayers. The Divine presence is distanced from a wicked person since he thinks unclean or negative thoughts."

ספר חסידים, סי' תשס"ז

Overview

Siman 90 Seif 24:

One may not *daven* next to, behind or in front of one's *rebbi*. According to some opinions this is limited to when one is not *davening* with a *minyan* but when *davening* with a *tzibbur* if this is the way the seats are arranged it is not a problem to *daven* in front of or behind one's *rebbi*. (Although it is appropriate to be stringent the custom is to be lenient.) **If one distanced himself four *amos* it is permitted** (See Yoreh Deah 142:16)

- It is haughty for one to *daven* next to his *rebbi* and a *rebbi* is defined as the teacher of a majority of one's wisdom or the *gadol hador*. (M.B. 73)
- Chaye Adam contends that the same *halacha* applies to one's father. (M.B. 73)
- When choosing a place one should be at least four amos and three steps behind one's *rebbi*. (M.B. 78)

Siman 90 Seif 25:

A student who is a colleague may *daven* behind his *rebbi*.

- He may also *daven* next to his *rebbi* but not in front of him. (M.B. 81)

Siman 90 Seif 26:

Any place where one may not read *shema* one may not read *shemone esrei*. The same manner in which one distances himself from waste, bad smells, a corpse and seeing an *ervah* for *shema* is the manner one must distance himself for *shemone esrei*.

- The same *halacha* is true for studying Torah or any other *davar she'b'kedusha*. (M.B. 82)

Siman 90 Seif 27:

If one was *davening* and a child urinated in the *Bais HaKnesses* one should stand silently until water is brought to pour on the urine or one should move forward or to the side four *amos* or leave the *Bais HaKnesses* to finish one's *tefila*. It is preferable to move to another place than to wait silently lest one remain silent for the amount of time it takes to complete *shemone esrei* and one would be required to restart from the beginning.

- Mentioning *tefila* emphasizes that even though he is standing in *tefila* he must distance himself. (M.B. 83)
- It is prohibited to interrupt by speaking. (M.B. 84)
- If a child brings waste into the *Bais HaKnesses* and others don't realize it is permitted to warn people even by speaking if necessary to save them from violating a prohibition. If, however, one has something that could be thrown on the waste or urine one should cover it rather than interrupt by speaking. (M.B. 84)
- Chaye Adam writes that if one fears that he will pause the time it takes to complete *shemone esrei* and he cannot distance himself four *amos* he may rely on Rashba who maintains that one may complete his *tefila* since he is already in the midst of *davening*. (M.B. 85)