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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן צ"ד סעיף א'-ב'

Halacha Highlight

Davening facing the correct direction

Shulchan Aruch Siman 94 Seif 1
יחזיר פניו לארץ ישראל
One should turn his face towards Eretz Yisroel

Shulchan Aruch (סע' א') writes that when *davening* one should face Eretz Yisroel, Yerushalayim, the Bais HaMikdash and the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. In the event that one is *davening* at home and the place that would face Yerushalayim would prove distracting, e.g. there is a window that opens to a busy street, or pictures, it is better to *daven* facing a different direction that will facilitate one's concentration rather than towards Eretz Yisroel if that would prove distracting. The reason is that concentration during *davening* is a higher value than facing towards Eretz Yisroel. The only cautionary remark is that according to many opinions one should not *daven* facing west since Tikunei Zohar writes very strongly against such a practice (פסקי תשובות אות ב').

Be'er Heitev (סק"ג) cites Teshuvas Yad Eliyahu who discusses what one should do if he finds himself *davening* in a *shul* that does not face the correct direction. Yad Eliyahu maintains that one should *daven* facing Eretz Yisroel even if the entire congregation is facing a different direction and such a practice does not involve haughtiness nor does he have to be concerned that he will generate enmity. Other authorities disagree and contend that one should *daven* in the same direction as the congregation even though they are facing the wrong direction. Mishnah Berurah (סק"י) only cites opinions who maintain that when faced with this situation one should face the same direction as the congregation. Sefer Chaye Moshe references other places where he discusses similar issues and he asserts that as a rule when an activity that does not involve a potential prohibition it is permitted to deviate from what the manner in which the congregation does something. Therefore, since *davening* in one direction or another represents a preference rather than a prohibition he maintains that one would be permitted to deviate from what the congregation does.

Stories to Share

The Custom at the Kosel

ש"ע ס' צ"ד, א': "ויכוין גם לירושלים ולמקדש ולבית קדשי הקדשים..."

On today's amud we find that while davening one should face—or at least focus his heart on—Yerushalayim, the Beis Hamikdash and the kodesh hakodashim.

Although many people believe that the kodesh hakodashim is under the Dome of the Rock, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, shlit"a, points out that this is not actually conclusive. "One sees people at the Kosel davening while turned towards the left. They do this since they believe the kodesh hakodashim is under the Dome of the Rock. If this were true, then davening in this position would fulfill a clear halachah outlined in the gemara: to face the holy of holies while davening. It is interesting to note, however, that this is not necessarily correct. There are several works written about this topic explaining why this may well be an erroneous assumption. It somehow seems appropriate if Hashem caused the Arabs to win and retain control of the area to ensure that it is not desecrated by Jews, but did not allow them to build over the kodesh hakodashim. According to the other way of viewing things, the kodesh hakodashim itself is towards the middle of Kosel in an unbuilt area between the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa. If this is true, it would validate the prevalent custom not to face left while davening at the Kosel. This would also fit well with the Zohar which states that the Even Hashesiyah was miraculously swallowed up until the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt.

He added, "It is certainly noteworthy that when the Belzer Rebbe came to Eretz Yisrael, he was careful to daven specifically in the middle of the Kosel, definitely not to the left. Rav Aharon of Belz was meticulous to always daven at the same place. It would appear that they understood that this is the most likely possibility."

תשובות והנהגות, ח"ג, סי' ל"ט

Overview

Siman 94 Seif 1:

When one stands to *daven* – if he is outside of Eretz Yisroel he should face Eretz Yisroel and have in mind as well Yerushalayim, the Bais HaMikdash and the Kodesh HaKodashim. If he is in Eretz Yisroel he should face Yerushalayim and should have in mind as well the Bais HaMikdash and the Kodesh HaKodashim. If he is in Yerushalayim he should face the Bais HaMikdash and should have in mind the Kodesh HaKodashim. If he is standing behind the *kapores* he should face the *kapores*.

- Shulchan Aruch means that although one can not face these more specific locations one should imagine as though he is standing facing the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushlayim in the place of the Kodesh HaKodashim. (M.B. 3)

Siman 94 Seif 2:

If one *davens* facing another direction he should turn his face towards Eretz Yisroel - if he is outside of Eretz Yisroel, towards Yerushalayim - if he is in Eretz Yisroel or towards the Bais HaMikdash - if he is in Yerushalayim. The reason why we face east is that we live west of Eretz Yisroel and by turning east we face Eretz Yisroel. The Aron Kodesh and the direction in which we *daven* should not be aligned directly towards the rising of the sun since that is a practice of heretics. Rather we face where the sun will be closer to midday. One who desires to fulfill the dictum that one who wishes to become wealthy should face north and one who wishes to become wise should face south should nevertheless angle themselves towards the east.

- Shulchan Aruch refers to one who wishes to become wise or wealthy and Chazal taught that for wisdom one should face south and for wealth one should face north. Alternatively, he refers to one who is travelling by donkey and cannot turn towards Eretz Yisroel. (M.B. 8)
- Since we daven facing east the custom is to place the Aron Kodesh on the eastern wall and if it cannot be placed on the eastern wall it should be placed on the southern wall. In the event the Aron was placed on another wall one must face east. (M.B. 9)
- If one began davening facing north or south one may not uproot his feet to turn east; rather he should just turn his face east. If one is in shul there are Poskim who permit him to turn his body towards the east. (M.B. 10)
- If a Bais HaKnesses placed the Aron on the southern wall and everyone *davens* facing the Aron, even though their behavior is improper one should nevertheless face the same direction as the *tzibbur* but angle towards the east. (M.B. 10)
- Later authorities agree that in countries that are east of Eretz Yisroel but are also slightly north of Eretz Yisroel they should construct the wall slightly southeast so that they will be facing Eretz Yisroel, the Bais HaMikdash and the Kodesh HaKodashim. Lechem Chamudos rationalizes the practice to not be particular about this but agrees that *l'chatchila* one should direct the Aron southeast. (M.B. 11)
- Pri Megadim writes that in places where the Aron faces east the rov should be seated north of the Aron so that he could angle south to become wise. Those places that have the Aron facing southeast the rov should be seated on the south side of the Aron assuming this will not generate an argument. (M.B. 11)
- Rashi maintains that one should face east and angle themselves to the north or south and this is the correct practice so that one dos not face a different direction than the *tzibbur*. (M.B. 12)