The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
Wed, Jun 24, 2026 ■ ט' תמוז, תשפ"ו
סימן צ"ח סעיף א'-ה'

Halacha Highlight

Concentration while *davening*

Shulchan Aruch Siman 98 Seif 1

המתפלל צריך שיכוין בלבו פרוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו

One who *davens* must focus his attention on the meaning of the words that come out of his lips

Shulchan Aruch (סע' א') stresses the importance of one contemplating the meaning of the words of *davening*. Shelah (מס' תמיד עניני תפלה נר מצוה ז' ד"ה במחשבה) explains that every person should think about the meaning of each word and this contemplation should take place before the word even leaves one's mouth. Likutei Maharich (סדר הנהגת התפלה) further explains this approach. He cites Sefer Sod Yachin U'Boaz who writes that in order to have proper concentration when reading the words of *davening* it is necessary for one to think about the word before saying it. For example, before reading אדון עולם אשר מלך one should think about the meaning of that phrase rather than think about the meaning of the phrase after the words were read. After the word was read it is too late to think about its meaning since the word was already read and at that point it is comparable to a body without a soul. It is very hard to *daven* in this manner without a *siddur* and Likutei Maharich, in fact, writes that *davening* in this manner is a *segulah* for *davening* with a siddur.

Another approach to concentration during *davening* is to strive to contemplate the meaning of the words as one reads them. This approach can be traced back to the language of Rabbeinu Yonah who is the source of this *halacha*. He writes that one who *davens* should concentrate, meaning, he should focus his attention on the words that he is reciting so that he should know what he is saying (פסקי תשובות).

Mishnah Berurah (סק"א) in the name of Pnei Yehoshua explains that regarding the general thoughts that one should have while *davening* that are recorded in Shulchan Aruch one should contemplate these matters before one begins to *daven* since during *davening* one's attention must be focused on the meaning of the words that he is reading.

Overview

Siman 98 Seif 1:

One who *davens* must concentrate on the meaning of the words that he reads. He should imagine the Divine Presence to be in front of him and should remove all thoughts that would burden him until his thoughts and focus are exclusively on his *davening*. He should consider, if he were appearing before a king of flesh and blood he would prepare his words and concentrate so that he should not make a mistake, so certainly he should do so when conversing with Hashem who examines a persons thoughts. This was the practice of the pious one who were mighty in their actions and would meditate during their *tefila* to the point that they were released from their bodies and strengthened their minds until they almost reached the level of prophecy. If another thought enters one's mind while *davening* he should be silent until the thought goes away. One must think about things that subdue his heart to his Father in Heaven and should not think about light-headed matters. Before *davening* one should contemplate Hashem's Exaltedness and the lowliness of man and one should remove all pleasures from his heart. One may not kiss his young children in the *Bais HaKnesses* so that he should set in his heart that there is no love comparable to the love for Hashem.

- Pnei Yehoshua explains that the thoughts recorded in Shulchan Aruch should be contemplated before davening rather than during davening since one is obligated to concentrate on the meaning of the words while davening. (M.B. 1)
- Elya Rabba cited Kitzur Shelah who writes that it is a segula to remove foreign thoughts for one to pass his right hand on his forehead three times and each time he should recite the pasuk לב טהור ברא לי וכו'. Similarly, if a foreign thought comes to mind during davening one should pause and then pass his hand over his forehead as described above and contemplate that pasuk. (M.B. 2)
- Shelah wrote very strongly against those who bring their young children to the Bais HaKnesses who haven't yet reached chinuch age who play and diminish the sanctity of the *Bais HaKnesses* and distract others. Furthermore, when they grow older that can't abandon their training of not treating the *Bais HaKnesses* with proper respect. (M.B. 3)

Stories to Share

From the Ground Up

ש"ע ס' צ"ח, א': "ויחשב קודם התפלה מרוממות הא-ל ושפלות עצמו..."

On today's amud we find that before praying one should consider the greatness of Hashem and his own lowliness.

When Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz mentioned this halachah he pointed out that this was the essential difference between the famous brothers, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and Reb Zusia of Anapoli. (הגדה של פסח אמרי קודש, ע' קצ"ד) They argued whether one should first work on humility and then rise to see the greatness of Hashem, or instead start by focusing on G-d's greatness, which naturally leads to humility? They traveled to their mentor, the holy Mezritcher Maggid to put their quandry before him.

"Rebbe, which is the better way?" they asked.

"Both paths are divrei Elokim chayim!" smiled the Maggid.

"But isn't one better than the other?" they pressed him again.

The Maggid paused a moment and then answered, "Both paths lead to Hashem, but only one is absolutely secure—the way of beginning with humility, and then looking up toward His greatness."

He added, "You can see this from the old saying: You can't fall from the ground!"

The Beis Avrohom of Slonim applies this concept to the haggadah, about which chazal said, "It begins in disgrace and ends in praise." We are first humbled by seeing where we come from—our ancestors served idols, and is there anything worse than that? We needed to be built from the ground up, and in the end, "Hashem drew us close to serve Him!"

מובא בספר בית אברהם

Siman 98 Seif 2:

One should not *daven* in a place where there is something that is distracting or during a time in which one is distracted. Nowadays we are not careful about this since we do not have such strong concentration during *davening*.

Shulchan Aruch refers to one who is distracted from distress, anger or traveling. (M.B. 5)

- It is obvious that if one is angry when one wants to daven he must remove those thoughts that would prove distracting. (M.B. 6)
- Even though we do not concentrate well during davening one should try as best as he can. (M.B. 7)

Siman 98 Seif 3:

One should *daven* in the manner of supplication similar to the pauper who is asking for something at someone's door and one should not *daven* in a way that it gives the impression that *davening* is a burden from which one only wants to fulfill his obligation.

- One should be aware that there is no force in the world that can fulfill one's request without the will of Hashem. (M.B. 8)
- If one does not think that he is approaching Hashem with a request but rather he is merely fulfilling his obligation it is not proper and one must be very cautious about this. (M.B. 9)

Siman 98 Seif 4:

***Tefila* replaces *korbanos*, therefore, one must be careful that his prayer resemble a *korban* in terms of intent, meaning one should not mix other thoughts in one's *tefila* just as improper thoughts can nullify the effect of one's *korban*. One must stand as is required when offering a *korban*, one must have a set place similar to the *korbanos* that had a set place where they were slaughtered and where the blood was applied. One may not have anything interposing between himself and the wall similar to a korban that becomes disqualified if there is something that interposes between one's hand and the sacred vessel. It is appropriate to have nice garments dedicated for use during *davening* as did the *kohaim* except that not everyone has the means for that. Nevertheless, one should have nice pants for *davening* that are clean.**

Siman 98 Seif 5:

One should not expect that Hashem will fulfill his request because he concentrated well during *davening*. The opposite is true because such an expectation highlights one's sins (because one's actions are scrutinized when he is confident in his merit); rather one should think that Hashem will do this out of his kindness and he should think to himself, "Who am I who is poor and despised to ask something from Hashem unless it is the result of His abundance of mercy in the way that he interacts with mankind."