The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן קי"ג סעיף א'-ט'

Halacha Highlight

Bowing in prayer

Shulchan Aruch Siman 113 Seif 4

אלו ברכות ששוחין בהם

These are the *berachos* during which one bows

Shulchan Aruch (סע' א') writes that we bow at the beginning and end of the *beracha* of *avos* and *hoda'ah*. If a person wants to bow at the beginning or end of another *beracha* he should be instructed not to do so. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ב) offers two reasons why one may not bow at the beginning and end of any of the other *berachos* of *shemone esrei*. His first explanation is that bowing when not mandated by Chazal could uproot their original enactment since each person will decide to bow when he thinks it is appropriate. The second reason is that is haughty for a person to behave in a way that indicates that he feels that he is superior than the other members of the *tzibbur*.

Poskim debate whether it is appropriate for the *shaliach tzibbur* to bow at the beginning of the ברכה מעין ז' that is recited after the Shabbos night *amidah* in *shul*. Mikor Chaim (סי' רס"ח בקיצור הלכות סע' ח') writes that the *shaliach tzibbur* should bow at the beginning of the *beracha* and this position is also held by Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (תפלה כהלכתה פכ"א סע' ל"א). On the other hand, Teshuvas Levush Mordechai (מהדו"ב סי' צ"ז אות ב') writes that there is no source that indicates that the *shaliach tzibbur* should bow when he begins ברכה מעין ז'. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (הליכות שלמה תפלה פ"ט הע' 34) relates that he used to maintain that the *shaliach tzibbur* should not bow when he begins ברכה מעין ז' but when he saw Mikor Chaim's position he withdrew his position in deference to the Mikor Chaim (written by the author of Teshuvas Chavos Yair).

Biur Halacha (ד"ה בסוף כל ברכה) cites Lechem Chamudos who writes that one should not bow when saying any *beracha* other than *avos* and *hoda'ah* even for *berachos* that are not in *shemone esrei*. For this reason he opposed bowing when reciting the *beracha* upon receiving an *aliyah*. Magen Avrohom (סי' קל"ט סק"ו) cites authorities who disagree and maintain that it is permitted since the bowing is done to give honor to the Torah. Mishnnah Berurah (שם ס"ק י"ט) writes that one should bow in the middle of the *beracha* rather than the beginning or end of the *beracha*.

Stories to Share

"We Bow before You"

ש"ע ס' קי"ג, א': "באבות תחלה וסוף ובהודאה תחלה וסוף"

Rav Chaim Freidlander explains the deeper meaning of bowing during modim with a fascinating insight. "The Avudraham writes that the word modim means to bow, as we find in the Targum in Shmuel. (שמואל ב', ט"ז:ד). The reason for this is because bowing is part of the proper expression of our gratitude to Hashem for all the many good things in our lives. Bowing is a way to show submission before the one before whom we bow, while one who stands upright demonstrates that he owes nothing to the one who bows before him.

"Bowing is a very powerful expression of self-nullification and absolute dependence, and explains why our very next words in modim are: 'צור חיינו—Rock of our lives.' We give thanks and express our praise for Hashem and are completely nullified to Him in this prayer.

"This also explains why we also bow at the beginning of shemoneh esrei. We show that the entire character of our prayer is to demonstrate that we can do nothing without Hashem. We internalize that by ourselves we are nothing, since everything we have is a free kindness from Hashem. It follows that we should turn only to Him for assistance. We must rely on Him for everything."

שפתי חיים, ביאורי תפלת שהו"ע, מאמר מודים משתחוים

Overview

Siman 113 Seif 1:

In the following *berachos* one bows, in *avos* at the beginning and the end and in *hoda'ah* at the beginning and the end. If one wants to bow at the end of another *beracha* or at its beginning he should be taught not to bow but in the middle of a *beracha* one may bow.

- Bowing extra times uproots Chazal's enactment and it appears haughty. (M.B. 2)

Siman 113 Seif 2:

Those who have the custom to bow on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur when they recite זכרנו and מי כמוך must stand when they reach the end of the *beracha*. Even though one bows at the end of *avos*, he must nevertheless stand straight at the end of זכרנו so it will appear as though he is bowing to fulfill his obligation

- Similarly those who daven the entire amidah while bowing must stand up straight at the end and beginning of each beracha. (M.B. 5)
- For זכרנו one stands straight for a few words before ברוך אתה so that he can bow when he reads the words ברוך אתה but in מי כמוך one stands upright before the words ברוך אתה. (M.B. 6)

Siman 113 Seif 3:

One who bows for ולך לבדך וכו' or for וכל קומה וכו' or during *hoda'ah* in *hallel* or *birkas hamazon* is behaving improperly (for one should only bow where Chazal instructed).

- The restriction is against extra bowing in *shemone esrei* but one may bow when not saying *shemone esrei* as he pleases. (M.B. 9)

Siman 113 Seif 4:

One must bow during *davening* so that his vertebrae stick out. One should not bow at his waist and keep his head upright; rather his head should be bent over in the shape of a cane.

Siman 113 Seif 5:

One should not bow so far down that his mouth is level with the belt of his pants. One who is old or ill and cannot bow so that his vertebrae stick out should bow his head and that is enough since it is then evident that he wants to bow further but it would cause him pain.

- Bowing too far appears haughty. (M.B. 11)

Siman 113 Seif 6:

When one bows he should bow quickly and in one motion and when straightening he should straighten slowly, his head rising first and then the rest of his body so that it should not appear burdensome.

Siman 113 Seif 7:

One bows when saying the word ברוך and one straightens when saying Hashem's name.

- One bends his knees when he says ברוך, when he says אתה he bends over so that his vertebrae stick out. For *modim* one does both steps at once. One must remain in this position until he says Hashem's name. (M.B. 12)

Siman 113 Seif 8:

If one is *davening* and is ready to bow and at that moment a person with a picture of an idol in his hand passes by, he should not bow even though his intent is for Hashem.

Siman 113 Seif 9:

One may not add descriptions of Hashem beyond הא-ל הגדול הגבור והנורא. This restriction is limited to *tefila* since one may not change Chazal's wording but when supplicating or during requests or while praising Hashem to one's self there is no restriction. Nevertheless, one who is adding praises should say those praises from *pesukim*.