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Parshas Vayechi ✍️ Rabbi Baruch Klagsbrun

Coping with Golus

In a Sefer Torah, the beginning of a paragraph is marked by a blank space that separates it from the previous paragraph. The one exception to this rule is at the beginning of Parshas Vayechi, whose first paragraph is separated from the end of Vayigash by a space of only one letter. Rashi explains that the sealing off of this paragraph is meant to express the extent of the suffering of the Yidden at the hands of the Egyptians. “Nistemu Einahem V'Libam Shel Yisroel” – the eyes and hearts of the Bnei Yisroel were closed – they became emotionally unable to cope with the decrees that eventually forced them into servitude, and beyond. This began as soon as Yaakov Avinu died, which is discussed later in this parsha.

The commentaries raise several issues with this explanation. First, the servitude in Mitzrayim did not begin when Yaakov died. Rather, it started only after Levi, the last of the Shvotim passed away. This did not take place until over seventy years later. Why then, does Rashi connect the death of Yaakov to our slavery in Egypt? Second, even according to Rashi, the ‘closed paragraph’ should appear much later in the Parsha, as Yaakov’s passing is not mentioned until after shishi. Quite the contrary, at the beginning of the Parsha, Yaakov was still alive and there was no suffering as of yet.

Perhaps, we can offer the following explanation, based on Hagoan Rav Moshe Feinstein ZT”L, in his Sefer Darash Moshe. When the shvotim first arrived in Mitzrayim, they were given a royal welcome. As brothers of Yosef, they were automatically given royal status, with all of the benefits that come with it. They were housed in Goshen, the prime choice of Egyptian real estate. Not to forget about their spiritual needs, they even had their own Yeshiva, with none less than Yaakov Avinu serving as Rosh Yeshiva. What the shvotim didn’t completely internalize was that despite all of these luxuries, they were actually in golus. It was only after seventeen years of this royal treatment, when Yaakov dies, that the brothers and their families

get their first wake-up call to the realities of their situation. Yaakov Avinu had ordered them to bury him back in Eretz Canaan, in the Meoras Hamachpelah. However, the brothers found themselves unable to fulfill their promise without first receiving Paroah’s permission to leave. This caught them totally off guard. They suddenly realized that not only were they now in golus, but they had been fooling themselves from the day they first arrived in Egypt. This sudden dose off reality came as such a shock for them, that they were never able to fully recover. As the situation began to deteriorate, they felt themselves unable to cope with each new problem, until in the end “their eyes and hearts were closed” from all of their troubles.

This, says Reb Moshe Zt”l, could have all been avoided had they had the right state of mind when Yaakov Avinu was still alive. Had they been more aware of their situation back then, they would have expected that there would be difficult times ahead and prepared themselves emotionally and spiritually for the task of golus that lay before them. The root of the problem lay not seven decades later when Levi died, but during the first few years when they could have prepared themselves, but did not.

This should serve as a lesson for Yidden throughout our long exile. The ability to forge ahead even in tough times is based on an awareness of being in golus even when things are going well. It is then possible to prepare for rougher times to come.

May this lesson soon become only theoretical, when our last golus will finally come to a joyful end, bimeheira beyameinu.

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Chazoras HaShatz

Halachos and Conduct for the Repetition of *Shmoneh Esrei*

Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein

he most fundamental part of each of our three daily *tefillas* is certainly the *tefillah* of *Shmoneh Esrei*, the 19 *brochos* that *Anshei Knesses HaG'dolah* authored for each and every Jew to pray in quiet meditation before HaShem.¹ *Chazal* instituted that immediately following this *tefillah* at *Shacharis* and *Mincha*, the *Shliach Tzibbur* (leader of the services) is to repeat the entire *Shmoneh Esrei* aloud for all to hear.² In the times of the *Mishna* and *Gemora*, there were many people who were not fluent in the text of the daily prayers. Given that, and the fact that there were not enough printed copies of the text of the prayers available, the original impetus for the institution of this repetition of the *tefillah* was in order to give those who could not say the *Shmoneh Esrei* themselves an opportunity to fulfill their responsibility to pray by listening intently to the *tefillah* of the *shliach tzibbur*.³

In truth, however, as with many decrees of *Chazal*, the reason given for this *tefillah* in the *Gemora* is only the tip of the iceberg. The *seforim* bring down a much deeper reason for the repetition out loud of the *Shmoneh Esrei*. They explain that this second *Shmoneh Esrei* is actually a far more powerful *tefillah* than the first, personal, quiet one.⁴ This *tefillah*, said specifically out loud, reaches “higher” and is more impervious to being “deflected.” Any imperfections that existed in one’s personal quiet *tefillah* are actually “repaired” by his paying attention to the *Chazoras HaShatz* properly.⁵ The Vilna Gaon *zt”l* explained that if one feels his *tefillas* are not being answered, he should focus on paying attention to *Chazoras HaShatz*, for that *tefillah* is accepted more by HaShem than the personal one.⁶ Keeping the immense power of this *tefillah* in mind, we can approach the practical *halachos* with a new appreciation.

Basic Conduct

During *Chazoras HaShatz*, the *tzibbur* is to remain silent and pay attention to the words of the *shatz*. Some *poskim* tell us that it is preferable to focus on the *Chazoras HaShatz* “inside,” following silently⁷ along with him in the *siddur*.⁸ It is preferable for one to stand⁹ in one place¹⁰ for *Chazoras HaShatz*. If one is weak, it is permissible for him to sit.¹¹ It is still, however, preferable to stand from the beginning of *Chazoras HaShatz* through *Kedusha*.¹² Additionally, when it comes to *Modim* (the time at which the *tzibbur* must bow together with the *chazzan*, one who is sitting, for whatever reason, must stand (if possible) in order to bow from a standing position.¹³

Talking During *Chazoras HaShatz*

Speaking during *Chazoras HaShatz* is strictly forbidden.^{14,15} Given what the *Poskim* and *Mekubalim* tell us regarding this special *tefillah* (above), it is perhaps understandable why the *Shulchan Aruch* uses extremely harsh language for one who speaks during the *chazzan’s* repetition of *Shmoneh Esrei*. Regarding this *halacha* is the only place in the entire *Shulchan Aruch* that the phrase “*gadol avono m’niso*, his sin is too great to bear” is used.¹⁶ The *Gedolei Acharonim* even encourage shuls to have an appointed person to see to it that there is no talking during *Chazoras HaShatz* [and indeed to mete out “punishments” or humiliate publicly those who speak at that time.]¹⁷

Learning During *Chazoras HaShatz*

The *halacha* is clear that if there are not at least nine people listening to the *chazzan* and answering *amein* to his *brochos*, his *brochos* are as if they were “*livatolah*, in vain.”¹⁸ There is therefore no question that if there are only nine people available for answering that they are all prohibited from engaging in any sort of learning during *Chazoras HaShatz*.¹⁹ However, in addition to one’s own requirement to listen to the *Shatz*, there is another

issue that has been brought up. The *Gedolei HaPoskim* have unanimously ruled that one may not learn – even if there are enough others listening and answering – as others may learn from this to take *Chazoras HaShatz* lightly and may come, G-d forbid, to even speak during that time. Despite the seemingly widespread nature of this practice, the *Poskim* do not seek to justify or find reasons to permit it. In fact, they consistently forbid and discourage it.²⁰ HaGaon Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlit”a* even suggests that one may not be “*yotzei*” with learning done at that time, as it is a *mitzvah haba’ah b’aveirah*.²¹

B’ezras HaShem, in these difficult times for *Klal Yisroel*, we should be *zocheh* to have all of our *tefillas* accepted and answered.

¹ See *Orach Chaim* 101:2, that *Shmoneh Esrei* should preferably not be said aloud, but rather in a quiet voice that is audible only to ourselves. Even the person standing next to us should not be able to hear our words [*Mishna Berurah* s.k. 6]. Less than this, however, (such as merely thinking the words without any sound actually leaving our lips) is not acceptable for any of our required *tefillas*.

² *Rosh HaShana* 33-34b and *O.C.* 124:1

³ *ibid.* See *Emes L’Yaakov* on *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* note 152 where HaGaon Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky *zt”l* is quoted regarding *Chazoras HaShatz*. Rav Yaakov explained that the original institution of *Chazoras HaShatz* was only for the “regular” shuls where those who in fact did not know the *tefillas* by heart were found. In the *Batei Medrashim*, however, where only those who knew the text themselves could be found, there was never a *takanah* to have *Chazoras HaShatz* to begin with. This is why, he explained, many yeshivos to this day do not have a *Chazoras HaShatz* at *Mincha*. [At *Shacharis*, there is no other choice than for everyone to begin together right away because of the requirement of *semichus Geulah l’Tefillah*.]

⁴ *Yesod viShoresh haAvodah* 18:6; *Kaf HaChaim* 125:2; *She’arim B’Tefillah* (Rav Shimshon Pinkus *zt”l*) page 14 who explains that the difference in “level” between the quiet *Shmoneh Esrei* and the *Chazoras HaShatz* is so extreme that they are in fact incomparable.

⁵ *Ben Ish Chai Terumah* year 1 #2.

⁶ *Kesser Rosh* #44. See also *Ben Ish Chai* and *Yesod viShoresh haAvodah* *ibid.*

⁷ One should not speak any of the words out loud. [*M.B.* 124:16]

⁸ The *GR”A* in *Ma’aseh Rav* #43 states that this is how we are to follow *Chazoras HaShatz*. The *M.B.*, however, indicates that this is certainly a pious act, but not necessary *min haDin* [124:26].

⁹ See *Rambam Tefillah* 9:3 and *Rema* 124:4. See *Ishei Yisroel* chap. 24 note 67 for various opinions on this matter.

¹⁰ See *Tefillah K’Hilchaso* chap. 13 note 78 in the name of HaGaon Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *shlit”a* that it is better to sit down than to “mill around.”

¹¹ See *Ishei Yisroel* note 78 who cites *Kaf HaChaim* 124:24.

¹² *Ishei Yisroel* *ibid.* citing *Ketzos HaShulchan* 22 s.k. 21.

¹³ *Ishei Yisroel* 13:38 citing *Yichaveh Da’as* 5:11.

¹⁴ This does not necessarily include those who are not currently part of the *minyan* in progress. Regarding those learning in a shul where a *minyan* forms and begins to daven, see *Halichos Shlomo* 9:6 who says that they only need to stop their learning for *Bar’chu*, *Kedusha* and *Modim* (as well as *Birchas Kohanim*). Even *amein* and “*Yehei shmei rabbol*” need not be answered.

¹⁵ *O.C.* 124:7

¹⁶ This is the phrase used by Kayin (Cain) following the murder of his brother [Bereishis 4:13]. See HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilbershtein (*Tuvcha Yabi’u* vol. 1 pages 53-54) who discusses this seemingly strange comparison.

¹⁷ *Vovay Ha’amudim* brought *lihalacha* in *Eliyahu Rabba* 124:12 and *Pri Megadim* (E.A.) 124:11. [See also *M.B.* 124:27 who quotes only the first half of this statement but omits the part regarding the punishments. Only in the *Sha’ar HaTzyun* (28) does he write “see there (*Pri Megadim*) for more.”]

¹⁸ *O.C.* 124:4

¹⁹ *Iggeros Moshe* *O.C.* 4:19

²⁰ *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 124:6; *Mishna Berura* 124:18; *Aruch HaShulchan* 124:9; *Kaf HaChaim* 124:16; *Iggeros Moshe* *O.C.* 4:19; HaGaon Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt”l* in *Halichos Shlomo* chap. 9 note 11; *Teshuvos ViHanagos* 1:106; *Teshuvos Az Nidbaru* 14:14; *Teshuvos Rivivos Ephraim* 5:61 who cites more sources and contemporary *Poskim* who forbid this.

²¹ See *Orchos Yosher*, *Tefillah* #28 who says this regarding *Shnayim Mikra*. He says that one does not receive any reward for learning at this time – and on the contrary, he is punished for it, and that this learning will not be *matziach*. The same, he says, applies to *Kaddish* as well.

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