

PROPER KAVANAH AT SHEMONEH ESREI

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A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

WHICH PARTS of SHEMONEH ESREI REQUIRE KAVANAH?

L'chatchilah, one must concentrate on the meaning of all of the words in the entire Shemoneh Esrei(1). Sometimes, however, it may be difficult to maintain that level of concentration, kavanah. In such a case, one must make an effort to have as much kavanah as possible. We will list, in order of halachic preference, the minimum levels of kavanah which are required. Kavanah is required:

1. for the first blessing (Avos), the blessing of Modim and the ending of each blessing (the chasimas ha-berachah)(2);
2. during the first blessing and the blessing of Modim(3);
3. during the first blessing only(4).

One who is temporarily unable to concentrate even during the first blessing, is advised not to daven just then(5) even if he will miss the halachically correct time for davening(6). He should instead daven the next tefillah twice, as a tashlumim (makeup).

One who davened but did not have kavanah during the first blessing, has not fulfilled the obligation of davening Shemoneh Esrei(7). He may not, however, repeat the first blessing, since there is a strong possibility that he will not have the proper kavanah the second time either. If, however, he realizes before he finishes the first blessing that he did not have proper kavanah, he should begin anew [from Elokei Avraham, etc.(8)]. Once he says Baruch atah Hashem, however, he must continue(9) on(10) to recite the rest of Shemoneh Esrei(11), with particular concentration on the blessing of Modim(12).

If one failed to have proper kavanah during the first blessing because of a specific distraction, such as a disruptive child or because he was holding something, he may repeat the first blessing [or the entire Shemoneh Esrei] once the source of the distraction is gone(13).

WHAT CAN ONE DO IF HIS KAVANAH IS BEING DISTURBED?

Proper kavanah is the most important ingredient of davening. Consequently, it sometimes overrides

other halachos. Therefore: If a sefer falls to the floor and that interferes with one's kavanah, he may pick it up after finishing the blessing that he is presently reciting(14). This may be done even if he needs to take a few steps in order to pick up the sefer(15). If, however, the fallen sefer does not disturb his kavanah, then he may not pick up the sefer during Shemoneh Esrei(16). Each individual needs to judge for himself if it is better for him to daven with a siddur or not, since some people concentrate better if they daven from a text, while others have better kavanah davening with their eyes closed(17). If one begins davening without a siddur and suddenly requires one in order to continue davening properly, he may go and get one if he knows its exact location. He may not, however, start searching around for a siddur(18).

If one is davening and is in doubt of a halachah concerning the Shemoneh Esrei, he may go and look up the halachah in a sefer. If he has no other choice, he may even ask another person what the halachah is(19). This should be relied upon only when not resolving his question might invalidate the Shemoneh Esrei(20).

A child [or an adult(21)] who is disturbing the davening may be signaled to with hand motions. If that does not work, one may walk away from the disruptive child [or walk over to the child to quiet him down(22)], but he may not talk to him in order to quiet him down(23). It is proper for a father to show his child where and what to daven before Shemoneh Esrei begins. Even if this will cause the father to start his Shemoneh Esrei later than the tzibur, he should still do so(24). If someone is knocking on the door or ringing the bell, or if the telephone rings during Shemoneh Esrei and it is interfering with his concentration, one may walk to the door and open it, or walk to the phone and lift the receiver off the hook. He may not speak, however(25).

QUESTION: How many people should be finished with Shemoneh Esrei before the chazan may begin his repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei(26)?

DISCUSSION: The poskim debate this issue. Some maintain that the chazan may not repeat Shemoneh Esrei until there are nine other people listening to him. Those who are still davening Shemoneh Esrei are not included(27). Other poskim are more lenient. They allow the chazan to begin the repetition as long as there are six people listening to him(28).

The Mishnah Berurah does not directly rule on this issue. On a related matter, he quotes both views and suggests that in a situation when the chazan suspects that there may not be nine people answering "amen" to his repetition, he should make a condition (tenai) before starting that his Shemoneh Esrei is a tefillas nedavah, a voluntary prayer, should nine people not answer "amen" to his blessings(29).

L'chatchilah, therefore, since some poskim rule strictly on this issue, the chazan should wait for nine people to finish their Shemoneh Esrei. If, however, people are rushing to go to work, etc., we may rely(30) on the more lenient view and begin Shemoneh Esrei before all nine people have finished(31). The chazan should do so with the aforementioned precondition.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1** O.C. 101:1. Some poskim (Yad ha-Melech, Rambam Tefillah; Chidushei R' Chayim Soloveitchik on Rambam Hilchos Tefillah) add that although one has fulfilled his obligation if he did not concentrate on the meaning of the words, nevertheless if during the Shemoneh Esrei his mind wandered to the degree that he does not realize that he is standing in front of Hashem, his tefillah is invalidated. Other poskim (Chazon Ish and Avi Ezri, Tefillah 4:6), however, do not agree with this strict interpretation of the halachah.
- 2** Shulchan Aruch Harav and Mishnah Berurah 101:1 quoting the Tur.
- 3** Mishnah Berurah 101:3; Da'as Torah 101:1.
- 4** O.C. 101:1. In addition, one must not think other thoughts during the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei, even when not actually saying the words. According to some poskim, those thoughts may constitute a hefsek which may invalidate the blessing ? see Mishnah Berurah 63:13 and Beur Halachah 101:1 quoting the Rashba and Igros Moshe O.C. 5:5.
- 5** Mishnah Berurah 101:3. See Aruch ha-Shulchan 101:2 who remains undecided concerning this halachah.
- 6** Yabia Omer 3:9. One who, for some reason, usually finds himself in a situation in which he cannot have the minimum kavanah, should consult his rav for guidance on how he should conduct himself.
- 7** O.C. 101:1. Many poskim point out, however, that although he has not fulfilled his obligation of tefillah, it is still not considered as if he recited 19 berachos l'vatalah ??see Chayei Adam 24:2 (quoted in Beur Halachah 101:1); Chidushei R' Chaim Halevi on Hilchos Tefillah; Yad Eliyahu 1:8; Pri Yitzchak 2:1; Kaf ha-Chayim 101:4; Eretz Tzvi 22; Kehilos Yaakov, Berachos 26; Harav Y. Kamenetsky (quoted in Orach Yisrael, pg. 133); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Siach Halachah, pg. 183, 237).
- 8** Mishnah Berurah 101:4 quoting the Chayei Adam. For an explanation of why one cannot begin from Baruch atah, see Orach Yisrael, pg. 108, quoting Harav Y. Kamenetsky and Harav M. Bik, and Yabia Omer 3:9-7; 3:10.
- 9** Some poskim advise that before continuing the Shemoneh Esrei, one should review the first berachah in his mind and then continue ??Orchos Rabbeinu 1:59 quoting the Chazon Ish; Yalkut Yosef, pg. 157.
- 10** It is not advisable to say lamdeini chukecha and start over again ??oral rulings by Harav M. Feinstein, Harav Y. Kamenetsky and Harav Y. Roth (quoted in Orach Yisrael, pg. 108).
- 11** See Beur Halachah who advises one to wait and listen carefully to the chazan's repetition of the first blessing during chazaras ha-shatz. Obviously when davening alone, or during Ma'ariv, this solution would not work. See also Shevet ha-Levi 1:1, Yabia Omer 3:10 and Orchos Rabbeinu 1:59 for discussion of the problem with this approach and why it is not customary to do so.

- 12** Kehillos Yaakov, Berachos 26; Yabia Omer 3:10.
- 13** Sha'ar ha-Tziyon 96:2.
- 14** Mishnah Berurah 96:7.
- 15** Be'er Moshe 3:13.
- 16** Mishnah Berurah 96:7, based on Pri Megadim.
- 17** Mishnah Berurah 93:2; 95:5; Aruch ha-Shulchan 93:8.
- 18** Rama O.C. 96:2, according to the explanation of Chayei Adam 22:7; 25:9 and Mishnah Berurah 104:2. According to Aruch ha-Shulchan 96:2, he may not walk to get a siddur even if he knows where one is located. See Hebrew Notes, pg. 269, for discussion.
- 19** Mishnah Berurah 104:2 and Kaf ha-Chayim 96:11 quoting the Chayei Adam. Several poskim (R' Shlomo Kluger in Ha-elef Lecha Shelomo O.C. 50; Eimek Berachah, pg. 7) disagree strongly with this ruling ??even to merely look in a sefer, much less to ask a question. See Yalkut Yosef, pg. 177 who rules like Chayei Adam (concerning looking in a sefer). Beis Baruch 25:22 also agrees with the Chayei Adam,
- 20** Beis Baruch 25:22.
- 21** Kaf ha-Chayim 104:3 quoting Machzik Berachah.
- 22** Harav S.Z. Auerbach (oral ruling quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasah, pg. 247).
- 23** Mishnah Berurah 104:1. Aruch ha-Shulchan 101:4 does not permit even using hand signals to quiet a child, much less walking away. See Hebrew Notes, pg. 269, for discussion.
- 24** Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei, 2nd edition, pg. 93).
- 25** Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasah, pg. 247).
- 26** Our discussion covers Chazaras ha-Shatz only. The halachos of Kaddish are more lenient.
- 27** Shulchan Aruch Harav 55:7; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 20:2; Kaf ha-Chayim 55:48. This ruling is based on the view of the Taz 55:4.
- 28** Aruch ha-Shulchan 55:13; Imrei Yosher 2:9-1; Eimek Berachah, Tefillah 6. This ruling is based on the view of Magen Avraham 55:8. This also seems to be the view of the Pri Megadim (MZ 55:4) and Beir Halachah 55:6. See Tzitz Eliezer 12:9 for an explanation.
- 29** Mishnah Berurah 124:19.
- 30** See Salmas Chayim 1:24; Tzitz Eliezer 12:9; Beis Baruch 29:1; Yalkut Yosef 1:287.
- 31** According to Chayei Adam 29:1 and Eimek Berachah, Tefillah 6, this should not be relied upon

unless there are at least eight people who finished Shemoneh Esrei. See also Orchos Rabbeinu 1:51 that this was the view of Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky.
