

# CHAZARAS HA-SHATZ - WHAT FOR?

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

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

Until modern times, the accepted norm was for all Jewish men to daven in shul three times a day. Even the amei ha-aretz, the people who were not able to daven on their own, were careful to meet their twice-a-day obligation to recite Kerias Shema and its blessings, and to daven Shemoneh Esrei at Shacharis and Minchah in shul(1). To assist the amei ha-aretz with their davening, the sheliach tzibbur was instructed to recite the parts of davening which were not commonly known by heart(2) in a loud and clear voice, so that everyone would be able to hear every single word. Indeed, even those who were able to daven on their own did not bother to do so, since they were able to satisfy their obligation by listening to the sheliach tzibbur and concentrating on his words(3).

When it came to Shemoneh Esrei, however, this system proved inadequate. The Rabbis did not want the people who were able to daven on their own to fulfill their obligation of Shemoneh Esrei by merely listening to the sheliach tzibbur; Shemoneh Esrei is an intensely personal encounter with Hashem where one throws himself at His mercy and entreates Him according to his unique situation and desires. Consequently, the Rabbis ruled that anyone who can recite Shemoneh Esrei on his own cannot get by on the sheliach tzibbur's coat-tails, so to speak. But what to do with the amei ha-aretz who were unable to daven on their own? The solution was a new Rabbinical takanah (ordinance) which stated that whenever a tefillah b'tzibur takes place, the Shemoneh Esrei must be repeated out loud for the benefit of those who cannot daven on their own(4).

It must be stressed, however, that even before this widely-accepted takanah was instituted, the Shemoneh Esrei was often repeated, sometimes completely and sometimes partially. Surely, whenever an am ha-aretz was spotted, the sheliach tzibur repeated the Shemoneh Esrei for his benefit. Even when there was no am ha-aretz present the first three blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei were recited out loud(5) in order for the congregation to be able to say Kedushah. In other communities the last part of the Shemoneh Esrei, too, was repeated, so that Bircas Kohanim could be recited(6). But it was not until this takanah was established and implemented that it became mandatory for Shemoneh Esrei to be repeated in its entirety, regardless of the circumstances(7).

It is for this reason that the Rambam(8) rules that even nowadays when amei ha-aretz no longer

frequent shuls and there is hardly anyone to repeat the Shemoneh Esrei for, we must still observe the takanah. The Rambam explains that when the takanah was enacted initially, it specifically included all situations - whether amei ha-aretz were present or not. The Rambam compares this takanah to another one - the recitation of Magen avos on Friday night after Shemoneh Esrei for the benefit of those who come late to shul. Once established, Magen avos is recited as a matter of course - whether or not there are late comers. So, too, with the takanah of chazaras ha-shatz; it is always recited regardless of the circumstances(9).

## **THE ROLE OF THE SHELIACH TZIBBUR**

An obvious question arises: Why did the Rabbis require the sheliach tzibbur to daven twice - could he not stand by in silence while the congregation recites their silent Shemoneh Esrei? Does it not seem that his silent tefillah is extraneous?

The Talmud answers that before the sheliach tzibbur recites the Shemoneh Esrei in order to exempt the congregation, he should prepare exactly how he is going to say it(10). Thus his silent Shemoneh Esrei serves as a trial run for his "real" Shemoneh Esrei - the one that he will recite aloud for the benefit of the congregation. It follows, therefore, that the nusach of the trial prayer be the same nusach as the "real" one; otherwise it is not much of a practice. For example, one who normally davens nusach Sefarad but is serving as a sheliach tzibbur for an Ashkenaz congregation must daven nusach Ashkenaz for his silent Shemoneh Esrei as well, since his silent prayer is actually only a practice run for his "real" Shemoneh Esrei(11).

A sheliach tzibbur who made a mistake during his silent Shemoneh Esrei (e.g., he forgot Ya'aleh v'Yavo on Chol ha-Moed) does not need to repeat it; rather, he may rely on the chazaras ha-shatz which is his "real" Shemoneh Esrei anyway(12). [If this happened in Ma'ariv, however, he must repeat the Shemoneh Esrei after Aleinu, except on Friday night, when he can rely on Magen avos.]

A sheliach tzibbur who missed an earlier tefillah and needs to make it up may do so through his present chazaras ha-shatz. He must have in mind that his chazaras ha-shatz is serving a dual purpose(13).

## **THE ROLE OF THE CONGREGATION**

Shulchan Aruch rules that at least nine people must listen intently to the entire chazaras ha-shatz. If not, the blessings that the sheliach tzibbur repeats are "akin to" a berachah l'vatalah(14).

The reason for this is based on our earlier explanation of chazaras ha-shatz. Nowadays, the main objective of chazaras ha-shatz is to fulfill the Rabbinical takanah. But it is clear that the takanah can be fulfilled only when a minyan is present and listening to the repetition of Shemoneh Esrei(15). If a quorum is not paying attention, then the sheliach tzibbur is not meeting the terms of the takanah and his berachos are being recited for no purpose. Because of the severity of this potential problem, Shulchan Aruch rules that every person should view himself as if he is one of only nine people

paying attention to the repetition and that his undivided attention is essential for the sheliach tzibbur to avoid reciting a berachah l'vatalah(16). Thus it is highly improper for anyone to learn, recite Tehillim or make up parts of davening during chazaras ha-shatz, even if he attempts to pay attention and answer amen in the correct spots(17).

If it is improper to engage in other spiritual endeavors during chazaras ha-shatz, it is strictly forbidden to engage in sichas chulin, mundane conversation, during chazaras ha-shatz. Shulchan Aruch reserves uncharacteristically strong language for a person who does so. He is referred to as "a sinner" and as "one whose sin is too great to be forgiven." The poskim report that "several shuls were destroyed on account of this sin"(18). In addition, conversing during chazaras ha-shatz causes chillul Hashem, since it unfortunately lends support to the widely-held perception that non-Jews are more careful than Jews to maintain proper decorum in a house of worship(19).

## FOOTNOTES

- 1** Shemoneh Esrei of Ma'ariv was initially established as a voluntary prayer, and was not obligatory until a much later period in history.
- 2** Pesukei d'Zimrah, which consists of Tehilim which everyone knew by heart, and Kerias Shema itself, which was taught to every child, were not recited out loud by the sheliach tzibbur but rather by each worshipper individually; see Tur O.C. 49, Shenos Eliyahu (Berachos 1:1) and Emes l'Ya'akov (Berachos 2a).
- 3** It seems that until the days of the Rosh, who lived in the thirteenth century, this was the prevalent custom in many areas. The congregation listened quietly as Yishtabach and Birchos Kerias Shema were recited out loud by the sheliach tzibbur. [The only exception was when a pasuk from the Written Torah was recited; then the entire congregation recited those pesukim out loud in unison; see Tur and Darkei Moshe O.C. 49]. Only in later times, when it became difficult to hear every word and to concentrate solely through listening, did the congregation chant along with the sheliach tzibbur. At first they chanted along in an undertone, so as to not disturb those who were listening to the words. After a while the original custom fell into disuse and everyone recited everything out loud; see O.C. 59:4 and Beir ha-Gra, Mishnah Berurah and Beir Halachah, ibid.
- 4** As is true for all mitzvos, there are mystical, Kabbalistic reasons for chazaras ha-shatz as well. Indeed, according to the Arizal, chazaras ha-shatz is a higher level of tefillah than the silent Shemoneh Esrei; see Kaf ha-Chayim 124:2.
- 5** Sometimes before the silent Shemoneh Esrei and sometimes after; see Beir Halachah 124:2.
- 6** Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:3. See Har Tzvi 1:61.
- 7** Bach O.C. 124 and Aruch ha-Shulchan, ibid.
- 8** Responsum quoted in Beis Yosef O.C. 124.

- 9** Despite the Rambam's unequivocal ruling to this effect, it is an historical fact that when the Rambam and his son R' Avraham resided in Egypt, they canceled chazaras ha-shatz during Minchah for the entire country because they could not get the congregants to quiet down and answer amen to the sheliach tzibbur's repetition.
- 10** Similar to a ba'al Koreh who is required to practice the Torah reading before he reads it publicly - whether he is familiar with it or not; Machatzis ha-Shekel 124:3.
- 11** Igros Moshe O.C. 2:29 based on Magen Avraham 124:3.
- 12** O.C. 126:4.
- 13** Mishnah Berurah 108:4.
- 14** O.C. 124:4.
- 15** An individual cannot exempt another individual from Shemoneh Esrei, even if the second individual is unable to daven.
- 16** In addition, once chazaras ha-shatz was established as a congregational obligation, it becomes mandatory for each individual member of the congregation as well, similar to kerias ha-Torah; Minchas Shelomo 2:4-15.
- 17** Mishnah Berurah 124:17. If there aren't at least nine people paying attention to the sheliach tzibbur, then it is strictly forbidden to learn, etc. during chazaras ha-shatz, since doing so causes berachos l'vatalah to be recited; Igros Moshe O.C. 4:19. See also Tzitz Eliezer 11:10.
- 18** Mishnah Berurah 124:27.
- 19** Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:12. [It is permitted, though, for a rav who is asked an halachical question during chazaras ha-shatz to answer it; *ibid.*]

---

*Weekly-Halacha, Copyright © 2000 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Project Genesis, Inc.*

*Rabbi Neustadt is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos.*

*The Weekly-Halacha Series is distributed L'zchus Hayeled Doniel Meir ben Hinda. Weekly sponsorships are available--please send email to the moderator, Dr. Jeffrey Gross [jgross@torah.org](mailto:jgross@torah.org).*

*The series is distributed by the Harbotzas Torah Division of Congregation Shomre Shabbos,  
1801 South Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118--HaRav Yisroel Grumer, Marah D'Asra*

---