

# TALKING IN SHUL

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

One of the serious flaws in our society today is the lack of proper decorum in shul, especially on Shabbos and Yom Tov. While socializing in shul is not a new problem<sup>[1]</sup> and certainly most, if not all people who go to shul are aware of the prohibition against talking during davening, still a great deal of talking goes on anyway, either from force of habit or out of disregard for the halachah. Today, when the power of prayer is needed more than ever, we must find new ways to eradicate this scourge from our midst.

Ideally, there should be no talking in shul from the beginning to the end of davening. This should be the long-term goal of every congregation. Below, we will review the halachic background for this.

## Talking in Shul: Halachic Issues

1.Shulchan Aruch rules that idle talk is forbidden in shul even when prayers are not being recited<sup>[2]</sup>. Idle talk includes conversation about one's livelihood or other essential needs<sup>[3]</sup>. Nowadays there is some room for leniency concerning such talk, since some Rishonim rule that shuls are generally built with a "precondition" allowing them to be used for essential matters other than davening<sup>[4]</sup>.

2.During a scheduled prayer session one may not separate himself from the congregation and engage in idle talk<sup>[5]</sup>.

3.Talking during prayers causes a 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 their houses of worship<sup>[6]</sup>.

4.When one is wearing his tefillin, he should refrain from idle talk<sup>[7]</sup>.

5.During certain portions of davening, talking is prohibited for additional reasons as well. Sometimes talking is considered a hefsek, an "interruption" which may invalidate the portion which is being interrupted, while at other times talking is prohibited because the congregation must give its undivided attention to that portion of the service. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the various sections of davening, the degree of the prohibition against talking in each section, and the reasons behind the prohibition. We will follow the order of tefillas Shacharis.

Note: During certain sections of davening, as will be noted, there is no specific prohibition against talking. However, the aforementioned reasons for prohibiting talking in general apply to these sections as well.

Between Birchos ha-Shachar and Baruch She'amar — There is no specific halachah which prohibits talking.

During Kaddish — Talking is strictly forbidden, as one must pay full attention so that he can answer Amen, etc. properly[8].

During Pesukei d'Zimrah — Unless there is an emergency, it is forbidden to talk during this time, as it would constitute an interruption between the blessing of Baruch she'amar and the blessing of Yishtabach[9].

Between Yishtabach and Barechu — It is permitted to talk for a pressing mitzvah need only[10].

Between Barechu and Yotzer Ohr or ha-Ma'ariv Aravim — It is strictly forbidden to talk[11].

During Birchos Kerias Shema and Shema — It is strictly forbidden to talk, as it would be considered an interruption in the middle of a blessing, which may invalidate the blessing[12].

Between Ga'al Yisrael and Shemoneh Esreh — It is strictly forbidden to talk, since it would interrupt the all-important connection between Geulah and Tefillah[13].

During Shemoneh Esreh — It is strictly forbidden to talk, as it constitutes an interruption in davening[14]. If one spoke inadvertently during one of the blessings of Shemoneh Esreh, he must repeat the blessing[15].

After Shemoneh Esreh — It is forbidden to talk if it will disturb the concentration of others who are still davening[16].

During Chazaras ha-Shatz — It is strictly forbidden to talk[17], since one must pay full attention so that he can answer Amen properly. One who talks during chazaras ha-shatz is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven[18]." The poskim report that several shuls were destroyed on account of this sin[19].

During Kedushah — It is strictly forbidden to talk. Total concentration is mandatory[20].

During Nesias Kapayim — It is forbidden to talk, as complete attention must be paid to the Kohanim[21].

Between Chazaras ha-Shatz and Tachanun — It is inappropriate to talk, since l'chatchilah there should be no interruption between Shemoneh Esreh and Tachanun[22].

Between Tachanun and Kerias ha-Torah — There is no specific prohibition against talking.

During Kerias ha-Torah - It is strictly forbidden to engage in either idle talk or divrei Torah during Kerias ha-Torah[23]. One who speaks at that time is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven[24]." Some poskim prohibit talking as soon as the Torah scroll is unrolled[25].

Between Aliyos — There are several views: Some poskim prohibit talking totally[26], others permit

discussing divrei Torah only[27], and others are even more lenient[28].

During the Haftarah and Its Blessings — It is forbidden to talk, as one must give undivided attention to the Haftarah reading[29].

Between Kerias ha-Torah and the end of davening — There is no specific prohibition against talking.

During Hallel — It is forbidden to talk. Doing so constitutes an interruption of Hallel[30].

Kabbalas Shabbos — There is no specific prohibition against talking.

During Vayechulu and Magen Avos — It is forbidden to talk[31].

Note: From a halachic point of view, it is important to distinguish between those portions of the davening in which talking is prohibited because of hefsek (e.g., Birchos Kerias Shema and Shema, Shemoneh Esreh, Kedushah, Hallel), where not even a single word is permitted to be uttered regardless of "need," and those portions where the prohibition against talking is based on the requirement of paying attention to the davening or because of shul decorum (e.g. Kaddish, chazaras ha-shatz), where an exception can be made when a special need arises, allowing one to quietly utter a few words[32]. The following statement, authored by Harav Shimon Schwab[33], sums up the Torah viewpoint on this subject: "For Hashem's sake — let us be quiet in the Beis ha-Knesses. Our reverent silence during the Tefillah will speak very loudly to Him Who holds our fate in His hands. Communicating with Hashem is our only recourse in this era of trial and tribulations. There is too much ugly noise in our world today. Let us find peace and tranquility while we stand before Hashem in prayer!"

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1. R' Avraham ben Rambam reports that this problem was so widespread in Egypt during his father's time that he decided to eliminate chazaras ha-shatz altogether; see Yechaveh Da'as 5:12.
  2. O.C. 151:1.
  3. Mishnah Berurah 151:2.
  4. Aruch ha-Shulchan 151:5; Halichos Shelomo 1:19-1.
  5. Rama, O.C. 68:1; 90:18. See Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 124:10, who writes that talking while the congregation is praising Hashem is a form of blasphemy.
  6. Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:12.
  7. Mishnah Berurah 44:3.
  8. Mishnah Berurah 56:1.
  9. O.C. 51:4 and Mishnah Berurah 6 and 7.

10. Mishnah Berurah 54:6.
11. O.C. 57:2; Mishnah Berurah 236:2.
12. O.C. 65:1 and 66:1 and Mishnah Berurah.
13. O.C. 66:7.
14. O.C. 104:1.
15. Mishnah Berurah 104:25.
16. O.C. 123:2.
17. It is permitted, however, for a rav to answer a halachic question that is posed to him during chazaras ha-shatz; Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:12.
18. O.C. 124:7.
19. Mishnah Berurah 124:27.
20. Rama, O.C. 123:2; Mishnah Berurah 56:1.
21. O.C. 128:26, Be'er Heitev 46 and Mishnah Berurah 102.
22. See Mishnah Berurah 51:9 and 131:1.
23. O.C. 146:2. and Mishnah Berurah 5.
24. See Beiur Halachah 146:2 (s.v. v'hanachon), who roundly condemns such people.
25. Mishnah Berurah 146:4. See, however, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:3, who disagree.
26. O.C. 146:2; Mishnah Berurah 2, quoting Eliyahu Rabba; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8.
27. Bach, as understood by Mishnah Berurah 146:6 and many poskim.
28. Machatzis ha-Shekel, Aruch ha-Shulchan, and Shulchan ha-Tahor maintain that the Bach permits even idle talk between aliyos. See also Pri Chadash, who permits conversing bein gavra l'gavra. Obviously, they are referring to the type of talk which is permitted in shul and on Shabbos.
29. O.C. 146:3, 284:3.
30. O.C. 422:4 and Beiur Halachah (s.v. aval).
31. O.C. 268:12; Mishnah Berurah 56:1.
32. See Salmas Chayim 38 and written responsum by Harav C. Kanievsky (Ishei Yisrael #206), based on Mishnah Berurah 125:9.

33. Selected Writings, page 230.

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