

Rav Moshe Feinstein's View on Learning from a Book During the Prayer Leader's Repetition of the Amidah

Q & A - Letters of Moshe, Way of Life 4:19	שו"ת אגרות משה אורח חיים ח"ד סימן יט
Looking into a Book at the time of the prayer leader's repetition - Friday, 25 April 1974. Ascension of honor of my beloved, the greatly honored, our leader, the Rabbi Zalman Aryeh Hilsenrad, ¹ may he live for a lengthening of good years.	עיון בספר בזמן חזרת הש"ץ עש"ק ד' אייר תשל"ד. מע"כ ידידי הנכבד מאד מו"ה ר' זלמן אריה הילזענראד שליט"א.

Section 1: Rav Moshe Explores the Position of Rabbi Avraham Gombiner

<p>Behold, of the topic of looking into a book at the time of the repetition [of the prayer by] the prayer leader, look at [what Rabbi Avraham Gombiner (1633-1683) wrote in his book,] <i>Magen Avraham</i> ("Abraham's Shield"), section 124, subsection 8, that he cites from a responsum of Rabbi Menahem Azariah de Fano (1548-1620) that the men who learn at the time of the repetition of the prayer by the prayer leader – if they are focusing [their minds] for the end of the blessing to answer "amen" as is fitting – there is not to protest against them. It is inferable that he opines that all of the silence is only in order that they can be able to say "amen", as this suffices with the focusing [of mind] to know the end of the blessing upon what they are answering "amen". So therefore, he opines that there is no prohibition and not to protest against them. Only he concludes that in the book <i>Vavei HaAmudim</i> ("The Pillars' Hooks")[, written by Rabbi Shabtei Sheftel Horowitz (1590-1660), who] calls out a complaint upon them and points to (<i>Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim</i>) 90:18 that Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1520-1572) wrote there on another topic that even one whose Torah is his livelihood, that according to the law, he is to pray in the study hall that he sets to learn in it even without 10 that even this, he should not accustom himself to do as such, in order that normal folks do not learn from him and then refrain from the house of gathering and he also concludes, and all the more so that he should not involve himself in Torah in the gathering house at the time the congregation is saying forgiveness prayers and supplicatory prayers and derives from there also to learn at the time of the reader's repetition, that even though he is acting lawfully, nevertheless, he should not do so, and they should protest against him, in order that others do not learn from him, but they won't direct [their minds] also to the end of the blessing. Look into [Rabbi Shmuel Loew's (1724-1806) work,] the <i>Mahazis haShekel</i> ("The Halving of the Shekel"), and [Rabbi Yosef Teumim's (1727-1792) work,] <i>Pri Megadim</i> ("The Fruits of Sweetness") that explained the intention of [Rabbi Gombiner in his] "Abraham's Shield" as such.</p>	<p>הנה בדבר עיון בספר בזמן חזרת הש"ץ, עיון במג"א סימן קכ"ד סק"ח שהביא מתשובת מע"כ דהאנשים שלומדים בעת חזרת הש"ץ התפלה אם מכוונים לסוף הברכה לענות אמן כראוי אין למחות בידם, משמע שסובר דכל השתיקה היא רק כדי שיוכל לומר אמן שלזה סגי בכונה לידע סוף הברכה על מה עונה אמן, שלכן סובר שליכא איסור ואין למחות בידם, אך מסיק דבספר ווי העמודים קרא תגר עליהם וציון לסימן צ' סעי' י"ח שכתב שם הרמ"א לענין אחר דאפילו מי שתורתו אומנתו שמדינא יש לו להתפלל בביהמ"ד שקבע ללמוד בו אפילו בלא עשרה דאפ"ה לא ירגיל עצמו לעשות כן שלא ילמדו עמי הארץ ממנו ויתבטלו מבית הכנסת וגם מסיק וכ"ש שלא יעסוק בתורה בבהכ"נ בזמן שהצבור אומרים סליחות ותחנונים ויליף משם גם ללמוד בזמן חזרת הש"ץ שאף שהוא עושה כדין מ"מ לא יעשה כן ומוחים בו כדי שלא ילמדו אחרים ממנו והם לא יכוונו גם לסוף הברכה, עיון במחצה"ש ובפמ"ג שפירשו כן כוונת המג"א.</p>
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¹ Zalman Aryeh Hilsenrad (1910-1993) was born in Austria and died, living in Brooklyn. Among his three children was his daughter, Toby, who married Rabbi Avi Weiss. He wrote a couple of books, including "My Soul Thirsts" and "My Soul Thirsts...Still". He did not formally receive *semikhah*.

Section 2a: Rav Moshe Discusses the Need for Ten Who Are Paying Attention

But, to the humbleness of my mind, it seems that this is only when there are ten who are listening to the prayer leader's repetition and they are not stopping at all, that the others would think that it is lawfully permitted to learn, for those who are able to direct [their minds] for the end of the blessing to answer "amen". If not, however, then others would be learning from them. But when there are not ten - it is forbidden according to the law, that, behold, the adjustment of the prayer leader's repetition was for him to fulfill [their obligation] for them in The Prayer of the 18. And this is explicitly so in subsection 3 (of "Set Table" section 124) that [Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575)] wrote, "A congregation that prayed and all of them are versed in prayer, even so, the prayer leader descends and he repeats to pray in order to fulfill [this particular] enactment of the [Talmudic] Sages." And it is from a responsum of Maimonides (1135-1204) that [Rabbi Karo, in his work,] *Beit Yosef* ("Joseph's House") brings from Rabbi David Abudraham (14th century) - see there. But if so, then it is necessary for it to be actually according to the adjustment that they adjusted in order to fulfill for one who is not versed, that it is necessary specifically that they should be listening to everything that the prayer leader is saying. And it is necessary that there are ten who are specifically listening, that it is not possible for each person to fulfill [the obligation] for his neighbor, as it is in the *Yerushalmi* (Palestinian Talmud) [tractate] of *Berakhs* ("Blessings") 3.3: "Rabbi Yose and Rabbi Ada ben Pazzi (both early-mid fourth century) were sitting saying, "It is not logical of the reading out of the "Shema" that each one would be repeating with his mouth; it is not logical that with prayer, each one should be seeking mercy upon himself." And it is brought by Rabbi Nissim of Gerona (1320-1380) [in his halakhic work] at the end of [his commentary on] *Rosh HaShanah* ("New Year"), s.v. *yahid*, "but on account of those who are not versed, they established a new matter that Prayer via a prayer leader should be specifically with ten, and with this Prayer, they would fulfill the [obligation of the] commandment of Prayer for those who are not versed, and they obligated this upon every community." And I have enlengthened upon this subject in my novella at the end of *Rosh HaShanah* ("New Year"). And this is what [Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (1270-1340)] wrote [in his] *Tur* ("Column") there from a responsum of [his father,] Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (1250-1328), that "when there are not nine who are directing [their minds] to the blessings of the prayer leader, it is close in my eyes that the blessing of the prayer leader would be for naught, because the blessings of the prayer leader were established to say them with ten."

אבל לע"ד נראה דהוא רק כשא"כ עשרה שומעין חזרת הש"ץ ולא מפסיקין כלל שלהאחרים הם סוברים שיותר מדינא ללמוד לאלו שיוכלו לכוין לסוף הברכה לענות אמן אי לאו הא דימדו אחרים ממנו, אבל כשליכא עשרה אסור מדינא, דהא תקנת חזרת הש"ץ היתה לאלו שהיה מוציא אותם בתפלת י"ח, ומפורש כן בסעיף ג' דכתב קהל שהתפללו וכולם בקיאים בתפלה אעפ"כ ירד ש"ץ וחוזר להתפלל כדי לקיים תק"ח, והוא מתשובת הרמב"ם שהביא הב"י מהר"ד אבודרהם עיי"ש, וא"כ הרי צריך להיות ממש כפי התקנה שתיקנו להוציא את שאינו בקי דצריך דוקא שישמעו לכל מה שאומר הש"ץ וצריך שיהיו עשרה השומעין דוקא דהא תפלת י"ח אין יכול אחד להוציא את חברו כדאיתא בירושלמי פ"ג דברכות ה"ג ר' יוסי ור' אדא בן פזי הוו מתיבין אמרו לא מסתברא בק"ש שיהא כל אחד משנן בפיו לא מסתברא בתפלה שיהא כל או"א מבקש רחמים על עצמו והובא בר"ן סוף ר"ה ד"ה יחיד, אבל בשביל האינם בקיאים תיקנו ענין חדש דתפלה ע"י ש"ץ שהוא דוקא בעשרה ובתפלה זו יוצאין מצות תפלה האינם בקיאים, וחייבו זה לכל צבור, והארכתי בענין זה בחדושי בסוף ראש השנה, וזהו מש"כ הטור שם מתשובת הרא"ש דכשאינן תשעה המכוונים בברכות ש"צ קרוב בעיני להיות ברכת ש"ץ לבטלה כי נתקנה ברכות ש"ץ לאומרם בעשרה,

Section 2b: Rav Moshe Compares One Who is Not Paying Attention to One Who Has Left When There Were Ten

<p>And this that he wrote "close" but not "actually", see in [Rabbi Yehoshua Falk's (1555-1614) work,] <i>Drishah</i> ("Seeking") in the name of [Rabbi Karo's] "Joseph's House" that this is because "if they began with ten, the prayer leader finishes even when some of them have left", it is inferable that, at the beginning, when ten are not directing [their minds] to the blessings of the prayer leader, it would actually be an empty blessing. And even if the ten are not directing [their minds] to the rest of the blessings, behold they are performe, according to this, as if they have left, that it is in the PT, tractate <i>Megillah</i> 4.4: "...and upon all of them², it says, 'And the deserters of God will be consumed'" (Is. 1.28). And this is brought in [Rabbi Yizhak Alfasi's (1013-1103)] halakhic work and in Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel's halakhic work there. But this is specifically when there not ten remaining, as it is in Rabbi Isserles' [writing on this topic at] (OH) 55.2 in the name of Mordekhai ben Hillel (1250-1298). But, if so, the reason is on account of him having caused the prayer leader to say the rest of the blessings without ten, that it must be since one who is not directing [his mind] to [what] the prayer leader [is saying], he is not counted as part of the ten. And why it is not for naught is because [the prayer leader] finishes also in the case of someone who left. Behold, if so, also regarding the subject of the significance of "deserters of God" there is also to consider him as if he has departed, <i>prima facie</i>.</p>	<p>וזה שכתב קרוב אבל לא ממש עיין בדרישה בשם הב"י דהוא משום דאם התחילו בעשרה גומר הש"ץ אף כשיצאו מקצתן, משמע דבתחלה כשלא יכוונו עשרה לברכות הש"ץ יהיה ממש ברכה לבטלה, ואף אם לא יכוונו עשרה לשאר הברכות הרי הם ממילא לפ"ז כאילו יצאו שאיתא בירושלמי על היוצאין בפ"ד ממגילה ה"ד ועל כולם הוא אומר ועזבי ה' יכלו והובא ברי"ף וברא"ש שם, והוא דוקא כשלא הניחו עשרה כדאיתא ברמ"א סימן נ"ה סעי' ב' בשם המרדכי, וא"כ הטעם הוא על שגרם שיאמר הש"ץ שאר הברכות בלא עשרה, שממילא כיון שמי שאינו מכוין להש"ץ אינו נמנה מהעשרה ומה שאינו לבטלה הוא משום דגומר גם ביצא הרי א"כ גם לענין חשיבות ועזבי ה' נמי יש להחשיבו כיצא לכאורה.</p>
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Section 3: Conclusion - A Return to the Shield of Abraham

<p>Therefore, it is compelling to say that Rabbi Menahem Azariah de Fano's responsum is only when there are ten who are directing [their minds] to [what] the prayer leader [is saying], does he opine to not protest against them. It is only when they are not doing appropriately, that every man needs to make himself as if there are not nine [men] other than him. And Rabbi Avraham Gombiner concludes in the name of [Rabbi Shabtei Sheftel Horowitz' work,] "The Pillars' Hooks", to also protest from the reason that they will learn from him. But when there are not nine, it is forbidden from the law even when he is able to direct [his mind] to the end of the blessing and to respond "amen" and he will be called with the name of [one of the] "deserters of God". Therefore, it is forbidden to learn at the time of the prayer leader's repetition. However, there is from the law and there is from the reason of Rabbi Gombiner.</p>	<p>שלכן מוכרחין לומר דתשובת מ"ע הוא רק באיכא עשרה מכוונין להש"ץ סובר דאין למחות בידם אף שאין עושין כהוגן דהא כל אדם צריך לעשות עצמו כאילו אין ט' זולתו, ובמג"א מסיק בשם ווי העמודים דגם צריך למחות מטעם שילמדו ממנו, אבל כשליכא ט' אסור מדינא אף שיכול לכוין לסוף הברכה ולענות אמן ויקרא בשם ועזבי ה', ולכן אסור ללמוד בשעת חזרת הש"ץ בכל אופן יש מדינא ויש מטעם המג"א.</p>
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Section 4: Closing

<p>And behold, I am his friend, Moshe Feinstein³.</p>	<p>והנני ידידו, משה פיינשטיין.</p>
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² Five different liturgical situations that require ten when there are ten with which to begin, but some of those leave, those who are still there are supposed to continue.

³ 1895-1986 b. Uzda, Belarus d. New York, NY

Shulhan Arukh OH 124.4

<p>When the prayer leader repeats The Prayer, it is [a good idea] for the congregation to silent [themselves] and to direct [their minds] to the blessings that the prayer leader is blessing and to answer "amen." And if there are not nine directing [their minds] to his blessings, his blessings are close to being for naught. Therefore, every man should make himself as if there are not nine others besides himself, and he should direct [his mind] to the blessing of the prayer leader. (Some say that every person should stand when the prayer leader repeats The Prayer.)</p>	<p>כש"צ חוזר התפלה, הקהל יש להם לשתוק ולכוין לברכות שמברך החזן ולענות אמן; ואם אין ט' מכוונים לברכותיו, קרוב להיות ברכותיו לבטלה; לכן כל אדם יעשה עצמו כאילו אין ט' זולתו, ויכוין לברכת החזן. (י"א שכל העם יעמדו כשחוזר הש"צ התפלה), (הגהות מנהגים).</p>
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Magen Avraham OH 124.8

<p>"It is [a good idea] for them to silent [themselves]" - Look into the responsum of Rabbi Menahem Azariah de Fano on [the topic of] the men who learn at the time of the prayer leader's repetition of The Prayer or saying supplicatory prayers if they are directing [their minds] to the end of the blessing to answer "amen" in a fitting manner to not to protest against them. But, in the book "The Pillars' Hooks", he (Rabbi Horowitz) reproached upon them. And it is as what was written in 90.18 [in the "Set Table".</p>	<p>יש להם לשתוק - עיין בתשו' מ"ע על האנשים שלומדי' בעת חזרת הש"צ התפלה או אומרים תחנונים אם מכוונים לסוף הברכה לענות אמן כראוי אין למחות בידם אבל בס' ווי העמודים קרא תגר עליהם וכ"מ ממ"ש סי' צ' סי"ח</p>
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