

# HALOCHOSCOPE

**This week's question:**

**At *krias hatorah* on *Shabbos*, it is customary for the *gabbai* to say a *mi shebairach* for the sick. Is there any value to an individual who has a sick family member saying it along with the *gabbai* in an undertone, so that the congregation's amen will apply to his own words?**

**The issues:**

- A) The *mi shebairach* for the sick
- B) *She'ailas tzrachav*, asking for one's needs, on *Shabbois*
- C) An individual partnering with a congregation in prayer

## **A) *Mi shebairach* for *cholim***

When one experiences hardship, he turns to Hashem. His prayer includes repentance, and undertaking good deeds and *tzedakah*, to gain merit. A major source for the sick person's *tefillah* is King Chizkiyahu, who epitomized the power of *tefillah* for recovery. Even a righteous person cannot rely on his own *tefillos* alone. The Talmud says 'the prisoner cannot release himself from prison.' When Rivka was having a difficult pregnancy, she went to "seek out Hashem". One explanation is that she asked Shem, a holy man and a prophet, to pray for her. Ordinary citizens need the help of *tzadikim*. The first example of this in the Torah is when Hashem tells Avimelech that Avraham is a holy man, and he will pray for the recovery of Avimelech. When Moshe told Yisro that the people "come to me to seek out Hashem", the commentaries say that he meant that they came to ask him to pray for their sick. The basic *tefillah* for the sick is that which was said by Moshe when Miriam was struck with *tzara'as*. Aharon asked Moshe to pray, and he said: *Kel na refa na lah*, please Hashem, heal her please! Later, in the *Nevi'im*, we learn of people going to a *tzaddik* when they have an ill family member, most notably, when Aviyah, son of Yerav'am was ill. Yerav'am sent his wife to Achiyah in disguise.

The Talmud and poskim say that part of the *mitzvah* to visit the sick is to pray on their behalf. In fact, visiting them without praying for them is considered an incomplete *mitzvah*. The Talmud also says that one who has a sick family member should go to a sage to ask him to pray. Based on this, the poskim say we have the custom to pray for the ill in *shul*, with the entire congregation. The connection needs some explanation. When one joins with a *tzibbur* his *tefilos* have more potency. Therefore, one should always have in mind that his prayers should be for other ill people as well as his own.

There are variations in the custom of congregational *tefilah* for the ill, with. In one reference, there was a custom to make this plea between *yishtabach* and the *kaddish* before *borchu*. It seems that this *minhag* arose from the rule that one may not interrupt at this point in the service, except for a communal or *mitzvah* need. This *tefilah* is deemed a *mitzvah* need. This is apparently the first opportunity to say a *tefillah* with the participa-

tion of the entire congregation, and they are all at a point where they can say amen.

Nowadays, the *minhag* is to recite special *Tehilim* for the sick at the end of regular services, followed by the *mi shebairach*. On days when there is a Torah reading, the popular *minhag* is to say it then. The person who just had his *aliyah* will ask the *gabbai* to say a special *mi shebairach* for his ill relative. The poskim cite variations in this practice, such as to recite it right before putting the Torah back in the *aron hakodesh*. The basis for this *minhag* is that when the Torah is read there is an *ais ratzon*, time of appeasement.

The *tefillah* invokes the blessings given to the Avraham etc., and asks that 'may Hashem Who blessed them, also bless ...' The language of the *tefilah*, '*Mi Shebairach*' is evidently ancient. It occurs in the ancient *siddur* texts in the *Shabbos* service, indeed right after *krias hatorah*. This original *mi shebairach* was on behalf of the congregation. The term *mi shebairach* does not occur in the Talmudic sources. This absence is used by some to object to the inclusion of this *tefilah* on *Shabbos* [see below]. However, its universal appearance indicates that it was in existence for a long time. It does parallel a Talmudic term, that might even have been borrowed from it. This is the '*mi shepara*', a curse for those who break their word: May He Who punished .. also punish ... Some commentators say that this curse was announced in *shul*, by the victimized party.

The extension of the *mi shebairach* terminology to a prayer for the sick might not be so ancient. Some complain that it was invented by *gabbaim* without proper authority. It should be abolished, especially on *Shabbos*, but has become entrenched. Others maintain that the *tefilah* has ancient roots, and is authorized. The question is whether it began as part of the *Shabbos* service [see below]. The original might have been what Moshe said on behalf of Miriam. Other versions include the terminology *mi shebairach*, but include different names. Most notably, the names of Miriam, Naaman and King Chizkiyahu are invoked. They merited famous recoveries from illness.

The connection to *krias hatorah* is, the sage that one should ask to pray is usually a senior elder. Preferably, one would like to have all sages pray for the sick. The best time to have all of them pray would be when everyone in town is present. Everyone comes to shul to hear *Krias hatorah*. This is the best time to have a prayer said, to which all the sages will surely respond amen. Thus, the prayer ends with the words 'let us say amen'.

Another explanation is based on the origins of the *gabbai*. The Torah is read as a reenactment of the original giving of the Torah. Therefore, a *gabbai* stands next to the reader. The poskim explain, the reader represents Hashem teaching, and the *gabbai* represents Moshe, standing by His side. Thus, the *gabbai* has the status of the *chacham*, the sage. He can stand in place of the *chacham* for the *tefillah* for the sick. [See Veyera 20:7 Toldos 25:22 Yisro 18:15 Beha'alosecha 12:11-13 Melachim II:14 20:1-5, commentaries. Brochos 5a-b 34b Rosh Hashanah 17a-b Taanis esp. 8a Nedarim 438b-41b Baba Basra 116b, Poskim. Koheless Rabah 5:3. Toras Haadam (Ramban) Shaar Hameichush. Tur Sh Ar OC 54:3 141:4 284:7 306:6 YD 335:6 10, commentaries. She'aylas Yaavetz I:64. Shaarei Efrayim 10:26 44. Mateh Efrayim 621:1. Ramat Rachel 17. Darom 65 p. 119. Yesodei Yeshurun pp.394-397. Sidur haminhagim. Minhag Shabbos, Zichron Asher 55.]

### **B) *She'aylas tzrachim on Shabbos***

The *minhag* seems to have arisen to wait until *Shabbos* to say the *mi shebairach*.

This would seem consistent with the theory that the origin of the *minhag* is an extension of the *mi shebairach* for the congregation. In addition, the congregants are usually in a hurry on the weekdays. We do not extend the services if it is burdensome on the congregation. This is especially true of the *krias hatorah* part of the service. On days when there is a *musaf* service, but people go to work, we add one aliyah, but may not add more.

This raises a question about the entire practice. On *Shabbos*, we do not ask for personal needs. The long version of *amidah*, *shemone esrai*, includes a *brocha* for each need, including *birchas hacholim*, the prayer for healing. Rather, we recite the first three and the last three *brochos*, that are all basically praises, and one middle *brocha* about *Shabbos*. The main reason given for this is *tircha*, it is burdensome. People want to spend *Shabbos* enjoying this special time. However, there seems to be another reason, to avoid asking for needs. We should feel that all is taken care of. In addition, there is a source for not saying the full version of *shemone esrai* is the very fact that it includes *birchas hacholim*. We avoid crying on *Shabbos*, and this *tefillah* can remind one of suffering.

Some say that there are two separate issues here. One should not burden himself with personal needs, and one should not arouse tears and pain. The implication is that one may choose to burden himself. Nonetheless, asking for needs is not permitted unless they are needed on *Shabbos*. This is all connected to *oneg Shabbos*. A separate prohibition forbids discussing weekday business on *Shabbos*. Asking Hashem for success in personal needs touches on this mundane talk. By this reasoning, asking for any needs should be forbidden. This leads to questions about certain *tefilos* that are recited on *Shabbos*. Some are part of the service, and some are actually only recited on *Shabbos*.

*Cheftzei shamayim*, needs that are deemed *mitzvah*-related or for the public good, may be discussed on *Shabbos*. Based on this, *tzedakah* may be pledged. When making a *mi shebairach*, there is usually an accompanying pledge. In addition, the Talmud discusses visiting the sick on *Shabbos*. Rather than the usual *tefillah*, one says '*Shabbos he mili-zok*'. This means that on *Shabbos* one does not cry out, but some say that it also means that *Shabbos* should serve as a merit for healing. It sounds like a prayer, but can be interpreted as a praise of *Shabbos*, and a statement of fact. The problem is that in the *mi shebairach* there is also a prayer for healing. There is further debate on the severity of the illness. There seems to be more room for a *tefillah* on a dangerously ill person. This applies especially to one who might die on *Shabbos*.

The consensus of the poskim is to permit prayers that are a well-established part of the service. Some maintain that this should only apply to those with Talmudic basis. However, many poskim apply it also to any part of the standard service. [This is where the questions about the origins of this prayer come in.] [See Brochos 21a 48b Shabbos 12a Yerushalmi 15:2, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 282 284 287 306, commentaries. Ramat Rachel 14. References cited by Habracha VII, p. 102.]

### **C) Combining private and congregational tefillos**

There seems to be some debate on which type of *tefillos* are included in this. One view seems to imply that *tefillah* for the public may not include *tze'akah*, crying out. An individual may pray this way. This could be connected to the idea that the crying is therapeutic, and provides him with a type of *oneg Shabbos*. The other view seems to imply

that only the public *tefilos*, that are standardized, may be said for needs on *Shabbos*.

There are two types of congregational prayer. In one, the entire congregation participates in the same *tefillah*, or recital. This is when a *shliach tzibur* exempts them all with his recital. In the other, each says his own *tefillah*, but together with everyone else. This happens during the silent *shemone esrai*. The individuals may insert their personal needs. The communal *tefillah* has added effect, partially due to the concept of *rov am*, a multitude doing a *mitzvah*. This is learned from *bikurim*, the first fruits. This *mitzvah* is performed by the individuals joining in a large procession.

An individual can say his *tefillah* with the *chazan*, planning to finish his *brochos* with the *chazan*. The congregation's amen will then apply to his own. He may also, sometimes, say a related *tefillah* this way. However, the poskim debate whether this counts as *tefillah betzibur*, communal *tefillah*. [See Bikurim 3:2, Tur Sh Ar OC 109, commentaries. Igros Moshe OC III:9.]

In our case, the individual wishes to say his own *tefillah* while the *chazan* says the communal *tefillah*. The question is twofold: Is he permitted to do so, in light of our discussion? Is there any advantage to doing so?

If *she'aylas tzrachav* is really forbidden, but permitted when a standard text is said, this might not apply to an individual. If it is really only forbidden for the congregation, but permitted for the individual in extreme cases, he would be permitted to pray anyhow. It is also possible that since he is timing his *tefillah* to coincide with that of the *gabbai*, it counts as the permissible type of communal *tefillah*. However, since he really means it as a prayer for personal needs, this might not help him. Nonetheless, he may claim that either way, his joining with the *chazan* is permitted. It is either permitted to him personally anyhow, since he has a severely ill person in mind, and praying puts his mind at ease. Or he is just participating with the *chazan*, and relying on the communal dispensation. However, according to the view that the *gabbai* stands in place of the *chacham*, this *tefillah* is not a communal prayer. Rather, the congregation just answers amen to the *tefillah* of the *chacham*. The individual is therefore saying a totally unrelated *tefillah*. It is questionable whether the amen can work for the two separate *tefilos*. By saying his own *tefillah* at the same time, he will not be saying amen to the *chazan*.

In conclusion, it seems that it is better for the individual not to join with the *chazan*.  
**On the Parsha ...** The vessels of the *Mishkan* are all mentioned in this *parsha*, except the golden altar. Perhaps we may offer the following explanation. The *shemone esrai* corresponds to the eighteen times that the Jewish people followed these instructions to build the *Mishkan* and its vessels. Perhaps the building of the golden altar corresponds to *refa'ainu*, the *tefillah* for healing. This *tefillah* is included in the general grouping of *shemone esrai*. However, it is also often recited separately, with a dedicated *tefillah* specifically for an individual ill person. Therefore, the instructions to make this vessel were set apart from the instructions to make the others.

**Sponsored by Joshua Sindler, in memory of Robert Horvitz, Beryl Yehoshua ben Shlomo z"l,**

**whose *yahrzeit* is on the 30<sup>th</sup> of Shevat. ☞**

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