

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

In *Alainu leshabaiach* we pause right before saying '*va'anachnu kore'im*', for the reasons discussed below. Someone is concerned that he does not usually make the pause. There is a variant version '*aval anachnu*' that negates the need for the pause. However, he has never used this *nusach* before. May he change to this version, while following his old *nusach* for everything else?

The issues:

A) *Alainu*

B) The meaning of the pause

C) *Nusach hatefilah*; changing one's *nusach*

A) *Alainu*

This is one of the oldest formal *tefilos*. In its basic current form, it has existed at least since the time of the compilation of the *Mishna*, about 1900 years. It appears in the Talmud as part of the *musaf* on *Rosh Hashanah*, in two separate parts. Some maintain that in some form this *tefilah* was composed by Yehoshua, when he entered Canaan. Some actually question reciting it outside *Eretz Yisroel*. The answer is that it is not part of the service in the *Bais Hamikdash*. Clearly, additions must have been made later on.

In most works of early poskim and sidurim it is not mentioned as the final prayer of the daily services. It first appears this way in some of the *sidurim* or *machzorim* of *Ashkenazic* origin, to be said silently at the end of *davening*. [The reason for silence could be non-*halachic*, see below.] From some *kabalistic* writings it appears that only one of the paragraphs was originally inserted in the daily services. Nowadays, most liturgies include both paragraphs in the daily services.

The *tefilah* is considered extremely exalted. On the basic level, it declares our obligation to acknowledge the privilege of being servants of Hashem, as opposed to heathens. The second paragraph is a prayer for the day when all nations will come to the same recognition. It must be said with devotion and in a standing position. At the point when we say *kore'im*, we bow. Some bend the knees at *kore'im*, and bow at *umishtachavim*. In the *musaf* repetition on *Yamim Noraim*, we prostrate ourselves at this juncture. This is one of the only occasions that we do this nowadays. History records it as the prayer that martyrs said while sanctifying Hashem's Name. [See Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 1:5 Avoda Zara 1:2, Poskim. Tur OC 123 Sh Ar OC 122:2, commentaries. Otzar Hatefilos, Iyun Tefilah, Alainu.]

B) *The pause*

When praying, juxtaposition can make a big difference. Thus, pauses are mandated at certain points. The best known are: in *Ashrei*, to make a break between *ohavav* and

v'es kol hareshaim – for obvious reasons; in Friday night *amida*, between *lishmecha* and *tachlis* – to avoid the perception the '*tachlis*' is a name of Hashem; to separate between *elohei ha'amim elilim*, the gods of the nations are useless idols, and *v'Hashem*, which means and Hashem – for obvious reasons; and the one cited most by the poskim: in *Alainu*, to separate between *shehaim mishtachavim*, the [nations] bow and pray to useless gods, *va'anachnu*, and we bow to Hashem. Without the break, there is a perception that we also pray to those idols.

This sentence in *Alainu* has a history. It was actually censored out by the Church. In some kingdoms, spies were posted to catch violators. There was a mistaken notion that it referred specifically to certain gods. In reality, it is based on Prophetic verses, and was likely composed long before the 'nations' started worshiping that god. Nonetheless, the original sentence was never forgotten. In some old *sidurim*, a blank space was printed so individuals could insert it by heart. In some texts, mysterious stars appear in this space, and in others, it is inserted in small print. Nowadays, many *sidurim* restore it to its place, though some include it in parentheses.

The controversy about the *vav* arises because the original version was *aval anachnu*, **but** we bow to Hashem. This *nusach* leaves no room for confusion. It is unclear whether *va'anachnu* was also a variant original *nusach*, or it became popular later. It is condemned by some authorities because of the possible confusion. It is then defended by others as the prevailing custom. [See Abudraham musaf Rosh Hashanah. Tur, Darkei Moshe OC 123. Rema OC 122:2, commentaries.]

C) Nusach hatefilah; changes

Originally, there was no formal version of the *tefilos*. There are eighteen basic subjects that were always included in the *tefilos*, but one could devise any language of his own to present his *tefilah*. Ezra and his court formalized the language of the *shemone esrai* as we know it. His court included a few prophets, and the rest had divine inspiration. Since then, one should keep to the accepted *nusach*, or version.

Originally, these formalized *tefilos* were memorized and passed down. Indeed, the *tefilos* were included in those sections of ritual and law that were forbidden to record. Those who recorded them were roundly condemned. Since these recorded *tefilos* were not sanctioned, they could not be rescued if a fire broke out on *Shabbos*. Since they had holy writings, these would now be left to destruction. Sometime following the recording of Talmud Yerushalmi, the formal versions of *tefilah* began to be recorded. Due to the oral nature of the transmission, coupled with the lack of printing presses, there were variant versions, including errors. During the Gaonic period, authorized versions began to be recorded and disseminated. Some of these have survived. However, within these themselves, there are variations. Furthermore, the same authority sometimes has two versions.

By and large, the standard text of the *tefilos* is universal. However, due to the distances between communities, some differences of opinion on the meanings and the need to preserve local customs, slight variations abound. Some early authorities maintained that there were deep meanings to the words, and even to the number of words included in a particular *tefila* or *brocha*. The poskim debate whether there is any validity to this.

As a result, different communities *daven* with different *nuschaos*. Furthermore,

based on the opinion that validates *kabalistic* meanings to the words and numbers, some maintain that one may, and perhaps should, try to change the *nusach*. Others maintain that one may not digress from his original *nusach*, based on the verse, *al titosh toras imecha*, literally, do not abandon the Torah of your mother.

Even these changed *nuschaos* are debated, resulting in even more variations. The poskim validate all *nuschaos*, provided one has that *minhag*. A visitor from another community will often have a different *nusach*. When *davening* in a *shul*, one may not digress from the congregations practices. This is based on *lo sisgodedu*, a Scripturally mandated rule to prevent divisiveness and strife. However, if he practices his own custom inconspicuously, no-one will know to cause strife. Moreover, there is the separate requirement to follow his original 'mother' practices. Therefore, many poskim maintain that in his private *tefilah*, one should keep to his own *nusach*. When reciting those parts of *tefilah* that are heard by others, one should follow the host *nusach*.

In our case, *alainu* is meant to be recited out loud, nowadays. Ideally, it should be said in unison, at least until *va'anachnu kore'im*. This means that one should really follow the version said by the congregation. In reality, most congregations say it softly most of the time. Some *shuls* chant the loud part together on *Shabbos*. On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* when it is recited in the repetition of *musaf*, all *shuls* chant it in unison. Thus, if we apply the rules to the reality of the situation, one could use a different *nusach* part of the time, but follow the congregation at other times.

This would be true even if the individual had a different mother *nusach*. In our case, he has the same mother *nusach*, but he wishes to change it. We mentioned the debate on whether one may change a *nusach*. In this case, the issue has already been debated specifically. The ruling, for *Askenazic* Jews, is to say *va'anachnu*, rather than *aval anachnu*. However, it is possible that this is not a real debate with a real conclusive ruling. The allegation was made that 'the *hamon am* – masses' saying *va'anachnu* were incorrect. The defense was that this had always been the practice. Therefore, one could not call it a mistake of 'ignorant' masses. It must have been approved by great scholars as well, especially since they themselves were saying it. This does not mean to criticize the other, possibly original *nusach* of *aval*. The original criticism of *va'anachnu* discusses the language of *musaf* on *Rosh Hashanah*. This is part of the main *tefilah*. The defense refers to *Alainu* after *shacharis*, and by extension, other times. Perhaps all would accept the version of *aval*, while some also accept and practice the *nusach* of *va'anachnu*.

Furthermore, this debate could also be understood as a question of choice of words. Perhaps the entire *tefillah* is one that leaves some discretion to the individual. The correct meaning of the words does not change based on the different *nuschaos*. The difference is about the implied juxtaposing. Therefore, one who changes to what seems to have been the older version is not really changing his *nusach*. The fact that the language puts this *tefilah* in a specific *kabalistic* category does not seem to be affected by nuances in *nusach*. All *nuschaos* are considered acceptable, since the changes are minor.

A further issue arises. Assuming that one may change his *nusach* due to the reasons mentioned, does this require *hataras nedarim*. Generally, if one has followed a meritorious practice, it is considered a personal vow. To stop this practice, he would need to be

absolved. However, if the practice was not a *chumra*, personal stringency, no *hatarah* is required. If it was a *chumra* but was perceived as basic *halacha*, no *hatarah* is required. It was undertaken by mistake. Moving permanently to a community that practices a different *minhag* does not require *hatarah*. The only question is whether the existence of two *minhagim* in the same community, both of which are valid, is the same. In our case, if anything, *aval* is a *chumra*. It appears that it was the original *nusach*. Moreover, it appears that for centuries the entire preceding sentence was either omitted or whispered or only thought of, by many communities. Even today, not everyone says it. The fact that it was reintroduced without a major *hataras nedarim* points to a type of discretion.

However, there could be one objection to the change. Apart from *toras imecha*, there is a requirement to follow one's teachers. One should not act independently of them, even when he thinks he is right. One of the great leaders describes the divine punishment he received for breaking with these traditions. Apart from the fact that any change can lead to a slippery slope, one never knows whether he is truly correct. Indeed, he usually has the majority against him. Furthermore, anyone following personal rulings is liable for *yuhara*, false pride. The question is whether this change would be included in such a category. The language used to defend the *nusach va'anachnu* implies that one should not try to make the changes. This indicates that one might have good reason to do so, but should still refrain. Accordingly, the questioner can apply the same attention he will inevitably need to make a change from his old habit to keeping the old *nusach* but making the required pause.

If, however, the questioner asks his teachers what he should do, they might be able to allow him to change. This 'change' is not a new idea, but is subscribed to by many communities. The teachers would have to have heard this practice from others, and that it was approved as an alternative. In that case, he could maintain that he is not creating a new idea, although he is departing from the way he was taught. However, it exists as a valid practice. [See Brochos 11a-b etc. Tur BY OC 68 (MA) 112 113, commentaries. References to section B. Yam Shel Shlomo, Baba Kama 7:37.]

In conclusion, One should first try to change his habit and learn to make the pause. It will take the same effort as changing the words. He should not make this *nusach* change without much soul-searching, and only with permission and guidance by his *rav*. If he is reciting *Alainu* aloud and in unison with the congregation, he should avoid saying something differently than the prevailing *nusach*. He may say it silently.

On the parsha ... When the servant of Avraham heard their words, he bowed to the ground to Hashem. [24:52] Here we learn that one gives thanks on good tidings. [Rashi] The commentaries discuss why this is learned from here rather than from the earlier verse [26-27]. Indeed, in that case, Eliezer actually went on to give full thanks. Eliezer had just heard that Besuel and Lavan, idolaters, had just acknowledged Hashem's divine providence. This was even greater, as a fulfillment of the second half of *Alainu*. His earlier thanksgiving was also a prayer for this acknowledgment. Thus, our bowing in *Alainu* reflects the first time Eliezer bowed!

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