



On the Air with Rav Aviner - #94

From Ha-Rav's weekly radio program in Israel

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Davening on an angle at the Kotel

Q: Do women in the women's section of the Kotel daven straight towards the Kotel or on an angle in the direction of the spot of the Temple?

A: It is true that one must daven towards the direction of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and the Kotel – both the men's and women's sections – are not exactly in the direction of the Holy of Holies. It would therefore seem that both men and women need to daven slightly on an angle to the left. But we see that people, including great Torah scholars, do not act this way and daven facing the Kotel. The reason is that no one in fact knows the exact location of the Holy of Holies. There are many measurements and theories regarding the location of the Temple with one contradicting the next. The custom is therefore to daven facing the Kotel. [MF – note – I once heard that Rav Aviner asked Ha-Rav Simchah Ha-Cohain Kook – born and raised in Jerusalem and currently the Rav of Rechovot – this question, and he answered: People have the custom to pray facing the Kotel.]

Placing Notes in the Kotel

Q: Is it permissible to place notes in the Kotel?

A:

1. We must first discuss if it is even permissible to place one's fingers in the cracks and crevices of the Kotel. The book "Mishkenot Le-Avir Yaakov" forbids it since it is forbidden to enter the Temple Mount when impure and the Kotel is considered part of the Temple Mount (chapter one of Massechet Tamid). The Avnei Nezer, however, permits it for various reasons, each of which is sufficient on its own.

a. It is not necessary to say that the Kotel possesses the holiness of the Temple Mount. The reason is that the gates to the Temple Mount are located in the same wall as the Kotel, and it is written that the Jews would remove their shoes in the gates before entering the Temple Mount. The gates were thus considered outside of the Temple Mount and not a part of it.

b. Even if we say that the Kotel is part of the Temple Mount, entering with one's fingers is a "Bi'ah Bemiktzat" (a partial entrance) and not considered entering.

c. Even if we say that a "Bi'ah Bemiktzat" is considered entering, it is not entering in the usual manner, since people enter through the gates and not through the walls.

d. It is not clear that the upper areas of the Temple Mount were sanctified and would thus also sanctify what was under them.

Nonetheless, there are others who are strict. For example, our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, would not place his fingers in between the stones of the Kotel, although he would kiss them as long as they were not sunken in.

2. Even if the Kotel does not possess the holiness of the Temple Mount, it certainly possesses the holiness of a shul. And we do not use the walls of a shul for profane purposes.

3. Regarding the notes themselves, there are discussions whether it is permissible to place a siddur between the stones of the Kotel, but a siddur is holy and a note is not. Although the Munkatcher Rebbe - Ha-Rav Chaim Elazar Spira - wrote that he had a tradition from his Rabbis that the Or Ha-Chaim Ha-Kadosh gave someone a note to place in the Kotel which said: "My sister, my dove, my wholesome one." Our notes, however, are not on the level of the Or Ha-Chaim Ha-Kadosh who wrote to the Divine Presence in the present tense! In any event, if it is permissible to put your fingers into the Kotel, it is permissible to place notes as well. It is difficult to say that it is forbidden, but if someone is unsure as how to act, we recommend that he not place notes in the Kotel, since one should be as strict as possible in matters relating to the Temple Mount and "Mora Mikdash" (awe of the Temple). There were even great Rabbis who refrained from approaching the Kotel, among other reason, based on the position of the Radvaz who said that the Kotel is one of the walls of the

Temple. Even though this position has been rejected, they were strict since it is a matter related to "Mora Mikdash."

It is therefore permissible to place notes in the Kotel, but we recommend praying directly to the Master of the Universe, who does not need notes. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, had reservations about placing notes in the Kotel, and he pointed out that there is a halachic problem of "Bi'ah Bemiktzat" (a partial entrance) into the area of the Temple Mount by doing so (see the book "Rabbenu," p. 304). And when a Torah scholar mentioned to our Rabbi the custom of placing notes in the Kotel, our Rabbi said that one should not do this, and one should even refrain from putting one's fingers into the Kotel. The Torah scholar said to him, "But this is 'Minhag Yisrael' (the custom of Israel)?" Our Rabbi responded: The word "minhag" [custom] contains the same letters as "gehinom" [purgatory]. He also said that Maran Ha-Rav Kook refrained from kissing a stone of the Kotel, which was not protruding and he was careful not to place his fingers between the stones of the Kotel (See Le-Shelosha Be-Elul 1 pg. 59 #71).

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