



Parashat Naso 5771 - #189

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

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On Yom Yerushalayim...

Q&A – The Kotel

Direction of Davening at the Kotel

Q: Should one daven at the Kotel while facing straight ahead or turn to the left, towards the spot of the Temple?

A: Straight, since the exact location of the Holy of Holies is unknown (Le-Mikdash Tuv p. 241. Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 3:39. And this is what we heard from Ha-Rav Neventzal and Ha-Rav Simcha Ha-Cohain Kook).

Back to the Kotel

Q: Is it permissible to turn one's back to the Kotel?

A: It is permissible just as in a shul it is permissible to turn one's back to the Torah ark. When one leaves the Kotel, the custom is to walk backwards with his face towards the Kotel until he reaches the Plaza (This was the custom of the Steipler. Orchot Rabbenu vol. 1 p. 320 and vol. 2 pp. 150-151. And also Ha-Rav Neventzal, although Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was not particular to do so. Ha-Kotel Ha-Ma'aravi – Halachot U-Minhagim p. 40).

The Kotel's Plants

Q: Is it permissible to trim the plants on the Kotel?

A: There are those who are strict with regards to them, since perhaps they have the same holiness as the Kotel (see the book "The Chief Rabbinate of Israel – 70 Years since its Establishment" vol. 2 p. 774, which discusses the dispute between the Chief Rabbis whether it is permissible to cut the plants which grow between the stones of the Kotel. Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef rules that it is permissible if an engineer establishes that they endanger the Kotel. But Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren was opposed, based on the idea that "the growth symbolizes the destruction," as is found in Megillah 28a-b. See too Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 151:1, that Shuls in a destroyed state should be left alone and the growth in them should not be cut. This is in order to heighten one's anguish. Ha-Rav Goren also notes that the Kotel has stood for thousands of years without the growth being cut).

Tearing one's Garment at the Kotel

Q: Do I have to tear my garment when I visit the Kotel after a long time?

A: We do not tear at all since it is under Jewish sovereignty (Tal Chermon – Moadim, p. 218).

40 Days at the Kotel

Q: What is the source for the idea that if one prays 40 days straight at the Kotel, his prayer will be answered?

A: There is no source. This is a new creation. Any prayer, even one time, is heard. There are, however, various sources about the value of prayer for 40 days based on Noach in the ark and Moshe Rabbenu on Mt. Sinai. But every prayer is heard, and there is no need for forty days of prayer (see Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv in "Ha-Shakdan" vol. 2 p. 109).

Holiness of the Kotel's Stones

Q: Is it permissible to place one's fingers in the cracks and crevices of the Kotel?

A: 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). Many authorities are therefore strict in this matter (Ha-Rav Joseph Soloveitchik in Nefesh Ha-Rav p. 101 and the Chazon Ish in Pe'er Ha-Dor vol. 2 p. 48). But the Avnei Nezer (vol. 2 Yoreh Deah 450-451) permits it because the Kotel does not possess the holiness of the Temple Mount, and 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 is not considered entering; and 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. And this is the ruling of many authorities (Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef in Ha-Kotel Ha-Ma'aravi Halachot U-Minhagim pp. 74-75 note 47 and Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach said that the great Rabbis of Israel were not concerned about this). But it is proper to be strict. And our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, was careful not to place his fingers between the stones of the Kotel and refrained from kissing a stone of the Kotel which was not protruding.

Notes in the Kotel

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

A: One should daven directly to Hashem. He does not need notes (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 [since it is forbidden for an impure person to enter the air of the Temple Mount in even the slightest way]. The Torah scholar said to him, "but this is the custom of Israel [minhag Yisrael]." Our Rabbi responded, the word "minhag" [custom] contains the same letters as "gehinom" [purgatory]. Le-Mikdashech Tuv, pp. 12-13).

Rav Aviner on... Trips in Yehudah and Shomron

Q: Is it permissible to travel to Yehudah and Shomron, or is it forbidden based on the commandment of "You shall surely safeguard your soul" (Devarim 4:15, 23:11)?

A: It is permissible. There is a clear distinction in halachah between a high-probability danger and a low-probability danger. If this were not the case, we would not be able to travel in a car since every year, to our great distress, six hundred people are killed in car accidents in Israel. Many more people have been killed in car accidents since the establishment of the State of Israel than in all of the terrorist attacks and all of the wars, even when they are added together. We nevertheless travel in cars, obviously with required caution, since this is called

"a non-frequent damage" in halachah (Pesachim 8b). In our time there are statistical tools to verify the frequency of a danger. There is a halachic responsum on this subject by Ha-Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of "Ramat Elchanan" (a neighborhood in Bnei Brak). A student was learning in a yeshiva in "Yesha" (Yehudah, Shomron or Gush Katif) and his parents were concerned about the danger. Ha-Rav Zilberstein proves that "a frequent damage" is five percent. This means that if – G-d forbid – five percent of the students of the yeshiva were murdered, it would be forbidden to learn in that yeshiva. This is obviously far from the reality - Baruch Hashem - since the terrorist attacks in Yehudah and Shomron are not killing five percent of the population. In fact, Ha-Rav Yitzchak Isaac Herzog in Shut Heichal Yitzchak proved, based on Shut Rabbi Akiva Eiger (#60), that a frequent danger is not five percent, but one in a thousand. Baruch Hashem, terrorist attacks in Yehudah and Shomron are not killing one in a thousand people either.

Furthermore, it is permissible to take a "small risk" for the sake of a mitzvah, and traveling throughout Eretz Yisrael is a mitzvah. The Tiferet Yisrael discussed this principle on the Mishnah in Massechet Berachot at the end of chapter one. There is a story about Rabbi Tarfon who said the Shema at night while reclining according to the view of Beit Shammai. He endangered himself while doing so and the Sages admonished him for following the view of Beit Shammai instead of Beit Hillel. But the question remains: Why did Rabbi Tarfon endanger himself, since reciting the Shema is not in the category of "Be killed and do not transgress," i.e. requiring one to sacrifice his life for its fulfillment? The Tiferet Yisrael explains that it was permissible since there was only a small risk of danger. There is an additional proof from when Rabbi Akiva was in jail, and he used the water he received for "netilat yadayim" (ritually washing his hands) instead of for drinking. The halachic authorities ask: How could Rabbi Akiva endanger his life for this practice? The answer is that Rabbi Akiva understood that he would obtain more water. The danger he was taking was extremely minute and it is permissible to take a small risk for a mitzvah. This is also the ruling found in "Pitchei Teshuvah" (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 157).

In conclusion:

- a. A non-frequent danger is not considered a danger according to halachah and the danger in Yehuda and Shomron is a non-frequent one.
- b. It is permissible to take a minimal risk for a mitzvah and traveling throughout all of Eretz Yisrael is a mitzvah.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Yom Yerushalayim

28th of Iyar 5727 - The Day of the Liberation of Jerusalem

That Very Wednesday

"...We are reminded of that very Wednesday. How is it possible not to remember? It is impossible to forget. An emissary of the Chief Rabbi [of Tzahal], Rav Goren, came to me. To hear the news, we were, of course, incredibly excited. Afterwards a telephone message arrived from Rav Goren. We did not have a telephone in our house. It was therefore quiet, but messages sometimes came to us through our neighbors. Thus, they sent in the name of Rav Goren a message that he wanted us to know that they were drawing near, they were

currently located in the area of Rockefeller [Museum] and they were going to the Kotel, and that I should be ready to travel there. When the driver arrived I asked him: 'How did you enter?' He said to me: 'All of the gates were open before us.' He brought me in an army jeep. We drove and drove. I asked him: 'Where are you going to bring me?' Suddenly he said to me: 'We are on the Temple Mount.' I was dismayed. We were across from their building [the Dome of the Rock]. The passage was in fact through the Lion's Gate. It was then impossible to approach any other way. They therefore brought me in through this passageway. There were groups of young men there. Large groups of soldiers from our Army were passing on all sides, and I heard a voice yell to me: 'Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah!' This was Chanan Porat. There were other Torah scholars, a large camp of soldiers of the Army [who were] Torah scholars! We arrived at the Kotel. We danced, we rejoiced, we were moved, we embraced and kissed each other with the soldiers. There is no need to relate the genius, the righteousness and the holiness of our Master, the Chief Rabbi of Tzahal (Shilt"a) [ztz"l], who went with courage at the front of the Army, at the front of the conquerors with two weapons. Do you know what his two weapons were? A small Torah scroll and a small shofar! Afterwards, he said to me: 'We have completed this visit at the Kotel, now I am going to Hevron.' I jumped. I was dismayed. I was afraid. I could not understand. Master of the Universe! What is the meaning of this? He was going to Hevron with the two weapons, with the small Torah scroll and with the small shofar! The next day they informed me in the afternoon: Rav Goren is at the house of his father-in-law, Rav David Cohain [This was already after the conquest of Ma'arat Ha-Machpelah - the Cave of Machpelah]. This was how it occurred. 'Were our mouths as full of song as the sea...we still could not thank you sufficiently' (from the prayer 'Nishmat' recited on Shabbat and holidays). How is it possible, Master of the Universe, not to see this? How is it possible not to fill ourselves with faith, how is it possible not to fill ourselves with the most glorious holiness for what the Master of the Universe has done, does and will do for us, before the entire world, before all of the non-Jews, before all of the believers and all of the nonbelievers?" (Sichot Rabbenu, Yom Yerushalayim 5733 [1974], #9).

Right after the liberation of Temple Mount, our Rabbi and "The Nazir" were brought there in an army jeep. They were not told about this and they suddenly realized they were on the Temple Mount, but decided it was acceptable for the moment to be on the Temple Mount based on the concept of "kiboosh" (acquiring land through conquering). In general, it is forbidden to be on the Temple Mount at this time (because we are impure). On the way back from the Kotel, our Rabbi wanted to return by a different route, but they were told that it was dangerous so they went through the Temple Mount. (Iturei Yerushalayim #6)

It was so very natural that the first citizens who arrived at the Kotel on the first day of its liberation were our Rabbi and Rav David Cohain "The Nazir."

Regarding the prayers of Minchah which he prayed with the paratroopers, our Rabbi said: "This was like the prayer of Neilah (the concluding prayers of Yom Kippur) in the yeshiva."

When the book "Be-Shesh Acharei Ha-Milchamah" of Yosi Gamzu was published, it included the song "Ha-Kotel - The Kotel" and one of the stanzas began: "He stood facing the Kotel, with us, the elderly Rav," accompanied by the picture of our Rabbi. Our Rabbi said: "I am not elderly." (Gadol Shimusha p. 17 #20)

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Women Reciting Kadish

Q: May a woman recite Kadish?

A: On condition that she is not alone, i.e. men are reciting it and she is saying it quietly word-for-word with them, so that her voice is not heard (see Pnei Baruch 34:20. Shut Piskei Uziel #3. Teshuvot Ibra #4. Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:12. Ha-Rav Yosef Soloveitchik in "Ha-Darom" #57, Elul 5748).

Women ruling on Halachah

Q: Is it permissible for a woman to give a halachic ruling in matters regarding Family Purity?

A: In order to rule, one must have knowledge of the issues. If she knows, she can rule. This is extremely rare. The word "rule" (lifsok) means to decide in a new matter. But in issues which have been previously ruled upon, a woman can certainly rule, with the condition that she is knowledgeable in that area. And there are, in fact, women who know the Halachah in the area of Family Purity (see Rama, Yoreh Deah 242:14. Pitchei Teshuvah, Choshen Mishpat 7:5).

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: mororly@bezeqint.net

