



Parashat Netzavim-Vayelech 5771 - #204

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From the Archives



Ha-Rav Aviner with Ha-Rav Tzvi Tau, Rosh Yeshivat Har Ha-Mor

On the Rosh Hashanah...

Collection of Laws of Rosh Hashanah – Part 2

[Shut She'eilat Shlomo 1:235]

5. Shofar

One should not say "Baruch Hu U-Baruch Shemo" (Blessed is He and Blessed is His Name) during the blessing over the Shofar, because this blessing is also recited in order to fulfill his (the listener's) obligation, and "Baruch Hu U-Baruch Shemo" is considered an interruption (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 585). This is the general principle: any time during which it is forbidden to interrupt, one should not say "Baruch Hu U-Baruch Shemo." As, for example, during the blessing before the Shema in the morning and evening, during Baruch She-Amar and during Yishtabach.

This also applies any time that a blessing is recited in order to fulfill one's obligation, as in Kiddush and Havdalah. But one may say "Baruch Hu U-Baruch Shemo" during the morning blessings, during the repetition of the prayer on Shabbat Evening in Me'ein Sheva, during Magen Avot and during the blessings for an Aliyah to the Torah.

6. Bowing in Shul

When one bows on the ground, he should spread out a towel, handkerchief or piece of paper (but not a Talit bag, since it is disrespectful to put it on the floor). We do this because it is written in the Torah (Vayikra 26:1): "Nor shall you place a figured stone in your Land to bow down on it." This means that it is forbidden to bow down, even to Hashem, on a stone floor (except for one in the Temple. Rama in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 131:8). And because all of this refers to when one's face touches the ground, one should spread out the handkerchief in the place where one's face will be and not under the knees (Mishnah Berurah #40-41. Luach Heichal Shlomo).

Question: Can women fall on their knees during Musaf on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, since women were not in the Temple courtyard and therefore would not bow? [In the book "Nefesh Ha-Rav" (pp. 214-215), Rav Soloveitchik rules that women should not prostrate on account of this reason].

Answer: Yes, they may. This is a minhag. As long as there is a modest place and she does not have a bad back, a woman may prostrate.

7. Preparing on the First Day for the Second Day

Question: Is it permissible to prepare on the first day of Rosh Hashanah for the second day?

Answer: Regarding this issue, each day is considered as a holy day on its own, and just as we do not prepare on Shabbat for a weekday, so too we do not prepare on the first day of Rosh Hashanah for the second day, since there is room to say that perhaps the holiness of the second day is in fact a weekday in relation to the holiness of the first day (Shemirat Shabbat Ke-Hilchata p. 20 #58 and p. 59 #1). It is therefore forbidden to cook, wash dishes, prepare candles in the candlesticks, make beds, set tables, etc... (ibid. 1, 58) on the first day in preparation for the second day. One must wait until after the stars have come out.

One may, however, prepare on Rosh Hashanah for Shabbat when they are consecutive days, by making an Eruv Tavshilin (by setting aside, before the holiday begins, an eruv consisting of a cooked portion of food and a piece of bread or matzah. This is considered the start of the food for Shabbat and any further preparation of food is seen as a continuation of it, and is thus permitted).

Addition to the revised edition

If Rosh Hashanah falls on a Thursday and Friday, it is forbidden to prepare on Thursday for Shabbat even with an Eruv Tavshilin. The preparation may only be performed on Friday (Shut Yehaveh Daat 6:32).

8. Repentance

Do not forget the essence of Rosh Hashanah: to perform Teshuvah, both in commandments between a person and Hashem and in commandments between a person and his fellow man.

Rav Aviner on...
You Shall Surely Remember the Holocaust

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Ki Tavo – translated by R. Blumberg]

Traveling to the Polish death camps is not something good. Any one of the following reasons should be a sufficient deterrent from doing so.

(1) It is forbidden to leave Israel, except for a temporary trip related to earning a living, marrying, or performing a mitzvah. Visiting a death camp is not classified as a mitzvah, either of the Torah or of our Sages, and it is not mentioned amongst the hundreds of thousands of paragraphs found in halachic works that were written in recent generations.

(2) One should not financially support the Poles, who collaborated with the Nazis in establishing the extermination camps, and even persecuted the Jews themselves many times. Shall murderers benefit from their deeds?

(3) Oftentimes, due to the high costs, only wealthy students can afford this trip. It is a scandal that something associated with the education system should involve a division between rich and poor.

Now one might say: If this is true, how shall we remember the Holocaust? The answer is simple: books, pictures, films, Yad Vashem and similar places. One might also say: That's all well and good, but I'm missing the experience of a live visit to a death camp. The answer is simple: Hold a live meeting with one of the Holocaust survivors, of whom there are presently 87,000, and hear directly from him what he experienced.

Still again, one might argue: "But visiting a death camp is an infinitely more powerful experience than talking to a Holocaust survivor." That argument, as well, is a cause for much puzzlement: Really? Is an enactment with inanimate objects more alive than one involving a living, breathing person?! Quite the contrary. Common sense and untainted morality dictate that all that money spent on this trip should be donated to Holocaust survivors, who are still suffering to this very day from the terrible open wounds to their body and soul.

It's true that many of them were absorbed in our country and became its builders, but many others are still suffering. Our country does a tremendous amount for these survivors, but it's natural for it not to succeed in solving all their problems. Many of them suffer from a lack of food and medical services. The State Comptroller's report from 2007 found fault with the way survivors are dealt with, even if since then their situation has vastly improved.

In sum, despite the State's prodigious assistance, we have not succeeded in answering all of their needs, especially since the Law of Assistance to Holocaust Survivors applies only to those who arrived in Israel before 5713. It's obvious that some of those who came afterwards are also suffering greatly.

But getting back to our topic – traveling to the death camps to remember what Amalek did to us there, while simultaneously forgetting the Holocaust victims who live in our midst.

If someone claims that this involves no small measure of hypocrisy, he will not be entirely mistaken. If someone is shocked by a person who prefers to spend his money on an important "death-camp experience," to assisting someone who was hurt there, thereby performing a human kindness, he is not entirely mistaken either.

Therefore, here are several practical suggestions:

1. Cancel the Poland trips and give all the money to organizations that grant assistance and support to Holocaust survivors. There are many such organizations, and you can find them by yourself. That's less complicated than all of the logistics of traveling abroad. I just would like to mention one organization that distributes free medicines to the poor, not necessarily Holocaust survivors, but including them, and its name is "Haverim LiTerufa" [Friends for Medicine].

2. Even if one does go to Poland, he should make sure that fifty-one percent of his expenses go to helping the victims themselves. That will allow one to argue that most of the allocations are going to people and a minority are going to stones and rocks.

Yet even if this suggestion is rejected, then at the very least, ten percent of one's total expenses from the trip should be invested in those suffering terribly to this very day, as a sort of 'Ma'aser', a tithe. That will render us at least a little bit innocent before G-d and man.

"Look to the Rock from whence you were hewn" (Yeshayahu 51:1).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Traveling to Uman to the grave of Rebbe Nachman on Rosh Hashanah

Question: Is it permissible to travel from the Land of Israel to Uman (Ukraine) to visit the grave of Rebbe Nachman on Rosh Hashanah?

Answer: This is a new "custom" based on the statement of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: "Anyone who visits my grave and gives eighteen coins to tzedakah will merit life in the World to Come." One may only leave Israel for a mitzvah (see Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 5:9 and Tosafot to Avodah Zarah 13a). Anyone who violates this, will, we hope, repent. Worse than this is one who travels under the impression that he is performing a mitzvah, because how then will he then repent?! Visiting the grave of tzadikim (righteous people) is not defined as a mitzvah – not a rabbinic mitzvah and not a Torah mitzvah; it is a positive act. Based on this, Maran Ha-Rav Kook ruled that we do not leave Israel to visit the graves of tzadikim, and he wrote "are we without graves in the Land of Israel that you travel to the Exile?!" (Shut Mishpat Cohain #147).

It is true that Rebbe Nachman said: "Anyone who visits my grave and gives eighteen coins to tzedakah will merit life in the World to Come," but Avraham Avinu is greater than Rebbe Nachman. Rebbe Nachman himself said this. Anyone who goes to Ma'arat Ha-Machpelah in Hevron and gives eighteen gold coins can be certain that Avraham Avinu will aid him. Furthermore, know that the Land of Israel is holier than Uman. Rebbe Nachman himself said this.

Therefore, go to Ma'arat Ha-Machpelah.

Also know that it is not enough to visit a grave and give eighteen coins to tzedakah to be worthy of life in the World to Come, but one needs to perform acts of loving-kindness, learn Torah and perform the mitzvot. And it is not proper to spend thousands of shekels to travel there. You should give the money to tzedakah. The value of traveling there is unclear, but giving tzedakah is clear. It is an explicit verse in the Torah.

Also, if you leave your wife alone and sad on Rosh Hashanah, know that you will not stand guilt-free before the Heavenly Court.

The custom of Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was to stand across from the national cemetery on Mt. Herzl and say: "These are the graves of the righteous who died sanctifying Hashem's Name. Why should I travel far distances? (Oro Shel Olam, p. 380)."

[A collection of other leading Rabbi's statements on this issue -

Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu: "It is not proper to leave Israel on Rosh Hashanah or during the rest of the year, and it is preferable for one who wants to pray at the graves of tzadikim to visit the graves of tzadikim in the Land of Israel – Hevron, Kever Rachel, Kever Rashbi – who was the teacher of Rebbe Nachman, etc. Do not leave Israel for the impurity of the lands of the other nations."

Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv: "Go daven at the Kotel."

Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef: "How did the grave of Rebbe Nachman become more important than the graves of the Rambam and Ha-Gaon Rav Yosef Karo?"

Ha-Rav Dov Lior explained how absurd is the thought-process of those who travel to Uman: "People travel to the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in order to ask him to help them to travel to the grave of Rebbe Nachman so they can make a request of him."]

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