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Facing Yerushalayim for Davening

Vayeitzei 5784

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Davening Facing Eretz Yisroel

Facing the Site of the Mikdash

1. Wherever a person is in the world, when he gets up to daven Shemoneh Esrei, he must stand in such a way that his body and face are pointed toward the site of the Beis HaMikdash.
2. **In a shul.** When davening in a shul as well, the main factor for determining the direction of tefilla is the direction of Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash. Therefore, l'chatchila and where possible, the aron kodesh should be situated on the wall facing Yerushalayim toward which the tizbur davens. However, if the wall where the aron kodesh is situated is not on the side facing Yerushalayim, really the direction of Yerushalayim – not the direction of the aron kodesh – should determine the direction of tefilla (מ"ב סק"ט; see below, 19).

In Yerushalayim

3. Someone davening in Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh should face toward the Beis HaMikdash, as the posuk says (ל"ב ו', ל"ב), "והתפללו אל הבית", (דה"ב ו', ל"ב), "ברכות ל' ע"א, שו"ע סי' צ"ד ס"א") "הזה" (ברכות ל' ע"א, שו"ע סי' צ"ד ס"א). Thus, if one is in a neighborhood in northern Yerushalayim, e.g., Neve Yaakov, he should face south. If one is east of Yerushalayim, e.g., in Ma'ale Adumim, he should face west. In a neighborhood in western Yerushalayim, e.g., Bayit Vegan, one should face east. In the neighborhoods of Malchei Yisroel, Ezras Torah, Minchas Yitzchok, Romema etc., one should face southeast.

In Eretz Yisroel

4. Wherever one is in Eretz Yisroel, he should face Yerushalayim, as the posuk says (מ"ד ח', מ"ד), "והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת", (מלכים א' ח' מ"ד). Thus, if one is in northern Eretz Yisroel, e.g., Kiryat Shmona or Meron, he should daven facing south. If one is standing in the south, e.g., Be'er Sheva, he should face north. As far as the cities on the Mediterranean coast: in Netanya, one should daven facing southeast; in Ashdod, facing east; and in Gaza.. one should daven facing northeast.
5. **Knowing the map of Eretz Yisroel.** Thus, it is worthwhile for a person to know the map of Eretz Yisroel so that before he gets up to daven, he can figure out the direction of the site of the Mikdash from where he is in Yerushalayim or Eretz Yisroel and face that way. [Additionally, by knowing the map of Eretz Yisroel, one can understand pesukim in Chumash and comments of Rashi, e.g., the location of the ladder in Yaakov's dream (י"ז ויצא כ"ח, י"ז), the travels of the Avos, the borders of the Land, and more.]

Rest of the World

6. Someone standing in Chutz La'Aretz anywhere else in the world should face toward Eretz Yisroel, as the posuk says (מלכים א' ח' מ"ח), "והתפללו אל ה' מ"ח). If one is east of Eretz Yisroel, e.g., in Japan, he should daven facing west. From the United States, which is west of Eretz Yisroel, one should stand facing east. From Uman in Ukraine, one should daven facing south. And from South Africa, one should daven facing north (תשובות והנהגות ח"א סי' ע"ט).
7. **Knowing the direction of Yerushalayim.** Thus, wherever a person is, he should find out which way Yerushalayim is so that he can accurately determine the proper direction to face when davening. Nowadays there are many tools with which to do this, e.g., digital maps to find out the exact direction of Yerushalayim. Just like we use clocks today to determine the exact zmanim of the day – which was not the case in earlier times – one should also use modern-day maps to figure out the exact direction of Yerushalayim to meticulously fulfill the halacha.

8. **Europe.** Most places in Europe, including England, are west of Eretz Yisroel. Thus, when discussing this halacha, many Rishonim wrote that one must daven facing "mizrach," as that was the case for most places. We are therefore accustomed to saying that we daven facing "mizrach" and we always look for "mizrach," but it is the direction of Eretz Yisroel that is the important thing, not mizrach/east (טור סי' צ"ד, רמ"א שם סי"ב).
9. In truth, one does not face due east even in Europe, as Eretz Yisroel is much further south than Europe. Thus, one should face southeast, not due east (לבוש הובא במ"ב סק"א ובביאה"ל ד"ה אין עושין ורוב אחרונים).

למנצח מזמור לרדוד

10. When a choir with many spread out members performs, they all face the conductor in the middle, who conducts a unified song; this is the beauty of the event. It is the same when the entire world faces the Beis HaMikdash, which is in the middle and at the height of the world, when davening; this is the beauty of the event of tefilla. This is the meaning of the posuk (שיר השירים ד', ד'), "כמגדל דוד צוארך בנוי לתלפיות", about which Chazal comment about all tefillos being directed toward the Beis HaMikdash (גמ' ברכות דף ל' ע"א): "The hill [תל] toward which all mouths [פיות] turn."
11. Thus, everyone must be careful about this halacha so as not to detract from the beauty of tefilla with unified direction.

Does Not Know the Direction of the Mikdash and Yerushalayim

12. **Individual.** If a person comes to a place from where he does not know the direction of the Beis HaMikdash, e.g., he is davening in some airport, office, or any other unfamiliar place, he can choose any direction for davening; the main thing is to direct his heart to Shomayim (שו"ע סי"ג). Some say he should direct his heart and thoughts to the site of the Mikdash (see below, 17) (חיי אדם כלל כ"ב אות י'). Nevertheless, it is proper for one to point his body in the direction of his choosing and turn his head to the right or left. This way, there is a fifty percent chance that either his body or head are facing the right direction, whereas if his body and head face the same way, there is only a twenty-five percent chance of him facing the right way (ביאה"ל ד"ה מי שאינו).
13. **Group.** If multiple people are davening together and none of them knows the right direction, they should all face the same way; they should not each face a different direction (שולחן שלמה סי"א).

Direction of Tefilla When Traveling

14. When davening while traveling, e.g., by car, bus, train, or plane, if one is standing for Shemoneh Esrei, he should l'chatchila daven toward Yerushalayim. If he is davening sitting, he can daven toward the direction the seat faces, but he should turn his head toward Yerushalayim where possible (מ"ב סק"ט).
15. **Better without distractions.** If davening toward Yerushalayim will entail disturbances in kavana or the like, one can forgo this to daven undisturbed (שו"ת זכרון יהודה ח"א סי' י'), as long as he won't have his back toward Yerushalayim.
16. **Traveling to and from Eretz Yisroel.** If one is traveling by plane to Eretz Yisroel and finds a convenient place to stand without disturbing other people or the crew and without women in front of him, he should point his body for tefilla in the direction of travel. When traveling from Eretz Yisroel to somewhere else, one should stand to daven facing the back of the plane, obviously when there will not be disturbances, as above. However, if one davens sitting because he will be able to have better kavana that way without disturbances or issues of davening before erva, he can daven in his seat even though it faces away from Eretz Yisroel. He should turn his face toward Yerushalayim if possible (כ"ל).

Directing the Heart to the Site of the Mikdash

17. Besides for the abovementioned requirement to face Yerushalayim and the site of the Mikdash when davening, one must also direct his thoughts and imagine he is standing in the Kodosh HaKodashim of the Beis HaMikdash in Yerushalayim (שׁוֹרֵי עַיִן סִי צִד וּמִלֵּב סִקָּה). Even if one's body is far, his heart should be close (חֲרָדִים בְּהַקְדָּמָה). It suffices to picture this once before starting Shemoneh Esrei, as during Shemoneh Esrei, one must focus on the meaning of the words (מִלֵּב סִי צִד וּמִלֵּב סִקָּה). Similarly, if mid-Shemoneh Esrei one finds himself daydreaming and roaming throughout the world, when he comes back to his place and wants to stir himself again to daven with kavana, he should again picture that he is at the site of the Mikdash (עַיִן מִלֵּב סִי צִד וּמִלֵּב סִקָּה).
18. "וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם." It is possible that the source for this is from Yaakov Avinu. The posuk says, "וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמַקוֹם," which teaches that the Beis HaMikdash came toward him until Beis El (גַּם הוֹלֵךְ דָּף צִדָּה). This was Har HaMoriya, where Avraham davened, and the field in which Yitzchok davened (שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם). All the tefillos instituted by the Avos were instituted at the site of the Mikdash. That is where the gate of tefillos is, as the posuk says (וַיִּצְאָה כַּח צִדָּה); Rashi and the Ramban explain that this refers to the Beis HaMikdash, which is the gate through which the tefillos and korbanos go up to Shomayim. Thus, we must also direct our hearts and thoughts to the site of the Mikdash so that our tefillos will be accepted just as the tefillos of our Avos were accepted in this holy place.

Setting the Aron Kodesh in a Shul

Aron Kodesh in the Direction of Davening

19. L'chatchila, the aron kodesh should be set at the side of the shul toward which the people daven (שׁוֹרֵי עַיִן סִי קִנֵּי סִיָּה). This is so that people face the aron while standing in tefilla (מִלֵּב שֵׁם סִקָּיָה). Thus, when planning the building of a shul, it should be determined which side faces the Mikdash, and that is where the aron kodesh should go.
20. **No other choice.** If it was impossible to set the aron kodesh on the side facing the Beis HaMikdash and it was set on the north or south side, some are uncertain whether to daven directly facing the aron kodesh or toward Yerushalayim (בִּיאָהֳלָל סִי קִנֵּי דָּהּ שְׁהוּא בְּרוּחַ). Most poskim hold one should daven toward Yerushalayim, as that is the more important factor (מִלֵּב סִי צִדָּה סִקָּיָה, שׁוֹרֵי עַיִן שֵׁם הַלֵּוִי הִי סִי כֵּן). In other words, it is very possible that the reality of a building or the layout of the streets in a built-up location does not allow the aron kodesh to face Yerushalayim. In such a case, a person davening must face his body toward Yerushalayim despite the fact that the aron kodesh was not set toward Yerushalayim.

Places that Do Not Face Directly toward the Mikdash

21. **Yeshivas Mir.** The aron kodesh and benches in the main building of the holy Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim do not face the Beis HaMikdash; the right-hand wall faces directly toward the site of the Mikdash. Thus, some daven toward the right-hand wall. Even those who daven toward the aron kodesh should at least turn 45° to the right and daven diagonally or turn their heads to the right.
22. In the big ezras nashim of Yeshiva Mir's main building, the benches are arranged such that the mispallel faces the proper direction, toward the Beis HaMikdash. Thus, one should daven in that direction even though he is davening with mispallelim in the main beis medrash who are facing more toward the aron kodesh, as they are really two distinct rooms.

Batei Medrash in Boro Park

23. One should daven facing east in New York. In the Boro Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, the roads are arranged in a grid in which all the Streets go in one direction and all the Avenues go perpendicular to the Streets. However, the whole grid of roads is arranged diagonally relative to Yerushalayim. Hence, if the wall with the aron kodesh is on a Street, the mispallel faces northeast and should turn slightly to his right to face due east. If the wall with the aron kodesh is on an Avenue, he faces southeast and should turn and daven slightly toward his left to directly face Yerushalayim.
24. When establishing the side with the aron kodesh for the first time in Boro Park, if there is an option to put it on either a Street or an Avenue, some explain that it is preferable to put it on a Street, as the Streets face closer to the east than the Avenues (הַגֵּרָב שׁוֹבֵקֵס, קוֹי בֵּית אֶהָרֵן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל צִדָּה עַמֵּל 112).

Batei Medrash with Conflicting Directions

25. It often happens that in batei medrash in a neighborhood, based on the setup of the streets and buildings, a corner of the room faces Yerushalayim. For the most part, it is difficult to put an aron kodesh in a room's corner. Thus, some batei medrash set the direction of tefilla one way, e.g., southeast, and others set it northeast. This is not a problem of לא תתגודדו and it does not look like people are davening to two G-ds. That issue only applies when people daven in different ways within one beis medrash.
26. **Shtiblach.** Also, when there are multiple rooms where people daven within one building, and out of necessity there are different directions of tefilla in different rooms, it is not a problem of appearing like there are two G-ds. Each tefilla room is viewed independently; we do not look at the building as a whole.

Tzibbur which Davens Improperly

27. L'chatchila, if a tzibbur davens the wrong way, e.g., the whole tzibbur davens facing north or south, they should receive a ruling from a rav that everyone should turn their bodies when davening toward the proper direction. It is not good for some mispallelim to face south or north and some to face east, or the like. Every shul rav should look into this.
28. If, in practice, they did not make a decision to change and the tzibbur davens in the wrong direction, there is a machlokes among the poskim about a person who wants to be meticulous and daven in the proper direction of Yerushalayim. Some poskim say one should not deviate from the rest of the tzibbur; he should daven in the direction that the tzibbur davens (דַּעַת הַחֹלֵק בְּשׁוֹרֵי יָד אֵלָיו סִי אֵי וְהוּבָא בְּבָאָר הַיֵּטֵב סִי צִדָּה).
29. However, others argue. They hold one can daven the right way without it being an issue of arrogance or causing hostility, as perhaps the reason he is facing a different direction than the tzibbur is because he wants wisdom or wealth (יָד אֵלָיו שֵׁם) (see below, 31).
30. Some compromise and say his body should face the same way that the tzibbur faces, but he should turn his face the right way (מִלֵּב סִקָּיָה). Or he can point both his body and face diagonally and daven toward the corner to fulfill both (see below, 34; עֵיט). If one is facing diagonally with a slight turn, it is not a problem of deviating from the tzibbur (עַיִן מֵה שְׁכַתְּבָנו שׁוֹרֵי חוֹקֵי חַיִּים חִ"ב).

For Wealth, Face North; for Wisdom, Face South

To the East and the Side

31. Chazal say that if a person wants to become wise, he should face south ["יִדְרִים"]; if he wants to become wealthy, he should face north ["יִצְפִּין"] (גַּם בִּבְּדָף כִּיָּה עֵיב) [יִצְפִּין]. i.e., when davening Shemoneh Esrei, he should turn south or north in accordance with his wishes (וַעֲיִ מְהֵרֵשֵׁי אֵי). But he needs to stand facing the Beis HaMikdash, asks the Gemara, so how can he face south or north? The Gemara answers that "he goes to the side" [מַצְדָּד אֲצִדוּדִין], i.e., there is a way to fulfill both matters. There are multiple approaches to this.
32. **Body to the east, face to the side.** Some say he should daven with his body facing east and only turn his face – south for wisdom, north for wealth (בִּי בִשֵׁם רֵשִׁי שֵׁם). The upside of this is that his body is facing the same way as the rest of the tzibbur; he just turns his face in a different direction (מִלֵּב סִקָּיָה, מִלֵּב סִקָּיָה).
33. **Face to the east, body to the side.** Others say יִדְרִים and יִצְפִּין mean his body should face south or north, and just his face should be turned to the east to face Yerushalayim (רַמְלָה סִבָּה). i.e., if he wants wisdom, he should stand with his body and face to the southeast, such that he fulfills an aspect of facing east and of facing south. The same goes for the north: if he wants wealth, he should face the northeast. But in any event, his body and face should point the same way (וְרִבֵּנו גֵּרָשׁוּם, וְרֵש לְפָרֵשׁ כֵּן גַּם דַּעַת רֵשִׁי).
34. **Diagonal.** Some explain that the Gemara means he should stand diagonally between the two directions. i.e., if he wants wisdom, he should stand with his body and face to the southeast, such that he fulfills an aspect of facing east and of facing south. The same goes for the north: if he wants wealth, he should face the northeast. But in any event, his body and face should point the same way (וְרִבֵּנו גֵּרָשׁוּם, וְרֵש לְפָרֵשׁ כֵּן גַּם דַּעַת רֵשִׁי).
35. Today, we do not see people stand to daven with their body facing one way and their face facing a completely different way. If one stands this way, he will look strange to people. It is possible that it is because we daven from a siddur today, so one's face is always lined up with his body. Thus, the best way to fulfill these matters is by facing diagonally, as mentioned. One who wants wisdom should face southeast; one should face northeast for wealth.

גִּבְרַת יִדְרֵנו הֲרַחֵם ר' מוֹשֶׁה רוֹקַח שְׁלִימָא - רִמָּ בְּלוֹנְדוֹן
לְרַגְל שְׁמַחַת נִישׁוּאֵי בְּתוֹ הַכְּלָה שְׁתַּחֲוִי
עַבְיָה חַתָּן הַחֹשֵׁב אֶהָרֵן זִינְגֶּר הִי"ו
בֵּן הֲרַחֵם ר' מוֹשֶׁה יִצְחָק זִינְגֶּר הִי"ו לֹנְדוֹן
בְּרַכַּת טוֹב שְׁנוֹרָה לְסָבִים הֲרַחֵם ר' אֱלֵעָזָר רוֹקַח הִי"ו
וְהֲרַחֵם ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שְׁמוּאֵל בְּלִיעֶר הִי"ו
וְהַגָּאוֹן ר' אֱלֵעָזָר פְּרִיעֶלְדֵּר שְׁלִימָא רַחֵם וְוִילְרִיין

גִּבְרַת יִדְרֵנו הֲרַחֵם ר' יַעֲקֹב דוֹד שְׁפִיגְלָמָן שְׁלִימָא
לְרַגְל שְׁמַחַת הַבְּרִית שֶׁל

הַרְחֵם הַגָּאוֹל מוֹשֶׁה צִבִּי בְּלִיעֶר בֵּן גִּיטָה הֲרַחֵם ר' שְׁמַעוֹן יְהוּדָה בְּלִיעֶר
מוֹל טוֹב לְאֲבוֹי הֲרַחֵם ר' יוֹסֵף יְהוּדָה אֲרִיָּה שְׁפִיגְלָמָן מַחְשׁוּבֵי מַעֲלָבוֹן
וְהֲרַחֵם אֲבָרְדָם זָאב בְּלִיעֶר שְׁלִימָא