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TAKING A STAND: SHOULD ONE RISE BEFORE RELIGIOUS LEADERS?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman
The Associated Press reports:

Hours after Pope Francis' death was announced, Israel's Foreign Ministry posted a short message on X: "Rest in peace, Pope Francis. May his memory be a blessing." Several hours later, it was deleted without explanation. Coming at a time of effusive global mourning over Francis' death, the decision to delete the post appeared to reflect the tensions that have emerged between Israel and the Vatican over Francis' frequent criticism of Israel's conduct during the war in Gaza. The Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the deletion.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is usually quick to issue statements on the passing of major international figures. It took him four days to issue a terse, 28-word statement on the official Prime Minister account, and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has been silent. The only immediate official condolences came from Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, who holds a largely ceremonial role and who praised Francis for being "a man of deep faith and boundless compassion."

For most of Francis' papacy, ties between Israel and the Vatican steadily improved—highlighted by a visit to the Holy Land in 2014. But everything changed after the war in Gaza erupted with Hamas' deadly attack in southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023.

While expressing sympathy for Israeli victims and hostages, Francis has suggested Israel's subsequent attacks in Gaza and Lebanon were "immoral" and disproportionate. He also called for an investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute genocide, a charge Israel denies while investigations at the U.N.'s top courts proceed...

At the start of Francis' papacy, the relationship with Israel warmed significantly. Francis visited the Holy Land in 2014 as one of his first international trips, when he met with Netanyahu, who was prime minister at the time. Then-President Shimon Peres visited the Vatican multiple times, including with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to plant a peace tree in the Vatican

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PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA COUNTING ON COMMAND

Excerpted and adapted from a *shiur*
by HaRav Chaim Weg

...She must count seven days for herself, and
afterward she may be purified.

Vayikra 15:28

In this *pasuk*, the Torah instructs a *zavah* to wait *shiva nekiyim* (seven clean days) before she may immerse in a mikveh. Tosfos (Ksubos 72a) asks why such a woman (and all women in a *nidah* state today, who have the same status, practically, as a *zavah*) does not recite a *bracha* on the counting of *shiva nekiyim* as we make a *bracha* on counting the *Omer*.

Tosfos answers that we only make a *bracha* on counting where the order is part of the calendar (e.g., *Yovel* or *Sfiras Ha'Omer*) and will definitely be completed. A *zavah*, however, may not be able to complete the *shiva nekiyim*.

Acharonim disagree about how to interpret Tosfos's answer. According to the *Shelah*, there is a mitzvah *asei* for the woman to count *shiva nekiyim*. A *bracha* is not recited, though, due to concern for *bracha levatalah* if she cannot complete the *shiva nekiyim*. The *Noda Bihudah* argues that according to Tosfos, because of the concern that it won't be possible to complete the count, there is no mitzvah to count *shiva nekiyim*. Rather, the Torah's "count" means that she should pay attention to her state to verify

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Out for the Count

Q I will be undergoing surgery during *Sfirah* and will probably miss counting that day. Should I count even now without a *bracha*?

A The reason one counts without a *bracha* after missing a day is that some *Rishonim*, including the *Bahag*, hold that if one day's counting is missed, the *sfirah* lacks the quality of *temimos* (completeness), so the mitzvah can no longer be fulfilled. Following this, the *Chida* (Moreh Be'etzba 217) writes that if a day is missed, the *brachos* recited previously were *levatalah* (in vain). Therefore, if you anticipate that you will miss a day, it stands to reason that you shouldn't begin counting with a *bracha*, to

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Gardens.

But the Israeli government's rightward shift, and the ongoing war with Gaza, strained the ties...

Although world leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron, will attend Francis' funeral, Israel will only send its Vatican ambassador, a lower-level diplomat.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oren Marmorstein said this was due partially to scheduling conflicts and the funeral taking place on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, which requires Israeli politicians to stay within walking distance of the funeral. The decision was not indicative of any tension with the Vatican, he said.

"Israel will be represented in the most official way in the funeral through our ambassador there," said Marmorstein. "There were things we didn't agree with, but we are taking part in the funeral."

During the Pope's 2014 visit to Israel, in addition to meeting Netanyahu, he met Israel's two chief rabbis of the time, R' Yitzchak Yosef and R' Dovid Lau. At the meeting, Rav Yosef told the pope, "I bless him and thank him for everything he does for humanity and Jewish communities worldwide: *Baruch haba* lirushalayim." Rav Lau greeted him with "*Bruchim haba'im* lirushalayim."²

Kikar HaShabbos reports that following the meeting's formal ceremony, the Pope told Rav Yosef, "I need your blessing." The latter responded, "May you be blessed from the mouth of the One on high."³

Bechadrei Chareidim reported at the time that the Pope's visit raised "many questions among Jews who are *shomrei* Torah umitzvos: Is it permitted to participate in ceremonies at which the pope is present, and is it permitted to shake his hand?" The site cites a column of the *Chareidi* journalist Shlomo Kook (son of R' Ben Tzion Kook), in which he related that seven years earlier he had joined a European trip of then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that included a visit to then-Pope Benedict XVI. Kook and his father discussed the visit with the latter's *rebbe*, R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who

was not pleased with the idea that I would enter the Vatican and gaze upon the face of the pope. "I am not discussing whether it is permitted or prohibited," said the gaon R' Yosef Shalom, "but how is it conceivable to go and see the *tum'ah*? For he is the *avi avos hatum'ah*, is totally submerged in *tum'ah*, and

represents the *tum'ah*."

Bechadrei Chareidim proceeds to note, though, that Rav Elyashiv himself had permitted the chief rabbis of his time to meet the pope, "in order that Jews should not suffer, as the bottom line is that the pope controls a large community of Christians in whose midst Jews dwell."⁴

Questions of how Jews should conduct themselves in the presence of high-ranking and powerful Christian clergy were considered by two great Ashkenazi *poskim* of six centuries ago, the Trumas Hadeshen (R' Yisrael Isserlin) and the Mahari Weil. The former writes:

Question: A powerful priest or noble (*sar*) who has a graven image (*tzelem*) or cross attached to his clothes or on his hat, and a Jew appears before him to honor and bow to him and to doff his hat to him—is this permitted or prohibited?

Answer: It would seem that it is good to be careful and avoid, to the extent possible, bowing before him in such a context... And so I recall from my youth, that the priest from Prussia who was in Vienna was in charge of all the assets in Prussia, and all those priests have crosses attached to their robes (*sarbolim*); when the Jews would come to him with regard to their affairs, he knew that they would not show him honor due to the abomination that was opposite them, so he would fold over the robe and cover it so that they would be able to show him honor.

But I found exactly this issue in a copy of a *teshuvah* of R' Yitzchak of Oppenheim:

"Regarding the priests who have a graven image attached in front of them on their clothes, is it permitted to rise before them and to remove one's hat? It appears to me that it is permitted to bow to them, to rise before them, and to remove one's hat in their presence, because they do not make themselves an object of worship (*avodah zarah*), and they are only served due to their greatness, for they are nobles, and not because of their crosses... But one should nevertheless close his eyes to the extent possible or rise prior to his arrival."⁵

The Trumas Hadeshen proceeds to challenge R' Yitzchak of Oppenheim's lenient view, but the Mahari Weil endorses it:

It would seem that it is permitted to remove the *matron* (presumably some sort of hat) from one's head in the presence of the priests...although they have crosses on their robes. Because the non-Jews themselves are not accustomed to remove the *matron* in the presence of the cross, so when the

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avoid the possibility of *bracha levatalah*.

But R' Betzalel Stern (Betzeil Hachochmah 5:45) writes, based on Shu"t Yad Yitzchak, that a person whose doctor says he will not live to finish *Sfirah* may count with

a *bracha*, because *temimos* is only lacking if someone is capable of counting but fails to do so. This *svara* can be applied to your case.

Some dispute this entire premise and say that even according to the Bahag, missing a day does not turn the earlier *brachos* into *brachos levatalah*. The Ben Ish Chai (Rav Pe'alim 3:32) says that although the complete mitzvah is not fulfilled, there is a partial mitzvah, so the *brachos* are not *levatalah*.

Others say that even the Bahag agrees that earlier counts are not retroactively pointless. Only future countings are invalid, so there is no issue with the past *brachos* (see Kovetz Halachos *perek* 4 footnote 15).

In practice, one may rely on those that permit the *bracha*, especially given that many *Rishonim* contend that missing a day does not impact *temimos* (see Kovetz Halachos 4:13 and Piskei Teshuvos 489:22).

Jew removes the *matron*, he, too, does not appear to be removing it in the presence of the cross. And so I heard that R' Yitzchak z"l of Oppenheim ruled.⁶

The *Rama* cites both opinions, and he rules that it is good to follow the stringent view of the Trumas Hadeshen and avoid rising upon the priests' arrival and removing one's hat in their presence, and only to do so in a manner that does not appear to honor the priest and idolatrous symbols. For example, one may rise to collect his dropped coins, or rise or remove his hat and bow before the priest arrives.⁷



RAV ARYEH FINKEL

¹Melanie Lidman, A deleted condolence after Pope's death revealed tension between Israel and the Vatican, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-jerusalem-israel-funeral-vatican-netanyahu-5e6fd6caa4850b0ee5b4fc8720043e1e>.

²Yoni Compinsky, HaRav Yosef La'afior: Mah Veish Beluchos Habris? Arutz Sheva, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/27692>.

³Yishai Cohen, Ha'afior LaRishon LeTzion: Tzarich Es Bircas'cha, Kikar HaShabbos, <https://www.kikar.co.il/haredim-news/143170>. Cf. here.

⁴Moshe Weisberg, Hagrish Z"t: "Ha'afior Hu Avi Avos Hatum'ah," Bechadrei Chareidim, <https://www.bhol.co.il/news/756025>.

⁵Trumas Hadeshen cheilek 1 siman 196, cited in Darchei Moshe Y.D. siman 150.

⁶Shu"t Mahari Weil Dinin Vehalachos siman 28, cited in Darchei Moshe ibid.

⁷Hagahos to Shulchan Aruch ibid. se'if 3.

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that the days are completed.

The Bais Meir questions why the Shelah is concerned with *bracha levatalah*. After all, if the Torah commands a woman to count, then a *bracha* on the count should not

be in vain. For this reason, the Bais Meir holds that there can be no mitzvah. Perhaps the Shelah would respond that in his view, the mitzvah is only achieved if she completes the entire *shiva nekiyim*; if not, she has not fulfilled it, and the *bracha* is therefore *levatalah*. The Bais Meir,

on the other hand, holds that each day's count is considered a separate mitzvah, and a *bracha* recited would not be considered *levatalah* even if the count is later interrupted.

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