



# FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

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## A Minor Doing the Concluding *Barchu*

**Question:** At *Ma'ariv*, a boy under *bar mitzvah* recited *Kaddish Yatom*. When he finished, people told him to say *Barchu* as well. Was that proper? If not, should I have answered?

**Answer:** A *mishna* (Megilla 24a) seems to address your question. Whereas a *katan* may get an *aliya*, he may not serve as *chazan* or be *poress al Shema*. Rashi (ibid. 23b) explains that *poress al Shema* is reciting *Kaddish*, *Barchu*, and the first *beracha* of *Birchot Kri'at Shema* (the latter no longer practiced – Rama, Orach Chayim 69:1) on behalf of latecomers. *Shuls* that recite *Barchu* at the end of *Shacharit* and *Ma'ariv*

(*Barchu Batra*) do a form of this (see Mishna Berura, intro. to *siman* 69), and thus we see that a *katan* may not lead it. Rashi (ibid. 24a) explains that because a *katan* is not obligated in these matters, he cannot do them on behalf of others.

However, there are cracks in the opposition to *ketanim* doing *Barchu*. Rav Yosef Karo (Beit Yosef and Shulchan Aruch, OC 53:10) refers equivocally to a *minhag* to allow a *katan* to serve as *chazan* for *Ma'ariv*. The Rama (ad loc.) is even less enthusiastic about it, and the Mishna Berura (53:32) cites being *motzi* the *tzibbur* in *Barchu* as the main problem. However, the *minhag* and the *poskim* who justify it must have a way to deal with the *mishna*. The Rashba (Shut I:239) suggests that there is not a problem of a *katan* not being obligated in *tefilla/Barchu* because an older *katan* is obligated Rabbinically and *tefilla* is only a Rabbinic obligation even for adults. He proposes then that the reason a *katan* may not be a *chazan* is due to *kavod hatzibbur*, which may allow for flexibility



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(see Beit Yosef *ibid*). The Beit Yosef also suggests that since *Ma'ariv* was originally an optional *tefilla*, a *katan* may suffice to lead it (the *mishna* could relate to *Shacharit*).

What can we learn from a *katan*'s ability to recite *Kaddish*? For one, we see that a *katan* can recite for the *tzibbur* something that requires a *minyán*. On the other hand, according to most, a *katan* can only recite the *Kaddeishim* that are peripheral to *tefilla* (Gesher Hachayim 30:8:4). It is actually because a *katan* is incapable of being *chazan* that *Kaddish Yatom* was set aside for mourners, including *ketanim* (Mishna Berura 132:10). In some ways, *Barchu* appears to be less of a problem of being *motzi* than *Kaddish* is, as it seems just like a prompt for the *tzibbur* to bless Hashem with "*Baruch Hashem hamevorach...*" (the *chazan*'s repetition of those words apparently is not to be *motzi* the *tzibbur* – see Mishna Berura 57:3:4).

Additionally, we do find that a *katan* does say *Barchu* when he gets an *aliya*. To explain the dichotomy in the *mishna* we have to say something along the lines that *Barchu* before an *aliya* is a requirement of the *oleh* and it is not reciting something on behalf of the *tzibbur* (Ishei Yisrael 15:(94)).

We have seen some logic and scant sources to allow a *katan* to recite *Barchu* at least at *Ma'ariv*, which we arguably might extend to *Barchu Batra* of *Shacharit*, which is based on only a chance that someone missed *Barchu*. However, *poskim* assume that a *katan*

should not be reciting it (Gesher Hachayim *ibid.*; Ishei Yisrael 15:32; Tefilla K'hilchata 17:).

If a *katan* did *Barchu Batra*, may/should one answer? Answering *Barchu* is important enough to interrupt at almost every juncture in *davening* (Shulchan Aruch, OC 66:3), apparently even for *Barchu Batra* after having already answered *Barchu* (see Mishna Berura 109:5). It is wrong to not respond when the *tzibbur* is answering *Barchu Batra* (Ishei Yisrael 16:(87), citing Rav C. Kanievsky zt"l). Admittedly, one must not answer *Barchu* without proper prompting (e.g., nine people did not hear it – Be'ur Halacha to 57:1). However, a *katan* is capable of prompting during his *aliya* and may just be missing the full power to be *motzi* others with it, and we have seen opinions that he can say it as a *chazan* at *Ma'ariv*. Therefore, if the mistake was made to have the *katan* say *Barchu Batra*, we posit that it is better to answer him than to not answer (even in a case where the *katan* will not notice and be embarrassed). ■

## Having a dispute?



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