



Rebuking Those Talking During *Davening*

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Question: I find it very difficult to concentrate at my *shul* during *chazarat hashatz*, as some congregants talk, which disrupts my *tefilla* and the service's sanctity. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 124:7) requires the congregation to be attentive during *chazarat hashatz* and forbids talking. I have approached the *gabbaim* about this issue, but they have been unwilling to act. Last week, out of frustration, I shushed someone who was talking, but this caused tension in the *shul*, and some complained to me. Was my response appropriate? What should I do in the future? [*Upon inquiry, the querier said that the shul has a rabbi, with whom he discussed the matter years ago, and the rabbi did not do much about it. Besides this issue, he is satisfied with the values and actions of the shul and its membership.*]

Answer: Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (OC 124:7) quotes and rules like the Orchot Chayim, who disparages those who speak idle matters during *chazarat hashatz*. Furthermore, it is one of the few times that the Shulchan Aruch directs observers of a wrongdoing to scold the perpetrator. So, at

first glance, you could not be more right.

Let us briefly put things in perspective. *Chazarat hashatz* is far from the most severe time to speak (see LTHP III, A-10); the critical thing is to have the nine answering the *chazan* for all the *berachot* (Shulchan Aruch, ibid. 4). There is a *machloket* about, when the quorum is clearly met, whether others can learn Torah (see Mishna Berura 124:17). On the other hand, it is disgraceful if, while the *tzibbur* stands before Hashem, members thereof are talking freely. This is both disruptive to people like you and a *chillul Hashem*, including in comparison to other religions' houses of prayer (see Aruch Hashulchan, OC 124:12). Perhaps because of the unseemliness or the tendency of our nation to slip into bad habits of such talking that the *poskim* tried to nip the problem in the bud with strong language and action.

Classic *tochacha* (rebuke) is done to change the actions of one who sinned knowingly. Although the *mitzva* exists nowadays, most follow the approach that one should not rebuke when it is not expected to be heeded, and, to the contrary, cause a negative reaction (see Yevamot 65a; see Amud Hay'mini, *siman* 10; regarding feared severe reactions, see Minchat Shlomo I:35). In most of today's

Orthodox *shuls*, where people basically understand that they should not be talking, there is little concern of causing hatred of religion. However, as you witnessed, rebuke still causes friction, which should be avoided when it provides no gain.

There is less chance that *tochacha* will be successful when many people are in the wrong together. Psychologically, they may feel that if talking was a REAL problem, not so many good people would be doing it. Also, the rebuker becomes a “public enemy,” i.e., easier to dismiss and criticize. Indeed, we find in several *poskim* resignation about the ability to “take on” those who talk during *chazarat hashatz* (Aruch Hashulchan ibid.; Shevet Halevi X:13).

It is not always a question of if to correct someone but when, how, and by whom it should be done. Consider the following application (see Rashi, Devarim 1:3) regarding timing. Yaakov, Moshe, Yehoshua, and Shmuel all waited until close to their deaths to rebuke their constituencies, out of concern that earlier rebuke might have caused them to change allegiances in favor of a path of evil. The same is true regarding who should be rebuking and how. The community leaders, especially the rabbi, are the ones who should be in charge of decisions and efforts.

Therefore, we recommend discussing the matter again with the *shul's* rabbi, who should have his finger on the pulse more than anyone else. His not taking a strong stand in the past certainly does not mean

that he does not care. He is likely to request that you not make waves at all. He may give you some guidelines on how, when, and to whom to express your dissatisfaction with the talking. While it is sad to have to curb your correct emotions, this too is part of serving Hashem. ■

Having a dispute?



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