
Davening to the Wall

ברכות דף ה': ושלחן ערוך סימן צ' סעיפים כ"א-כ"ג [עפ"י פסקי מ"ב]

What is the reason for davening directly to the wall?

The source is a פסוק which describes חזקיהו doing so. The רמב"ם explains that the reason for the דין is, so as not to distract one's thoughts. For this reason, if one cannot do so, he should close his eyes or look into the סידור.

Similarly, one should avoid anything that will disturb concentration. For example, it is wrong to print pictures and cartoons in the סידורים from which people daven. So too, although there is not problem to have the curtains drawn, one should avoid having attention-catching pictures or designs. If one wishes to decorate the shul in such a fashion, one should ensure that the painting is done above the eye level of the congregants.

Does this mean that nothing should stand between him and the wall?

Anything that is fixed and is there for the purpose of davening, such as the shul benches, poses no problem. Something which is not made to be moved, but serves no purpose for prayer, such as a bed, though strictly speaking it is not seen as an obstruction, in deference to the opinion of the ט"ז, where possible, one should be stringent. Although shtenders are moved about, since their primary purpose is for the sake of תפלה, one need not worry about them.

Only objects that are more than 4 טפחים (32cm-38.4cm) wide and 10 טפחים (80cm-96cm) high are problematic; even if they are the required width only at the top. Those that are less than these dimensions need not be removed. However, there are those who argue that they *do* disturb concentration and thus must be removed.

Although the מחבר writes that animals can stand in the way, the רמ"א contends that this is a mistake and it should read that they are most definitely a problem. As for other human-beings, it is perfectly fine to pray behind someone-else. Where possible, even this should be avoided. [See שערי ירושלים who brings a dissenting opinion that one who is stringent in this regard, is deemed a יחידיוטי.]

It is well worth noting that the פרי מגדים opines that the objection refers only to that which stands in his 4 אמות (192cm-230.4cm). Hence, even someone who finds himself in the middle of the room,

surrounded by many obstacles, if he places himself in a spot where no-one else and nothing else is standing in the 2 metres before him, there is no concern at all.

Is this obligation or a good thing to do?

As mentioned above, the aim is to prevent lapses in concentration. Thus, one should try to follow the above guidelines, but where it is not possible, there is no need to look for another room in which to daven. One should simply close one's eyes or look into the סידור.

Would closing one's eyes help if one is faced with a mirror?

No. Although it would help avoid the above mentioned problem, there is a further issue; namely, it seems like he is bowing down to himself.

Learning before Davening

ברכות דף ה': ושלחן ערוך סימן פ"ט סעיף ו' [עפ"י פסקי מ"ב]

Can one learn before davening שחרית?

Though תוספות sees no problem with this, we follow the opinion of רש"י who is stringent on this matter. We are concerned that he will become engrossed in his learning and lose track of time, missing the time for prayer. Even if he has a fixed quota to learn, it is forbidden to learn before davening. Hence, if one is in a place where he will not find a מנין, it would be better to forego the מעלה of davening at the *time* that the congregation will be praying, in order to daven at the earliest opportunity and then learn his quota.

Are there any exceptions?

Yes:

1. If one begins to learn before the time that one may daven; namely, day-break and some say that this refers to a little time before sunrise, the opportune and ideal time to pray.
2. The worry applies only to one accustomed to pray alone, without a מנין, in the בית המדרש in which he learns. Hence, if either a ציבור normally assembles there [acting as a reminder to daven], or if he normally proceeds to shul to pray with a מנין, one need not worry.
3. If one gives a shiur to the public, unless there is concern that the lecture will not conclude in good time to read שמע, the זכות הרבים is sufficient cause to wave this דין; if the shiur is postponed, who says the people will attend at a different time?

4. One may appoint someone else to remind him to daven. This person must, however, not be busy learning himself. [see 'Prohibited Activities Before Shema' for further details.]

If one did begin to learn, must he stop in the middle?

If he started before the time that one may daven, he need not stop. If he commenced after the time meant for praying, though he need not stop davening, there are differing views as to whether he must interrupt for קריאת שמע.

Direction of the Bed

ברכות דף ה': ושלחן ערוך סימן ג' סעיף ו' [עפ"י פסקי מ"ב]

רמב"ם הלכות בית הבחירה פרק ז הלכה ט

אסור לאדם לעולם שיפנה או שישן בין מזרח למערב, ואין צריך לומר שאין קובעין בית הכסא בין מזרח למערב בכל מקום מפני שההיכל במערב, לפיכך לא יפנה למערב ולא למזרח מפני שהוא כנגד המערב, אלא בין צפון לדרום נפנים וישנים, וכל המטיל מים מן הצופים ולפנים לא ישב ופניו כלפי הקדש אלא לצפון או לדרום או יסלק הקדש לצדדיו.

One must place the bed in the right direction. Is this a matter of prohibition or merely a good thing to do?

Although the גמרא implies that it is praiseworthy but not incumbent, the רמב"ם writes, and so is the פסק of the שולחן ערוך, that this is a matter of איסור. However, the ט"ז is adamant that the reasoning of the רמב"ם does not apply to us and thus, it is not a matter of prohibition.

Is this only a matter for husband and wife, or for anyone who sleeps in a bed?

Once again, although there are ראשונים, such as רש"י and תוספות, who maintain that this is linked to תשמיש המטה, a simple reading of the רמב"ם suggests that the prohibition applies to simply sleeping in the wrong direction, even if one's wife is not present.

In which direction should the bed actually be placed?

This is a matter of much debate. From the גמרא, as explained by רש"י and תוספות, the head of the bed should face north, since the שכינה is between east and west. This is the פסק of the שולחן ערוך too. However, the זוהר הקדוש would seem to say that the *width* of the bed should lie between north and south. The head of the bed should face west.

What is the final הלכה?

The *משנה ברורה* writes that one should try to follow the opinion of the *שלחן ערוך*, especially since the *Vilna Gaon* contends that the *זוהר הקדוש* means to say the same as our *גמרא*. However, there is a strong argument, to say that one need not rearrange the whole house just in order to conform to this opinion. This is based on a number of factors:

1. The above said opinion of the *ט"ז*. [It is interesting to note, however, that neither the *באר היטב* nor the *משנה ברורה* even mention this ruling.]
2. The opinion of the *זוהר הקדוש*, as explained by the *תשובות מנחם עזרי*.
3. The *מלבי"ם* opines that the *רמב"ם* also conforms to the *זוהר הקדוש* and twinned with the fact that many *pasken* in accordance with this, he feels that even *לכתחלה*, one should place the length of the bed between east and west.

[See *שלחן ערוך השלחן* who writes that our custom is not to be concerned with this *דין*. He concludes that since either way, one will not be fulfilling all opinions, 'this *דין* has fallen into a pit'.]

Although the *מחבר* rules that ideally, one should not even sleep in the wrong direction, the *מלבי"ם* rules that if one is clothed or at least the bed is surrounded with sheets, a bit like a canopy, one need not be concerned. Moreover, the *פרי מגדים* suggests that to take a nap never poses a problem.

Last Man out of Shul

[ברכות דף ה': ושלחן ערוך סימן צ' סעיף ט"ו [עפ"י פסקי מ"ב]

One must not leave someone davening alone in shul, for concern that he will not be able to concentrate. Does this apply nowadays?

Strictly speaking, no. But, there are those who are stringent.

Does this apply even during the day?

As above.

What if the person came in late?

If he clearly could never have finished in time, then he has surely indicated that he is not afraid to be left alone. However, it would be *מדת חסידות* to wait for him.

Does one have to wait for someone who is adding in extra *תפלות*?

One is not obligated to wait.