

# HALOCHOSCOPE

While davening *Shemone Esrei* on a windy day, someone's *Yarmulka* blows off in the middle. Should he continue bareheaded? Should he continue with his hand or sleeve covering his head? May he move from his spot, retrieve his *Yarmulka*, and continue there or go back to the original spot?

The issues:

(A) The principle of wearing a *Yarmulka*; particularly for *Tefilos*.

(B) Remaining stationary for *Shemone Esrei*

(A) *The Yarmulka*

Sources for wearing a *Yarmulka* are found in Talmud and related texts. None of them specifically *require* covering the head. Their speculative nature leads to debate on their strength as proof for the practice. Evidently, the practice is uniquely Jewish and has existed for a long time. There is little reason to speculate that it arose recently for an incidental reason. It is presumed to be founded in Halacha or practices uniquely Jewish. Thus, it is considered a valid Jewish practice. The debate is only on how it relates to existing laws.

The regular reason given is that covering the head engenders a sense of awe of Heaven. One reason simply states "The *Shechina*, Divine Presence, is above my head." Philosophically, the following reasons are offered. The human body is made up of two elements, the animal parts and the human parts. The hands and face perform human functions not performed by animals. Therefore, they are exposed. The rest of the body, being similar to that of animals, is covered due to shame. One must delineate between the area given to mankind to control, and the areas above, which are under sole control of Hashem. The head is covered as a form of partition. In addition, covering the head is viewed as a sign of submission and modesty. Furthermore, the head contains the holy elements of the body. It is as if it is constantly in the presence of Hashem. Just as during *Tefila* one must dress appropriately due to the presence of the *Shechina*, so should the head constantly be covered.

One source is a Talmudic passage on destiny. Astrologers informed the mother of a young future Talmudic sage that he was destined to steal. If she covered his head constantly he would be reminded to fear Heaven and would

overcome the temptation. Once, while sitting under an apple tree belonging to someone else, his headcovering fell off. Immediately, he reached to take an apple. It seems that it was uncommon to cover the head. Possibly, the practice was to cover the head anyhow. The astrologers advised rigorous adherence in this case. Here we have an indication to the purpose of the Yarmulka. Indeed the word Yarmulka is reputed to be a condensation of the Hebrew/Aramaic *Yarei Malka*, fear of the King (Hashem.)

In another source, three sages watched a child pass by bareheaded. They commented on his arrogance and linked it to probable dubious ancestry. Later investigation confirmed their suspicions. This indicates that common practice was to cover the head. Absence of a headcovering aroused suspicion. However, it does not indicate a reason, but that the absence of the cover indicates arrogance.

Another passage refers to the covering worn by a Rabbi and its value. This text clearly limits the practice to distinguished people. Some Poskim consider it mandatory for a *Talmid Chacham*, scholar, to cover his head. In another passage, too, the type of headcovering is mentioned in reference to a sage hurriedly placing an unsuitable headcovering on to leave the house. The indication is that it was not necessarily worn at all times. Accordingly, some say it must be worn out of doors, but not indoors. This was the practice in some communities.

In the main source cited by the Poskim, a sage is reputed never to have walked more than four cubits (6-8 ft.) bareheaded. This indicates that it was considered *Midas Chasidus*, extra piety, and at that, only to walk more than four cubits. However, other versions of this text omit reference to the four cubit distance. Nonetheless, some Poskim point out that the practice applies to walking about. In a sitting position, no such practice is recorded. In another passage, a term is used by a sage clearly referring to *Midas Chasidus*, when he claims to have always covered his head when walking. Other Talmudic and Midrashic sources are cited that also indicate that the practice was not widespread among the masses but a *Midas Chasidus*.

Thus, most Poskim attribute sources cited for the practice to *Midas Chasidus*. However, once adopted, the practice became *Minhag Yisroel*, a custom of Jews. This puts it in the category of *Neder*, an undertaking made by utterance, which is difficult to suspend. The other aspect of the practice of bareheadedness is that some Poskim consider it *Chukas Hagoy*, custom of the prevailing gentile culture. When these practices have little or no rational explanation, or are rooted in superstition, they are forbidden Scripturally. If local society does not emphasize the custom, it is considered to have been abandoned. Apparently, gentile culture emphasized the

ideal of uncovering the head, at least sitting indoors. Thus, it became forbidden for a Jew to practice this. By default, Jews had to cover their heads. Since it is no longer considered a *Chukas Hagoy*, some Poskim maintain that this aspect is not applicable in times of pressing need to bare the head. Some Poskim say, since it has become the accepted practice of Jews, breaking with the tradition demonstrates arrogance, immodesty, and insensitivity to Jewish values. [See Shabbos 118b, 156b, Kidushin 8a, 30a, 31a, Kalah Rabasi 2:2, Poskim. Rambam Dayos 5:6. Sefer Chasidim 53 (Mekor Chesed 14). Tur, Bach, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 2:6, Aruch Hashulchan 10. 8:2, Bais Yosef, Darkei Moshe, Taz 3, Gra, 91:3-5, commentaries. Chovev 14:4. Igros Moshe O.C. I:1 IV:2. Choshen Mishpat I:93.]

For a *Azkara*, mention of Hashem's Name, a *Tefila* or *Brocha*, there is more reason to cover the head. [Some maintain that the same applies to entering a shul.] A minority consider even this a *Midas Chasidus*. Many consider it a compulsory obligation. The principle here is respect for Hashem before whom one stands. Decent dress itself is relative issue, depending on prevailing local dress practices. There is a *Midas Chasidus* to place a second cover on the head during davening.

For this more serious requirement, some Poskim allow covering the head with a hand. Thus, if one is unable to find a Yarmulka in the dark, but must recite a *Brocha*, he may cover his head with his hand. Others maintain that this is insufficient. The hand is part of the body and does not constitute a separate cover. Thus we have three opinions, (i) any head covering for *Brochos* is *Midas Chasidus*, (ii) some cover is mandatory, but the hand is sufficient, (iii) a separate item must be used to cover the head for *Brochos*. [See Kidushin 39b Sofrim 14:15. Trumas Hadeshen 10. Tur, Darkei Moshe, Sh. Ar. O.C. 8:2 91:3-5, 206:3, commentaries.]

### **(B) Remaining in one place for Shemone Esrei**

Two factors must be considered here. First, one must stand, and as possible, with his feet together in one spot for *Tefilah*. Second, one may not interrupt his *Tefilah* in any way. The recommended stance for *Tefilah* is learned from two sources, the *Malachim*, angels, and the *Avoda*, temple service of the Kohanim. The Talmud cites a *Passuk* describing the angels as having one straight foot. During *Tefilah* we resemble angels. We are divested of physical needs to be devoted to *Tefilah*. We submit to service of Hashem, and negate any other possible movement, and prevent running away. We show no desire for movement but only wish to be in the presence of Hashem. Long paces were restricted when ascending the altar. This teaches us that Kohanim were forbidden to spread their feet while performing the *Avoda*. One explanation is that while Kohanim did have to walk with short paces,

Malachim need not use two feet at all. Also, Kohanim are themselves compared to Malachim. According to the latter explanation, we need not compare ourselves to Kohanim if we can compare ourselves directly to angels. Some say that the true reason is to be able to concentrate.

The main types of interruption discussed are talking, motioning, waiting silently between one part and the next and leaving the spot where one began Tefilah. The Tefilah that was interrupted can also lose its continuity, and the person might be required to repeat Shemone Esrei. Talking is the most serious form of interruption. Even responding to the Chazan or inserting the wrong addition to Shemone Esrei could invalidate the continuity. Pausing for long enough to have ended the entire Tefilah also invalidates the continuity.

Moving from one's spot is discussed with respect to both of the above issues. Poskim maintain that moving from place to place does not interrupt continuity, especially if one intended to move before beginning. Even if one moves as a result of an unforeseen occurrence, he may continue from where he stooped. One may not interrupt to respond to someone. In case of imminent danger, one may interrupt. If, however, it is possible to walk away, one should rather do this than **say something**. In addition, one may **walk** for a **Mitzvah** during the time **he** is **saying** the additional prayers at the end. For urgent needs of the Tefilah **he** is saying, he may even walk during the Shemone Esrei. These include the presence of something in the proximity of which one may not continue davening. If one moved away, then was able to move back, some say this is preferable to continuing where he moved away to. If at all possible, one should try to avoid moving away. [See Brochos 10b 23a 24b 30b 33a Yerushalmi 1:1, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 8:13 65:1 90:27 92:2 95:1 97:4 103:2 104, 621:4 Rema, commentaries.]

In our case, he may not continue bareheaded. Is it preferable to retrieve the Yarmulka, or to remain in his spot and continue davening uncomfortably? It is not ideal to use a hand or sleeve to cover the head, and is distracting. Thus, he should rather move to retrieve his Yarmulka, than continue with an improvised covering. He should return to his original place to finish davening. If retrieving it will lead to pausing long enough to finish the whole Shemone Esrei, he should improvise. Interrupting to leave will inevitably lead to repetition, involving many more utterances of Hashem's Name.