

TEFILLAH TIPS

TEFILLAT SHACHARIT—SHABBAT

Barchu

A story is told of a father waking his son up to go to *shul* on *Shabbat* morning. To his chagrin the son seems to be in a comatose state of *Shabbos Menucha*, the father exclaims, "You had better be in *shul* by *Barchu*". The father arrives to *shul*, he davens *Psukei Dzimra* and does not see his son, *Shacharit* begins and the son is nowhere to be found, *Barchu* comes and goes and the son has not arrived. Thirty minutes later during the latter section of the Torah Reading the son walks proudly into *shul*, sits down joyfully next to his father only to find his father disgruntled and frustrated. The father turns angrily towards the son and says, "Where were you? I told you that you had to be here by *Barchu*." The son answers, "You did not say *which Barchu* – there are still a few *Barchus* left in the Torah Reading."

This story inspired me to consider exactly when and why we recite *Barchu* in our prayers? There are three times in our prayers when the *Barchu* is recited.

- 1- every morning after *Yishtabach* preceding the blessings before *Shema*.
- 2 - before each *Aliyah* read from the Torah.
- 3 - at *Maariv*, the evening prayer, introducing the blessings before *Shema*.
- Additionally – if one misses saying *Barchu* early in the service, it may be recited at the conclusion by the latecomer or another.

Questions:

What is the function of *Barchu*?

When is it said and why is it said?

Why is there no *Barchu* at *Mincha*?

Answers:

Rav Schwab zt"l explains that the *Barchu* formula is an invitation. The leader/reader/*Chazzan* calls out *Barchu-Proclaim G-d's Blessing* to the entire congregation and invites them to respond *Baruch Hashem*...which states G-d's benevolence and blessedness. The Talmud explains that this interchange is based on the verse "*Ki shem Hashem Ekra Havu godel Laylokeynu*" (*Deut 32:3*), which means "*To the name of G-d I will call, exclaim greatness towards our G-d*".

Barchu is only recited as an introduction to the recitation of Scripture i.e. *Shema* or Torah Readings in the morning and the evenings; therefore it is not recited during *Mincha*. The question is why not?

HaRav Abraham Azulai zt"l (1570–1643) who is quoted in the *Sefer Levush* explains that when the Leader chants *Barchu Et Hashem Hamevorah – Blessed are You G-d the Blessed, and the congregation answers with alacrity Baruch Hashem Hamevorach Leolam Vaed – Blessed are You G-d forever and ever*, it is an expression of gratitude that we have been blessed with a **Soul** – the G-dlike spirit that infuses all mankind with life. The mystics teach us that there are five components of the soul: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chayah and Yechidah*. Therefore our response *Baruch Hashem* .. contains specifically five words corresponding to our souls.

I would like to suggest that one reason we do not recite *Barchu* at *Mincha* is because we do not recite *Shema* or generally read Scripture at *Mincha*. Another reason perhaps is because at night when we sleep our souls depart, and in the morning when we awaken our souls are returned; therefore at those dynamic moments we celebrate our souls and recite *Barchu* with all of our hearts and souls. During the daytime when our souls remain within us, we do not recite *Barchu* at *Mincha*.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Epstein