

Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz

Minhag Ashkenaz: Sources and Roots

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Omitting *Berikh Shemei* When Taking the Torah from the Ark

Many communities observe the practice of reciting the Aramaic *Berikh Shemei* prayer when removing the Torah from the ark, as the *Zohar* (the basic text of *Kabbalistic* thought) instructs.

Upon the discovery of this prayer, many in Germany – as in all other countries – very much wished to include it in the regular prayer service, and some individuals in Germany recited it. The leading rabbis of Germany, however, were fundamentally opposed to institutionalizing this recitation. Even among those who do recite *Berikh Shemei*, we find a number of differences of opinion regarding certain aspects of this custom. We list here the arguments raised against reciting this prayer, as well as the points of controversy that exist among those who have embraced the custom:

- 1) *Berikh Shemei* was not recited by our ancestors or by the *Rishonim*, as it was not included in the tradition transmitted by *Chazal* and the *Ge'onim*. Likewise, neither the *Shulchan Arukh* nor the *Rema* makes any reference to this prayer.
- 2) The fact that the recitation has become widespread among most Jewish communities lends no proof to the propriety of this practice.¹
- 3) Some opposed the recitation of *Berikh Shemei* as part of the effort to conceal the *Zohar* and *Kabbalistic* thought from the masses.²

¹ *Chida*.

- 4) Some object to the expression *ולא על בר אלהין סמיכנא* (literally translated "and I do not rely upon any son of G-d") which may sound as lending credence to Christianity or Sabbateanism.³
- 5) One must ensure not to misinterpret the phrase *דסגידנא קמיה ומקמיה דיקר אורייתיה* ("before Whom and before the glory of Whose Torah I bow") to mean that we bow before something other than the Almighty Himself.⁴
- 6) Not everybody is worthy of honestly avowing, *אנא עבדא דקודשא בריך הוא* ("I am a servant of the Holy One, Blessed be He").⁵
- 7) Reciting this prayer might be forbidden on *Shabbat*, when *Halakha* forbids praying for one's personal needs.⁶
- 8) According to *Kabbalistic* teachings, it is inappropriate to recite *Berikh Shemei* on weekdays, and possibly even on *Rosh Chodesh* and *Yom Tov*.⁷
- 9) The authorities debate whether on *Shabbat* this prayer should be recited during *mincha*, or only during *shacharit*.⁸
- 10) There is some disagreement as to when exactly the congregation should recite *Berikh Shemei* – a) before the Torah is removed from the ark, b) as it is removed, c) after

² German *halakhic* authorities.

³ *Chavot Ya'ir, Noda Bi'yehuda, Kitzur Shela, Keter Shem Tov, Tzelota D'Avraham*, Rabbi S.D. Munk.

⁴ *Ge'onim, Ri'az, Sefer Hanitzachon, Keneset Hagedola*.

⁵ *Chafetz Chaim*.

⁶ *Me'orei Or, Torat Shabbat*.

⁷ Writings of the *Ari-zal, Elya Rabba, Chida*, Karlin, Kumrana, Koznitz, *Ben Ish Chai*.

⁸ *Ram"z, Chida*.

