

## Customs and Laws from the Parsha: Behaalotecha

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*So it was, whenever the ark set out. Moses would say. Arise, O Lord, may Your enemies be scattered and may those who hate You flee from You. (Bamidbar 10:35)*

Whenever the Torah is taken out to be read, some congregations recite the prayer 'B'rich shmei' (see Chief Rabbi's Siddur page 408). The text is taken from the mystical work known as the Zohar, attributed to Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai (Zohar Parshat Vayakheil 206a). The prayer includes requests for God to show compassion and mercy to the Jewish people and asserts our Jewish faith. The preceding section of the Zohar explains that when the Aron HaKodesh (lit. holy ark, where the Torah scrolls are housed) is opened, the gates of compassion in Heaven are also opened (Zohar *ibid.*).

Both Rabbi Avraham Gombiner (known as the 'Magen Avraham' d. 1682) and the Baghdadi authority Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer (known as the Kaf HaChaim, d. 1939) maintain that B'rich shmei was only to be recited on Shabbat and Yom Tov (Magen Avraham 282, Kaf Hachaim 134:11). This is the accepted custom in the United Synagogue.

The former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (b. 1920) adds that one should bow when reaching the words *אנא עבדא דקודשא בריך הוא* 'I am a servant of the Holy One, blessed be He' (Yabia Omer 4:8). Others are not particular about this custom (Kaf HaChaim 113:12).

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (d. 1986) cites Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margalioth (known as the Shaarei Efraim d. 1828) who holds that B'rich shmei should be recited when the Torah is taken from the Aron HaKodesh and not beforehand (Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 4:70). Nevertheless, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira (the Munkácz Rebbe, d. 1937) wrote the Torah should not be removed until B'rich Shmei has been completed. This is the accepted custom in the United Synagogue.

Before reading from the Torah, reciting B'rich Shmei helps us to focus on our relationship with God and in particular asks God to open our hearts to the ideas held within the Torah. This way we can help bring 'goodness, life and peace' for all of Israel.

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