

“Shover Oyevim U’Machnia Zeidim” or “Machnia Minim”

by Rabbi Haim Jachter

Many are struck by the wide variety of Sephardic Siddurim . Even more interesting are the nuanced differences between the various Siddurim. One example stands out.

In the Moroccan¹, Syrian and Turkish Siddurim, the ending for the twelfth blessing in the Amidah is printed as “Shover Oyevim U’Machnia Minim”. However, in the Siddurim that follow the rulings of Hacham Ovadia the conclusion is “Shover Oyevim U’Machnia Zeidim”. The Yemenite Siddur also concludes in this manner.

Support for the Concluding with the Word Minim

The former group opts to conclude with the word “Minim” because Maran Ha’Hida in his Sefer Keshet Gudal (17:7) writes that one should end this blessing by saying “U’Machnia Minim”. The reason for this is because one must conclude every blessing similar to the text with which it started (referred to by Hazal as “Hatimah Mei’ein Petihah”). Thus, the blessing of “Ata Kadosh” ends with the words “Ha’kel Ha’Kadosh” and the blessing of “Refa’enu” ends with the words “Rofeh Holei Amo Yisrael” etc. Therefore, the blessing of “La’Minim Ve’Lamalshanim” should end with the words “Shover Oyevim U’Machnia Minim”.

Rabbeinu Yosef Haim, the famous author of the Ben Ish Hai, in his Sefer Ben Yehoyada (Berachot 28a) adds as limited proof that the author of this blessing was Shemuel HaKatan. The Ben Ish Hai suggests that Shemuel HaKatan hinted his name at the end of the blessing, like many poets do, in acronym form, as follows: “SH’over O’yevim U’machnia M’inim; this is an acronym for the Shin, Mem, Vav, and Alef of Shmuel’s name. The last letter of his name, Lamed, is hinted in the first word of the blessing, “LaMinim”.

¹ Rav Shalom Messas (Teshuvot Shemesh UMagein 3:58:3) rules that the concluding word of this Bracha should be Minim, in light of the fact that the Bracha is referred to as Birkat HaMinim (Rif, Berachot 19b). Rav Mordechai Lebar (Magen Avot Orah Haim pages 109-111), as his wont, vigorously defends this dominant practice among Moroccan Jews. He even cites a personal ruling he received from Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv that those whose custom is to conclude with the word Minim should continue to do so, despite the fact that so many Rishonim support the text that concludes Zeidim.

Support for the Concluding with the Word Zeidim

However, Rav Ovadia Yosef² disputes this position, arguing in part, that it appears farfetched to think that Shmuel Ha’Katan would have hinted his name in a text that is meant as a curse upon heretics. We can add that the Talmud Yerushalmi (Sotah 9:13) explains that Shmuel HaKatan was given this nickname Shemaktin Et Atzmo, due to his great humility. It is difficult to assume that such a humble man would encrypt his name into the Bracha he composed.

However, the argument of Maran Ha’Hida still stands in that one must always end the Beracha in a text similar to its beginning, thus, the text of “U’Machnia Minim” seems more of an appropriate ending to the blessing which begins “La’Minim Ve’Lamalshinim”.

Nevertheless, Hacham Ovadia argues that the correct version is indeed “Shover Oyevim U’Machnia Zeidim”. He notes that Rav Haim Palagi rules likewise (Kaf HaHaim 15:31) and that this has been the custom of the Mekubalim in the famous Kabbalistic Yeshiva “Bet El” located in the Old City of Jerusalem³.

Hacham Ovadia cites the text of “U’Machnia Zeidim” is the text quoted in the works of all of the early Geonim such as the Siddurim of Rav Sa’adia Gaon and Rav Amram Gaon, as well as the Siddur of the Rambam (that appears at the end of Sefer Ahavah in the Mishneh Torah). Rav Ovadia and his son Rav Yitzhak cite a large number of Rishonim who concur⁴. Moreover, we find in the Talmud Yerushalmi (in the fourth Perek of Berachot) that the proper ending is “Zeidim”⁵.

Regarding the Hida’s question that “U’Machnia Zeidim” does not fit the beginning of the blessing, we can answer that the concluding term “Zeidim”

² Sources are arguments are referenced in Yalkut Yosef Orah Haim 124: Nusha’ot HaTefillah number 56.

³ As is noted by Rav Amram Aburabiyah in his important work Nahagu HaAm. Rav Ovadia and Rav Yitzhka Yosef write that the custom in Jerusalem “in years past” was to conclude with the word “Zeidim”.

⁴ Rav Ovadia and Rav Yitzhak argue that had the Hida known about the many Rishonim who support the conclusion of Zeidim, he would have retracted his position regarding this issue. Rav Lebhav counters that it seems unreasonable to make such a claim regarding the Hida who, as is well known, made it his business to be familiar with a very wide variety of Rishonim and Aharonim, especially the texts to which he was exposed as a result of his extensive travels through much of the world.

⁵ Rav Lebhav, though, counters that the position of the more authoritative Talmud Bavli is not clear regarding the proper conclusion to this Bracha.

emphasizes that only the “Zeidim” (deliberate sinners) are included in this curse. Thus, only the leading heretics are cursed but not their followers who are misled (similar to the Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 3:1-4, limiting of severe punishment to those who initiated heretical movements such as the Tzedukim and Kara'im).

Shaarei Orah member Itamar Carmi observes that it is not surprising to find such variation in this Beracha, since this Bracha was not part of the original Amidah composed by the Anshei Keneset HaGedolah. Shaarei Orah member Richard Schulz adds that the text may have been impacted by censorship of those who felt offended by this Beracha. Rav Mordechai Lebhav notes this as well.

Conclusion

While the ruling of Rav Ovadia Yosef is to conclude with the word Zeidim, nonetheless a variety of practices persist. Regarding this fascinating dispute one must stand back and conclude “Eilu V'Eilu Divrei Elokim Hayim” both options are supported by great Rabbanim and have a rich basis to support them. At Congregation Shaarei Orah, we follow the ruling of Rav Ovadia and conclude with the word Zeidim.