
Clocks and Prayers--Blog by Howard Riell

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(Howard Riell, a member of our Institute, wrote the following item that appeared in the Boulder Jewish News)

A young guy in shul this morning who is visiting from Israel asked me what time we would get to Borechu. I know from experience that lots of my fellow Orthodox Jews keep a sharp eye on the clock while they are davening; in fact, the amud that the baal tefillah uses in my shul has an actual listing of the various times he should be reaching the various sections of the service.

I find this notion absolutely ridiculous! I told the young man, "I have no idea. When I'm davening I'm talking to Hashem, not looking at the clock."

Why on Earth are we so very obsessed with time during prayer when we should consider ourselves to be in a place beyond time and space? There is one guy in my shul who, after mincha, announces how many minutes and seconds we have until maariv. This is amazingly stupid for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that in the days of the gemara there was no such concept as seconds. They hadn't been invented yet! And to imagine that God is standing in heaven with a stopwatch, timing us to see if we start the one precise and proper moment — and that it matters — is something that a small child should be embarrassed for thinking. When do we get smarter?

It reminds me of that pathetic joke. Someone asks a young Orthodox Jew whether he ever thinks about God. The young man responds, "Are you kidding? I get up in the morning, say my prayers, wash and get dressed, do daf yomi, then I'm off to shacharis, then to yeshiva where I learn all day, then attend a series of shiurim, then there's minchah and maariv, and then the rav gives a class. When am I supposed to find time to think about God?"

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