**Shomeah K’Oneh: Speaking Through Each Other**

**Introduction**

At *Har Sinai*, *Bnei Yisrael* exclaimed to Hashem *“naaseh v’nishmah, we will do and we will hear.”* The commentators note that *Bnei Yisrael* announced “we will do” before saying “we will hear” to demonstrate the important idea in Judaism that even when we do not understand, we must still fulfill the *Mitzvos*. However, Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, the Beis HaLevi asks a different question. Why did *Bnei Yisrael* say “*we* will do and *we* will hear,” in the plural form, and not “*I* will do and *I* will hear,” in the singular form? Why did each person speak on behalf of everyone else? The Beis HaLevi answers that *Bnei Yisrael* *had* to speak on behalf of others and if they did not, they would not have received the Torah. The Torah, explains the Beis HaLevi, was given to the nation of Israel as a whole and not to a bunch of individuals who happened to belong to one nation. Hashem was only willing to give us the Torah if we accepted upon ourselves to make sure the other members of our nation keep it as well. This idea, that we are all responsible for each other, manifests itself in several areas of *Halacha*. The following *shiur*, on *Shomeah K’Oneh*, will give us insights into a very fundamental area of *Halacha* as well us teach the place of the individual in the community.

**What is it?**

*Shomeah K’Oneh* literally means “listening is like responding.” The *Gemara* in several places employs the rule of *Shomeah K’Oneh* to teach us that in certain instances, one can merely listen to someone else reciting something and it is considered as if the listener recited it as well. For example, at most Shabbos tables one person recites the blessing of *Hamotzi* on behalf of the others eating with him or her. The listeners are allowed to eat bread since their listening to the blessing makes it as if they themselves recited the blessing. The following *Gemara* cites the source for *Shomeah K’Oneh:*

סוכה לח:

אר״ש בֶּן פָּזִי אֲמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי מִשּׁוּם בַּר קַפָּרָא מִנַּיִן לַשּׁוֹמֵעַ כָּעוֹנֶה דִּכְתִיב אֶת (הדברים) אֲשֶׁר קָרָא (יאשיהו)וְכִי יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ קְרָאָן וַהֲלֹא שָׁפָן קְרָאָן דִּכְתִיב וַיִּקְרָאֵהוּ שָׁפָן (את כל הדברים האלה) לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָּא מִכָּאן לַשּׁוֹמֵעַ כְּעוֹנֶה

Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of Bar Kappara: From where do we know that one who listens is as though he responds? From what’s written, ‘*Even (all the words) of the book which the King of Yehuda (Yoshiahu) has read*.’ [Melachim II 22:16] Was it *Yoshiah* who read them? But wasn’t it *Shafan* who read them, As it’s written, ‘*And Shafan read it (all these words) before the king*’ [verse 10]? Rather, from here it can be learned that one who listens is as though he responds.

**How does it work?**

In order to understand how *Shomeah K’Oneh* works, we must first examine a debate between Rashi and Tosafos regarding if one may stop in the middle of their personal *Shemoneh Esreh* in order to listen to the *Chazzan* recite *Kadish* or *Kedusha.* What follows is Rashi’s opinion, a *Gemara* in *Brachos* that seems to be a question on Rashi, and the opinion of Tosafos:

רש"י סוכה לח: ד'ה הוא אומר ברוך

וְכֵן למתפללין בְּצִבּוּר וּשְׁלִיחַ צִבּוּר אוֹמֵר קַדִּישׁ אוֹ יְהֵא שְׁמֵיהּ רַבָּא יִשְׁתֹּקוּ בִּתְפִלָּתָן וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּכַוָונָה וַהֲרֵי הֵן כעונין וכשיגמור הַקְּדוֹשָׁה יַחְזְרוּ לִתְפִלָּתָן וְכֵן יָסַד רַב יְהוּדָאֵי גְּאוֹן בַּעַל הֲלָכוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת

and so with one who prays with a congregation, and the leader says *Kaddish*, or *yehei Shmei Rabbah*, they should remain silent and not recite their prayer, and listen intently, and it's as if they answered, and when the *chazzan* finishes his *kedusha*, they should return to their prayer, and so established Rav Yehudai Gaon the Baal Halachos Gedolos.

ברכות כא:

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא הַנִּכְנָס לְבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת וּמָצָא צִבּוּר שֶׁמִּתְפַּלְּלִין אִם יָכוֹל לְהַתְחִיל וְלִגְמוֹר עַד שֶׁלֹּא יַגִּיעַ ש״ץ לִמּוּדִים יִתְפַּלֵּל וְאִם לָאו אַל יִתְפַּלֵּל ריב״ל אָמַר אִם יָכוֹל לְהַתְחִיל וְלִגְמוֹר עַד שֶׁלֹּא יַגִּיעַ ש״צ לִקְדוּשָּׁה יִתְפַּלֵּל וְאִם לָאו אַל יִתְפַּלֵּל בְּמַאי

Rav Huna said: If a man goes into a synagogue and finds the congregation praying, if he can begin and finish before the chazan reaches 'We give thanks', [the seventeenth blessing] he may begin praying then, But if he cannot, he should not pray. [He should wait until after 'We give thanks' and then begin privately.] Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: If he can begin and finish before the reader reaches the *Kedusha*, [Recited in the third blessing. In this also the congregation joins in.] he should pray, but if he cannot, he should not pray.

תוספות כוכה לח: ד'ה שמע ולא ענה יצא

אלא ודאי אם היה שותק היתה שמיעתו הפסקת תפלתו

Rather, certainly if one were to be quiet [in order to be listen to the Chazzan’s repetition], their listening would be considered an interruption in his [personal] prayer (i.e. *Shmoneh Esreh*)

**Points to Ponder:**

* What do you think is the route of the dispute between Rashi and Tosafos?
* Do they understand the mechanics of *Shomeah K’Oneh* differently?
* Does it matter what part of *Shemoneh Esreh* the individual is up to?

Rav Yosef Engel (amongst others) suggests the following as the explanation of the debate between Rashi and Tosafos. Consider this explanation but also try to think of a different way to explain the debate:

**ציונים לתורה להרב יוסף ענגיל- ברכות כא:**

דמחולקים בזה אי הא דשומע כעונה הכוונה דהוי כעונה בדיבורו, ממילא הוי הפסק. או הכוונה רק דדינו כעונה בעצם השמיעה כמו שיוצאים בעניה, אבל אין השמיעה חשובה עניה כלל, והיא רק שמיעה לבד אלא שגם בשמיעה יוצאים כמו בעניה, ואם כן ממילא אינו הפסק.

They debate this: if ‘listening is like responding’ means that it is *actually* as if one is responding, and if so it would be considered an interruption [for one to stop in the middle of *Shmoneh Esreh* to listen to the *Chazzan* which is prohibited], or it means that one has the halachic status as if he responded just as one fulfills their obligation by responding. [According to this second approach,] actual listening is not considered actually [verbally] responding. Rather, it is just listening, but with the listening one fulfills their obligation as if responding. Therefore, [stopping in the middle of *Shmoneh Esreh* to listen to the *Chazzan*] would not be considered an interruption.

**Birchas Kohanim**

This explanation of the debate between Rashi and Tosafos can help us understand the following debate between the Beis Halevi and the Chazon Ish regarding if a *Kohen* may fulfill his obligation for *Birchas Kohanim*, the priestly blessing, through *Shomeah K’Oneh.* First, we must cite a *Gemara* in *Yoma* in which the Beis Halevi bases his argument on:

יומא לח.

תַּנְיָא אִידָךְ כֹּה תְּבָרְכוּ בְּקוֹל רָם אוֹ אֵינוֹ אֶלָּא בְּלַחַשׁ ת״ל אָמוֹר לָהֶם כְּאָדָם שֶׁאוֹמֵר לַחֲבֵירוֹ

 Another baraisa teaches: *'This is how you will bless*;' in a loud voice. But perhaps it is not so and the meaning is softly! Therefore, it says, *'You will say to them*,' like a man who talks to his companion.

**בית הלוי (לקוטים בסוף חומש בראשית)**

אמנם עיקר הדבר לא נהירא כלל, דשומע כעונה שייך רק בדבר דאין צריך בו אלא אמירה לחודא, אבל ברכות כהנים דצריך קול רם כאדם אומר לחברו...ובזה לא שייך שומע כעונה, דהרי ענייתו של הכהן השומע הרי אינו נשמע לעם השומעים, ולא עדיף הך כהן השומע מאם היה אומר מפורש הפה רק בלחש דלא יצא.

However, the matter does not make sense because ‘listening is like responding’ applies only to matters that require speech alone, and *Birchas Kohanim* requires a loud voice as one speaks to his friend…and for that ‘listening is like responding’ is not applicable, for the ‘response’ of the *Kohen* who is listening is not heard to the people congregation who are listening [which is required for *Birchas Kohanim*]. This *Kohen* who is listening is no better off than a *Kohen* who would respond *Birchas Kohanim* through [actual] speech in a whisper, in which he has not fulfilled his obligation.

The Chazon Ish (Orach Chaim 29:3) argues on this ruling and holds a Kohen can fulfill his obligation to recite Birchas Kohanim through *Shomeah K’Oneh.* Furthermore, we have documentation that in the Italian community of Trieste, the Kohanim indeed fulfilled their obligation of *Birchas Kohanim* through *Shomeah K’Oneh.*

**Points to Ponder:**

* What is the root of the dispute between the Beis Halevi and Chazon Ish?
* Can a distinction be made between *Birchas Kohanim* and the case in which Rashi and Tosafos debate?
* If we look back to the *Gemara* in *Sukkah* which cites the source of *Shomeah K’Oneh,* does one side of this debate now make more sense than the other?

**Sefiras HaOmer**

Let’s turn our discussion now to *Sefiras HaOmer*. The Mishna Brurah brings the following debate:

משנה ברורה אורח חיים תפ"ט:א

(ה) לספור לעצמו – דכתיב וספרתם לכם משמע שהמצוה חל על כל יחיד ויחיד והנה משמע מזה דבספירה אינו כמו בשאר מצות התלוי באמירה לענין קידוש והבדלה וכיו"ב דאם שמע לחבירו ונתכוין לצאת דיוצא בזה משום דשומע כעונה והכא גילתה התורה דלא יצא כל כמה דלא ספר בעצמו אבל יש מאחרונים שכתבו דכונת התורה הוא רק דלא נימא דמצוה זו אב"ד לבד קאי כמו בשמיטין ויובלות

It says “*as you should count yourselves”* which implies that the *Mitzvah* applies to each in individual. It seems from here that *Sefiras HaOmer* is not like other *mitzvos* that are dependent on speech, such as *Kiddush* and *Havdalah*, in which if someone else hears it and has intention to fulfill his obligation through [listening] then he has fulfilled his obligation through *Shomeah K’Oneh.* However, here [by *Sefiras HaOmer*] the Torah revealed to us that one has not fulfilled the *mitzvah* if he did not count himself. However, some later authorities argue and say that what the Torah means [when saying *“as you should count yourselves”*] is just that this *Mitzvah* is on court alone as [the counting of] *Shemitah* and *Yovel* are.

**Points to Ponder**

* Considering Rav Yosef Engel’s analysis above, can you explain this debate here in those terms?
* According to the opinion who says one cannot fulfill *Sefiras HaOmer* through *Shomeah K’Oneh,* what is the reason? Is it just because the Torah tells us you cannot, or is there something fundamental to the concept of counting that would limit *Shomeah K’Oneh* from working here?
* Do you think the opinion which prohibits *Sefiras HaOmer* to be fulfilled through *Shomeah K’Oneh* would agree to the Beis Halevi’s opinion regarding *Birchas Kohanim*?

**Kiddush**

Many have the custom to fulfill their obligation of *Kiddush* on Shabbos through *Shomeah K’Oneh*, by listening to someone else recite *Kiddush* on their behalf. However, *Kiddush* is required to be said over a cup of wine (or some other liquids) and many times those who are listening to the one reciting Kiddush are not themselves holding a cup of wine. If we assume that *Shomeah K’Oneh* works because the listener is considered to have actually recited the *Bracha* or prayer himself (as Rav Yosef Engel suggested for the opinion of Tosafos), then how is this custom justified? Granted, the listener would be considered to have recited *Kiddush*, but can it really be considered that as if they were also holding the cup of wine? Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank addresses this question, and in turn, gives us a new way of understanding *Shomeah K’Oneh*:

**הר צבי או"ח סימן נז**

דשומע כעונה אנו חושבים את השומע כנגרר לקורא לכל דבר, ולא רק לעצם הקריאה בלבד אלא גם להשלמת תנאי מצות הקריאה.

For *Shomeah K’Oneh* we consider the listener to be dragged by the reciter for all matters, not just the actual recitation but even the fulfillment of the conditions for the *mitzvah* of recitation as well.

**Points to Ponder**

* Can we fit in this new understanding of *Shomeah K’Oneh* to the debates above regarding *Shomeah K’Oneh*? Is it possible that Tosafos, the Chazon Ish, and the second opinion quoted in the Mishna Brurah regarding *Sefiras HaOmer* understand *Shomeah K’Oneh* in this manner as well?
* What would Rav Frank say regarding *mitzvos* that are fundamentally action oriented but have a speech element to it as well? For example, would one be able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin* by observing someone else put on *Tefillin* and listening to their blessing?
* Is this answer really necessary? Is the cup of wine an integral part of the *Kiddush* to the point where one would not fulfill their obligation without it?

**Tefillah B’Tzibur**

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* lists three cases when *Shomeah K’Oneh* does not work:

**ירושלמי ברכות פרק ג הלכה ג**

א"ר לייא שנייא היא ברכת המזון דכתיב בה (דברים, ח) ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלהיך, מי שאכל הוא יברך. ר' יוסי ור' יודא בן פזי הוו מתיבין אמרו לא מסתברא בק"ש שיהא כל אחד ואחד משנן בפיו לא מסתברא בתפילה שיהא כל אחד ואחד מבקש רחמים על עצמו מה

Rebbe Laya said that *Birkat Hamazon* [the blessing after food] is different [in that *Shomeah K’Oneh* does not work] as it says, *“and you should eat, be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d”* (Deuteronomy 8) [which implies] that the one who ate is the one who blesses [*birchat hamazon*]. R’ Yosi and R’ Yuda son of Pazi were sitting and they said that it doesn’t make sense for [for *Shomeah K’Oneh* to apply to] *Krias Shema* (reciting Shema) [because it is about accepting the yoke of Heaven and therefore], everyone should say it themselves, and it doesn’t make sense [for *Shomeah K’Oneh* to apply to] Prayer [*Shemoneh Esreh*], rather everyone should ask for mercy themselves.

This throws a wrench in our whole understanding of *Shomeah K’Oneh!* We recite *Chazarat HaShatz* (the prayer leader’s repetition of *Shemoneh Esreh*) daily, which the intention being that those who do not know how to pray can fulfill their obligation with the leader! How can we justify this practice in light of the *Talmud Yerushalmi’s* statement that *Shomeah K’Oneh* does not work for prayer!? Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik gives us an answer to this question which will, in turn, deepen our understanding of both *Shomeah K’Oneh* and *Chazarat HaShatz*:

**רשימות שיעורים סוכה דף לח ע"א**

אמנם יש אופן לצאת בתפלה ובק"ש ע"י חברו אבל זה רק בציבור-כשיש עשרה. כשיש עשרה מישראל חל דין תפילת ציבור. תפלת הציבור אינה תפלה של עשרה יחידים אלא הריהי חפצא של תפלה מסוים לעצמה וחלות שם מיוחדת של תפלה. מי שאינו בקי יוצא בתפלת הציבור בהשתתפותו לציבור. הש"ץ מתפלל על שם הציבור- והיחיד שאינו בקי יוצא בתפלה ע"י זה שהוא משתתף בתפלת הציבור. היחיד יוצא ע"י הציבור אבל לא מדין שומע כעונה בעלמא כבשאר ברכות. בשומע כעונה בכהת"כ יחיד מוציא את היחיד, אבל בק"ש ובתפלה הציבור הוא המוציא את היחידים.

However, there is a way to fulfill *Tefillah* (prayer) and *Krias Shema* through someone else, but this is only in a congregation- where there are ten [men]. When there are ten Jews there is [a new law and category called] “the prayer of the congregation.” The “prayer of the congregation” isn’t a prayer of ten individuals, rather it is its own independent halachic category of prayer. Whoever isn’t an expert in the words [of the prayer] can fulfill his obligation of prayer by joining with the congregation. The *Chazzan* prays for the congregation-and the individual who doesn’t know how to pray fulfills his obligation of prayer by joining in with the prayer of the congregation. The individual “prays” through the congregation, but not through the law of *Shomeah K’Oneh* as by regular blessings. When *Shomeah K’Oneh* is employed an individual fulfills the obligation of another individual, but by *Krias Shema* and *Tefillah* the congregation fulfills the obligation of the individuals.

Rabbi Soloveitchik writes that there is a fundamental distinction between regular blessings in which one can fulfill their obligation by listening to another individual (i.e. *Shomeah K’Oneh*), and *Tefillah* in which one can fulfill their obligation by listening to the *Chazzan* through “*Tefillah B’tzibbur*.” Rav Tzvi Reisman uses this dichotomy to explain the position of Rashi (cited above) who permits one to pause in the middle of one’s *Shemoneh Esreh* to listen to the *Chazzan* recite *Kaddish* and *Kedusha*:

רץ כצבי שבת סימן י'

מכוחה של מעלה זו של "תפילת הציבור," יש מקום להתיר לשתוק באמצע תפילת שמונה עשרה ולכוון לשמוע את הקדיש והקדושה ואין לחשוש שיש בכך הפסק בתפילה, בגלל שחיובם נובע מכח מעלת "תפילת הציבור." מה שאין כן, בשמיעה הבדלה שהיא כמובן מצוה שחיובה מוטל על היחיד, נותר על כנו החשש שהשתיקה באמצע התפילה לצאת מדין "שומע כעונה" נחשבת כ"הפסק" בתפילה, ואין מקום להתיר זאת.

From this category called “the prayer of the congregation,” there is room to permit one to pause in the middle of *Shemoneh Esreh* to listen to *Kaddish* and *Kedusha* and there is no concern that it is considered an interruption in the prayer. This is because the obligation to recite those prayers stems from the elevated status of “the prayer of the congregation.” This is as opposed to listening to *Havdalah* [for example] which is a commandment placed on the individual and thus there would remain a concern that pausing in the middle [of *shemoneh esreh*] to fulfill the obligation [of *havdala*] through *Shomeah K’Oneh* would be considered an interruption in the *shemoneh esreh* and would not be allowed.

**Points to Ponder**

* In light of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s distinction, what other laws might be different when listening to the *Chazzan* recite *Shemoneh Esreh* that we would not find when it comes to the laws of listening to someone else recite a normal blessing?
* Can Rabbi Soloveitchik’s distinction be used to explain the practice of *Kohanim* pausing in the middle of their silent *Shemoneh Esreh* to fulfill their obligation to recite *Birchat Kohanim*?
* Through the sources cited above, there emerges at least three different ways to understand the debate between Rashi and Tosafos regarding pausing in the middle of *Shemoneh Esreh* to listen to the *Chazzan* recite *Kaddish* and *Kedusha*. Can you list all three?

**The Jewish Soul**

While we have seen different understandings of *how* the mechanics of *Shomeah K’Oneh* works, we still don’t have the full picture of *why* it works. After all, how can someone else recite a blessing on my behalf?! The following sources will answer to this question, and give us a deeper understanding of the soul, and what it really means to be a Jew:

ריטב"א ראש השנה כט ע"א

כל ברכות המצות אע"פ שיצא מוציא שאע"פ שהמצות מוטלות על כל אחד הרי כל ישראל ערבין זה לזה וכולם כגוף אחד וכערב הפורע חוב חבירו.

For all *Brachos* recited on *Mitzvos*, even though one fulfilled his obligation, he may still fulfill the obligation of others [through *Shomeah K’Oneh*]. Because even though the commandments are placed on every individual, all of Israel is responsible for one another, and they are all like one body, like a guarantor who pays the debt of his friend.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook- Orot page 144

The relationship between the Jewish people and its individual members is different than the relationship between any other national group and its members. All other national groups only bestow upon their individual members the external aspect of their essence (a title such as American). But the essence itself each person draws from the all-inclusive soul, from the soul of God, without the intermediation of the group... This is not the case regarding Israel. The soul of the individuals is drawn from ... the community, the community bestowing a soul upon the individuals. One who considers severing himself from the people must sever his soul from the source of its vitality. Therefore, each individual Jew is greatly in need of the community. He will always offer his life so that he should not be torn from the people, because his soul and self-perfection require that of him.