

Dear Clanton Park Members and Guests,

The *Gemara Berachos* 6b says: "Whoever sets a place for his *tefillos*, the G-d of Abraham will help him, and when he dies they will say of him: 'what a humble, righteous man, a student of Avraham Aveinu.'" This *Gemara* does seem to value having a *makom kavua*, i.e. a regular spot for one's *davening*. The *Arukh ha'Shulchan* 90, 23 quotes authorities who limit the idea of *makom kavua*; they state that the main point is to *daven* in one *shul* on a regular basis; one's place within the *shul* is irrelevant. Those who do apply the rule to place within the *shul* seem to follow the *Magen Avraham* 90, 34, in saying that the focus is not on a specific seat but on a specific area, because "it is impossible to be exact". *Shulchan Aruch* 90, 19 puts things in full perspective when he allows changing one's spot "for a need".

We welcome you to *daven* in a seat of your choosing. We suggest to our members: "that your obligation to your *makom kavua* needs to be balanced against the severe prohibition against embarrassing your fellow Jew in public" (see Bernard Rabb below) — whether a youngster or an elder. Telling someone who has already been *davening* before your arrival that, "you are in my seat", leads to resentment, embarrassment, and the distinct sense that "you are not welcome here", contrary to the students of Avraham Aveinu where *hachnasas orchim* is the priority.

We ask that instead of asking people to move from your seat, welcome the new *davener*, guests and new members as they "find their place" at Clanton Park Shul. Wish them a *Gut Shabbos* or a *Gut Yom Tov*. Invite them for *kiddush* following *davening* and introduce them to the members of the decorum committee, who would be pleased to help if there are questions or concerns.

One man's personal perspective on the universal issue of *makom kavua* and seating problems is described on a *halacha* blog. Bernard Rabb writes:

Many years ago someone asked me: What is the phrase most heard in an orthodox *shul*? The answer was: "You are in my seat." As someone who had been the object of this complaint once or twice, I determined never to use this phrase or one like it. I know how disconcerting it is when someone is sitting in your seat and how strange it feels to *daven* in another seat, but your obligation to your *makom kavua* needs to be balanced against the severe prohibition against embarrassing your fellow man in public. Most of the time it is a visitor who has found your seat accidentally and is unlikely to return again anytime soon. One time it was a young teen who regularly sat in front of me but decided one *Shabbos* when he arrived before me that he preferred my seat instead. Obviously he was not aware of the *inions*, and since his parents were not *shul*-goers there was no one to instruct him. Considering his age and status I was sorely tempted to "pull rank" and ask him to move. But then my "policy" intruded, and my admiration for the *derech* he had chosen without parental encouragement led me to hold my tongue.

I will admit that I was surprised to find how uncomfortable I felt sitting in a seat not my own, but nevertheless I waited until *shul* was over before speaking to him privately, and of course he apologized and never sat in my seat again. After this incident I renewed my determination never to use the dreaded phrase, and, with G-d's help, I never will.

The *shul's* policy on *makom kavua* is now under review by the Executive. If you have any suggestions, feel free to approach any of the members of the Executive with your ideas.

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