

TEFILLAH PATHWAYS: LAWS AND TRADITIONS IN THE SYNAGOGUE - LESSON ONE

WELCOME

In this course, we will explore the rich tapestry of tefillah (prayer) and delve into the intricate laws and customs associated with our synagogues (shuls). Our primary goal is twofold: to master the laws of davening (prayer) and to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual significance behind our prayers.

Before we get started, allow me to share an inspiring story from the Baal Shem Tov - one that underscores the profound importance of prayer.

“On this journey, we will halt for the night,” declared the Baal Shem Tov to his disciples, indicating a nearby hamlet. “We are to receive a substantial amount of money from one of the locals.” The disciples were taken aback. They had never set foot in that hamlet before and questioned whether the villagers even knew of their master.

Upon their arrival, the Baal Shem Tov led his disciples to a dilapidated shack, the dwelling of an impoverished Jew. The inside of the shack was as destitute as the outside; signs of poverty were evident everywhere. The lady of the house greeted the visitors warmly and invited them to sit. She served them the only loaf of bread she had been saving for her hungry children, her heart aching within her.

Her husband, a liquor merchant, entered shortly after and grimaced. His children were in tears, his wife was distraught, and there sat some distinguished-looking guests.

“We are here to collect eighteen rubles from you,” the Baal Shem Tov stated.

“Eighteen rubles!” the poor Jew exclaimed in shock. “I don’t have a single groschen. What can I offer you?”

“Sell your bedding,” suggested the Baal Shem Tov. The bewildered host realized that nothing short of selling his bedding would satisfy his guests. He pleaded with them to wait until morning. They consented.

The next day, the poor Jew collected all the pillows and blankets in the house and went to see how much he could get for them. He returned with eighteen rubles, which he handed over to the Baal Shem Tov. Only then did the latter agree to depart.

The poor man followed the Baal Shem Tov outside, his wife and children trailing behind, hoping that the Baal Shem Tov would reconsider and return the eighteen rubles. But the tzadik never looked back. He climbed into his wagon and soon vanished from view.

The liquor merchant returned to an empty house, a weeping wife, and hungry children. It was late afternoon by then, time to daven mincha. The poor Jew prayed as he

had never prayed before, tears streaming down his face. He poured out his sorrowful heart to Hashem, and He listened. The family went to bed early that night, their stomachs empty and their bodies shivering. Later in the night, the father heard a loud knock at the door. "Who is it?" he asked apprehensively.

"Isn't this a tavern?" a gruff, Gentile voice inquired. "Open up and give me a shot of whiskey."

The Jew had emptied his whiskey barrel but, fearing the Gentile might become violent, he opened the door. He let the man in and asked him to wait a moment. He rushed into the next room, filled a glass with water from the barrel, swirled it around, and poured it back into a schnapps glass. "Here," he said, handing it to the goy. The peasant downed it in one gulp. "Ahhhh," he sighed contentedly. "It's been a while since I had such good schnapps. But I'm afraid I don't have any money to pay now. I'll pay another time."

The Jew let him go without a fuss. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. He went back to sleep but was awakened a few hours later by a sharp knock.

"Who could it be at this hour?" he exclaimed in annoyance. It was the same peasant, back for another shot of whiskey. The Jew served him as before, concealing his disappointment when the latter apologized for not being able to pay. The scene repeated several times that night. On his final visit, the Gentile pulled a coin from his pocket. "Here, take this for your patience. I don't know what it's worth, but it should cover my drinks."

When the Jew took the coin to the money changer the next day, he discovered that it was more than enough to cover all the goy had drunk the previous night. And when the goy showed up again that night, the whiskey merchant gave him the change. The Gentile was astounded by the Jew's honesty and began to frequent him regularly. It was his business that quickly turned the tide of the Jew's fortune. Before long, the days of poverty were a distant memory, and the Jew was already buying land and building on it, making the most of his good fortune.

About a year later, the Baal Shem Tov, accompanied by his disciples, happened to pass by. The ramshackle hut was gone, replaced by impressive, stately buildings. The disciples were puzzled.

"All this wealth was destined to be our host's from last year," explained the Baal Shem Tov. "All he lacked was the asking. Heaven required him to turn to Hashem in one fervent prayer and ask for Hashem's help. Now you understand why I had to take everything of value away from him. He had accepted his lot until then without complaint. But when he was left without food or clothing, he had no one to turn to but Hashem. And when he prayed that one mincha prayer from a broken heart, Hashem listened and opened His storehouse of riches. Our poor man of last year is today a man of means, thanks to his prayer."

Countless blessings await us, and all that G-d asks is for us to reach out and ask. The moment we do, the floodgates of heaven open wide to pour out blessings upon us instantly!

Now let's break down what this course entails:

1. **Laws of Prayer (Tefillah):** We'll study the halachic guidelines for prayer—when to pray, how to pray, and the specific requirements for various prayers. Whether you're familiar with the Siddur or new to Jewish prayer, we'll explore the mechanics and nuances together.
2. **Understanding the "Why":** Why do we pray? What drives us to stand before God in supplication? We'll explore the philosophical and emotional aspects of prayer, uncovering its transformative power and purpose.
3. **Entering the Shul:** How should our mindset shift when we step into the shul? What reverence and awe should we cultivate? We'll discuss proper conduct within the shul, including reverence, respect, and the significance of our actions during prayer.
4. **The Role of the Mechitza:** The mechitza—a partition separating men and women during prayer—holds symbolic and practical significance. We'll explore its origins, purpose, and the balance it strikes between unity and modesty.
5. **The Intricacies of Prayer:** Beyond the basic mechanics, we'll delve into the deeper layers of our Davening. From the morning blessings to the Amidah, we'll unravel the threads that weave our prayers into a meaningful tapestry.

WHY DO WE PRAY?

Let's begin our journey by exploring a fundamental question: Why do we pray, and what is the source of this obligation?

This topic has been debated among the Rishonim, and it remains one of the most famous disputes between the Rambam and the Ramban.

The Rambam, in his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, which enumerates the 613 Mitzvos, designates prayer as Positive Mitzvah #5.

TEXT ONE A: RAMBAM – POSITIVE MITZVAH NUMBER 5

...שְׁצִוָנוּ לְעַבְדוֹ, וְכָבֵד נִכְפַּל זֶה הַצְּוִי פְעָמִים בְּאִמְרוֹ וְעַבְדְתֶם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְאָמַר וְאוֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ. וְאִף עַל פִּי שְׁזָה הַצְּוִי הוּא גַם כֵּן מִהַצְּוִיִּים הַכּוֹלְלִים כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּאִרְנוּ בְּשֵׁרֵשׁ ד', הַנֵּה יֵשׁ בּוֹ יְחִוּד אַחֵר שֶׁהוּא צְוִי לְתַפְלָה. וְלִשְׁוֹן סִפְרֵי וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ זֶה תַפְלָה. וְאָמְרוּ גַם כֵּן וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ זֶה תַלְמוּד, וּבְמִשְׁנֵתוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בְּנוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יוֹסִי הַגָּלִילִי אָמְרוּ מִנֵּיין לְעַקֵּר תַפְלָה מִצְוָה מִהֵקָא אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ תִירָא וְאוֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד, וְאָמְרוּ עַבְדוּהוּ בְתוֹרָתוֹ וְעַבְדוּהוּ בְמִקְדָּשׁוֹ, רוֹצֵה לֹאמַר הַכּוֹן אֱלֹוֹי לְהַתְפַּלֵּל שֶׁם כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּאִר שְׁלֹמֹה עָלִיו הַשְּׁלוֹם. (בְּפִרְשֵׁת וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, אֲהַבָה הַלְכוֹת תַפְלָה וּבִרְכַת כְּהֵנִים פָּרָק א')

That is that we are commanded to serve Him. And this command is repeated several times: His saying, "And you shall serve the Lord,

your God¹”; and His saying, “and you shall serve Him²”. And although

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- it nevertheless has specificity, since it is the command to pray. The language of the

4 - that is prayer.” And they also said,

- that is [Torah] study.” And in the Mishnah of

Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Yose HaGelili, they said, “From where [do we know that] the essence of prayer is a commandment? From here -

5.”

And they said, “Serve Him through His Torah; serve Him in His Temple.” This means, direct [yourself] towards it, to pray [towards] there, as Shlomo, peace be upon him, explained. (See Parashat Mishpatim: Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 1.)

The Rambam, in his *Mishnah Torah*, explains that although the specific prayers we recite are not explicitly biblical, the foundation of prayer is rooted in the Torah. As a result, there exists an obligation for all Jews to pray, including women. Even though women are generally exempt from time-bound Mitzvos due to their primary responsibility of raising children, they are still responsible for prayer. The time-sensitive aspects of prayer were introduced by Ezra and his court after the destruction of the first Temple⁶.

Let’s see this in the words of the Rambam:

TEXT ONE B: HILCHOS TEFILLAH CHAPTER 1, LAWS 1 AND 2

א. מצוות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר (שמות כג כה) "וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם". מפי השמועה למדו שעבודה זו היא תפלה שנאמר (דברים יא ג) "וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכֹל לְבַבְכֶם" אָמַר

¹ Exodus 23:25

² Deuteronomy 13:5

³ See Shores Number 4:

שאין ראוי למנות הצווים הכוללים התורה כלה: הנה יבואו בתורה צוויין ואזהרות אינן בדבר מיוחד אבל יכללו המצוות כלם. כאלו יאמר עשה כל מה שצויתך לעשות והזהר מכל מה שהזהרתך ממנו, או לא תעבר דבר ממה שצויתך בו, ואין פנים למנות הצווי הזה מצוה בפני עצמה שהוא לא יצוה לעשות מעשה מיוחד שיהיה מצות עשה ולא יזהיר מעשות מעשה מיוחד שיהיה מצות לא תעשה.

That it is inappropriate to count commands that include the whole Torah. The Torah brings commands and warnings that are not about a specific thing, rather they include all of the commandments. It's as if it [the Torah] says: "Do everything I have commanded you to do and be careful about anything from which I have prohibited you"; or "Do not transgress anything of what I have commanded you about." And there is no room to count this command on its own - as it does not command us to do a specific act, like a positive commandment; nor does it warn us from doing a specific act, like a negative commandment.

⁴ Deuteronomy 11:13

⁵ Deuteronomy 6:13

⁶ See Rambam Hilchos Tefillah Chapter 1 Halacha 4.

חכמים אי זו היא עבודה שבבלב זו תפלה. ואין מגזין התפלות מן התורה. ואין משנה התפלה הזאת מן התורה. ואין לתפלה זמן קבוע מן התורה :

ב. ולפיכך נשים ועבדים חייבין בתפלה לפי שהיא מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא

- 1) It is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day, as [Exodus 23:25] states: "You shall serve God, your Lord." Tradition teaches us that this service is prayer, as [Deuteronomy 11:13] states: "And serve Him with all your heart" and our Sages said: Which is the service of the heart? This is prayer.

The number of prayers is not prescribed in the Torah, nor does it prescribe a specific formula for prayer. Also, according to Torah law, there are no fixed times for prayers.

- 2) Therefore, women and slaves are obligated to pray, since it is not a time-oriented commandment.

The Rambam emphasizes that the mitzvah of prayer serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it allows us to praise Hashem for the wondrous creation of the world and the daily blessings bestowed upon us. Secondly, prayer provides an avenue to ask Hashem for our needs and desires.

TEXT ONE C: HILCHOS TEFILLAH CHAPTER 1, LAW 2, CONT.

אלא חיוב מצוה זו כה הוא שיהא אדם מתחנן ומתפלל בכל יום ומגיד שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואחר כה שואל צרכיו שהוא צריה להם בבקשה ובתחנון ואחר כה נותן שבח והודיה לה על הטובה שהשפיע לו כל אחד לפי כחו:

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Rather, this commandment obligates each person to offer supplication and prayer every day and utter praises of the Holy One, blessed be He; then petition for all his needs with requests and supplications; and finally, give praise and thanks to God for the goodness that He has bestowed upon him; each one according to his own ability.

The Rambam continues in the chapter and explains that nowadays, we pray three times a day. Although the biblical mitzvah does not specify a frequency, the Rambam points out that after the destruction of the Temple, the sages instituted prayer as a replacement for sacrifices. These three daily prayers correspond to the former Temple offerings: Shacharit (morning prayer) aligns with the daily morning sacrifice (Kurban Tamid), Mincha (afternoon prayer) corresponds to the

afternoon sacrifice (afternoon Karban Tamid), and Arvit (evening prayer) reflects the remnants of the sacrifices that burned throughout the night.

In summary, the Rambam views prayer as a biblical commandment, but the specific details of what to say and when to say it have rabbinic origins. However, this opinion is not universally agreed upon among the Rishonim.

In his commentary on the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos, the Ramban discusses the origin of prayer and offers the following insights.

TEXT TWO A: RAMBAN, HASAGOS L'SEFER HA'MITZVOS:

...אֵלָא וְדַאי כָּל עֲנָן הַתְּפִלָּה אֵינוֹ חוֹבָה כָּלָל אֲבָל הוּא מְמַדְת חֶסֶד הַבוֹרָא יִתְבַּרְךָ עֲלֵינוּ שְׁשׁוּמֵעַ וְעוֹנֶה בְּכָל קְרָאָנוּ אֱלֹוֹי, וְעֵקֶר הַכְּתוּב וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁתִּהְיֶה כָּל עֲבוֹדָתְנוּ לְקַל יִתְעַלֶּה בְּכָל לְבַבְנוּ כְּלוּמַר בְּכֹונָה רְצוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה לְשִׁמוּ וּבְאֵין הַרְהוּר רַע... וְאִם אוֹלֵי יִהְיֶה מְדַרְשָׁם בְּתִפְלָה עֵקֶר מִן הַתּוֹרָה גְּמִנָה אוֹתוֹ בְּמִנְיָנוּ שֶׁל הַרְבּ וְנֹאמַר שֶׁהִיא מִצְוָה לַעֲת הַצְּרוֹת שְׁנֹאמִין שֶׁהוּא יִתְבַּרְךָ וְיִתְעַלֶּה שׁוּמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה וְהוּא הַמְצִיל מִן הַצְּרוֹת בְּתִפְלָה וְזַעֲקָה, וְהִבֵּן זֶה:

Indeed, the entire matter of prayer is not an absolute obligation; rather, it stems from the attribute of kindness of Hashem Blessed be he. He listens and responds to our every prayer. The essential commandment is to serve Him with all our hearts, a positive mitzvah that elevates all our service to Him. This means having complete and proper intention for His name, without any negative thoughts... Perhaps you can interpret that prayer is a Mitzvah derived from the Torah as part of the Mitzvah to call out to Hashem during times of distress, as we believe that Hashem will bless and will respond to our prayers. He is the One who saves from troubles through prayer and supplication.

From this we see that the Ramban disagrees with the Rambam regarding the origin of prayer. According to the Ramban, prayer is entirely a rabbinic commandment. Any biblical obligation to pray would only arise during times of trouble, where we have a mitzvah to pray to God. Otherwise, daily prayer is considered a rabbinic mitzvah.

Because of the Ramban's assertion that prayer is entirely of rabbinic origin, consequently, he believes that women are obligated to pray at the set times, just like men.

This is clearly stated in the Mishna Berura's interpretation:

TEXT THREE: MISHNA BERURA 106:4

אבל דעת הרמב"ן שעקר מצות התפלה היא מדברי סופרים שהם אנשי כנסת הגדולה שתקנו י"ח ברכות על הסדר להתפלל אותן שחרית ומנחה חובה וערבית רשות ואף על פי שהוא מצות עשה מדברי סופרים שהזמן גרמא והנשים פטורות מכל מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא אפלו מדברי סופרים כגון קדוש הלבנה אף על פי כן חיבו אותן בתפלת שחרית ומנחה כמו אנשים הואיל ותפלה היא בקשת רחמים.

However, the opinion of the Ramban is that the mitzvah of prayer is from the Sages. They established eighteen blessings in the order of prayer: Shacharit (morning prayer) and Mincha (afternoon prayer) are obligatory, and Arvit (evening prayer) is optional. Even though it is a rabbinic positive mitzvah according to the words of the Sages, which is time-bound, and women are exempt from all positive time-bound Mitzvos; nevertheless, they are obligated to pray the Shacharit and Mincha prayers just like men, since prayer involves seeking mercy from Hashem.

In contrast, the Rambam views the biblical commandment of prayer as primarily praising Hashem. The specifics of what we pray and when we do so are added by rabbinic tradition. Therefore, women would not be obligated to perform the full prayer like men; merely praising Hashem once a day would suffice.

We've had an interesting discussion, but the main focus of this class is practical halacha. What are our obligations? After considering the viewpoints of the Rambam and the Ramban, let's address the practical aspect: What is the origin of prayer, and are women obligated to pray three times a day as well?

Let's explore how the Shulchan Aruch addresses this matter:

TEXT FOUR: SHULCHAN ARUCH: 106:2

נשים ועבדים אף על פי שפטורים מקריאת שמע חיבים בתפלה מפני שהיא במצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא.

Women and servants, even though they are exempt from the Recitation of the Shema, are obligated in [the Amidah] prayer, because it is a positive mitzvah that is not limited by time.

In the concise language of the Shulchan Aruch, it can be challenging to determine the halacha. Both the Rambam and Ramban agree that women are obligated to pray, but their disagreement lies in the specifics of this obligation. Due to this lack of clarity, the Magen Avraham provides his commentary on this halacha.

TEXT FIVE: MAGEN AVRAHAM: 106:2

כֵּן פָּתַח הַרְמַב"ם דְּסִבְיָהּ לִיּה דְתַפְלָה מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה דְאוֹרֵייתָא הִיא דְכָתִיב וּלְעַבְדוּ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וְכוּ' אִף מְדַאוֹרֵייתָא דִּי בְּפַעַם אֶחָד בְּיוֹם וּבְכָל נֶסַח שִׁירְצָה וְלִכֵּן נִהְגוּ רַב נְשִׁים שְׂאִין מִתְּפַלְלוֹת בְּתַמִּידוֹת מְשׁוּם דְּאוֹמְרִים מִיָּד בְּבִקְרָ סְמוּךְ לְנִטְיֵלָה אֵיזָה בְּקִשָּׁה וּמְדַאוֹרֵייתָא דִּי בְּזָה וְאִפְשָׁר שְׂגַם חֻכְמִים לֹא חִיבוּם יוֹתֵר. וְהַרְמַב"ן סוֹבֵר תַּפְלָה דְרַבְנָן וְכֵן דַּעַת רַב הַפּוֹסְקִים.

The Rambam, however, maintains that prayer is a positive mitzvah from the Torah. This is based on the verse 'And to serve Him with all your heart,' etc. Nevertheless, according to the Torah, it suffices to pray once a day in any format one desires. Therefore, many women follow the practice of not praying regularly, as they say immediately after morning washing, a short prayer. From a Torah perspective, this is sufficient. It is also possible that even the Sages did not obligate them further. The Ramban, on the other hand, considers prayer a rabbinic commandment, and this is the opinion of most halachic authorities.

The Alter Rebbe, who concurs with the Magen Avraham, clarifies the practical implications of the Magen Avraham's position that the majority of halachic authorities concur with the Ramban's ruling.

TEXT SIX: ALTER REBBE'S SHULCHAN ARUCH 106:2

אָבֵל יֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים שְׁעַקֵּר מִצְוֹת תַּפְלָה הִיא מְדַבְּרֵי סוֹפְרִים, שֶׁהֵם אֲנָשֵׁי כְּנֻסַת הַגְּדוּלָה שֶׁתִּקְנוּ י"ח בְּרֻכּוֹת עַל הַסֹּדֵר, לְהַתְּפַלֵּל אוֹתָן שְׁחֲרִית וּמִנְחָה חוּבָה וְעַרְבִית רְשׁוּת, וְאִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה מְדַבְּרֵי סוֹפְרִים שֶׁהִזְמִן גְּרַמָּא, וְהַנְּשִׁים פְּטוּרוֹת מִכָּל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁהִזְמִן גְּרַמָּא אֶפְלוּ הִיא מְדַבְּרֵי סוֹפְרִים כְּגוֹן הַלֵּל וְקִדּוּשׁ הַלְּבָנָה – אִף עַל פִּי כֵן חִיבוּ אוֹתָן בְּתַפְלַת שְׁחֲרִית וּמִנְחָה, הוֹאִיל וְתַפְלָה הִיא בְּקִשְׁת רַחֲמִים. וְכֵן עֲקָר.

אָבֵל תַּפְלַת עַרְבִית שֶׁהוּא רְשׁוּת, אִף עַל פִּי שְׁעַכְשָׁו כְּבָר קִבְלוּהוּ עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחוּבָה, מִכָּל מְקוֹם הַנְּשִׁים לֹא קִבְלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְרַבֵּן אֵינֶן מִתְּפַלְלוֹת עַרְבִית בַּמ"ש⁷:

There are, however, authorities who maintain that [even] the

⁷ "Saturday night" (Motzaei Shabbos) is the presumed meaning of the Heb. initials in the original, yet the commentaries have questioned why the Alter Rebbe mentions specifically Saturday night. (Though this concept appears again in sec. 299:18 with regard to the laws of Havdalah, the mention of Saturday night there is obviously significant.) Seemingly, his point here is that women at large did not undertake the obligation to pray on any night.

essential mitzvah of prayer originated with the Sages, i.e., the Men of the Great Assembly, who ordained that one should pray by reciting eighteen blessings in a certain sequence, in the morning and the afternoon as an obligation, and in the evening, voluntarily. Even though it is a positive commandment of Rabbinic origin dependent on time – and women are exempt from all positive commandments dependent on time, even those of Rabbinic origin such as the recitation of Hallel and the Sanctification of the Moon, [this is an exception. The Sages] obligated women, nonetheless, to recite Shemoneh Esreh in the morning and the afternoon, because prayer .is a request for [G-d's] mercies. The Halachah follows this view

The Evening Service, which [was originally] voluntary, [is different]. Though the entire Jewish people have accepted it as an obligation, women have not undertaken it, and most do not recite the Evening Service on Saturday night.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach⁸, notes that the prevailing custom follows the lenient view of the Rambam. According to this practice, women meet their prayer obligation with a brief prayer encompassing praise, request, and gratitude. He further explains that by saying 'Modah Ani' for praise and gratitude, and adding a verse for request, a woman fulfills her prayer obligation⁹.

⁸ Halichos Shlomo, Tefillah 2:5

ה ואף שהמשנה ברורה (ושלחן ערוך הרב) סימן קו סק"ד החמיר לחיבו, ובהמגן אברהם סימן קו סק"ב, וצריכה תפלתו לכלל שבת בקשה והודאה שזהו עקר סדר התפלה. אמנם ידי חובת שבת והודאה יוצאות באמירת מודה אני וכו' ולכן יש להן להוסיף רק פסוק של "בקשה". והמנהג שהנשים מברכות גם ברכת על נטילת ידיים.

And even though the Mishna Berurah and the Shulchan Aruch Harav are strict to obligate them, and as the Magen Avraham teaches, and their tefillah requires to include praise and thanks to Hashem, which is the main order of prayer – They can however fulfill their obligation with the Modeh Ani and therefore they only have to add one verse as a request. The custom is that the women also recite the blessing of Netilas Yadayim.

⁹ This is consistent with the Alter Rebbe's perspective, as cited at the start of the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, section 106:2.

נשים ועבדים אף על פי שפטורים מקריאת שמע – חיבים בתפלה, מפני שהוא מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא, י שומני התפלה הם מדברי סופרים, ועקר מצות התפלה היא מן התורה, שנאמר: "ולעבדו בכל לבבכם", יב איזו עבודה שבלב – זו תפלה, אלא שאין לה גסח ידוע מן התורה ויכול להתפלל בכל גסח שירצה ובכל עת שירצה, יד ומשהתפלל פעם אחת ביום או בלילה – יצא ידי חובתו מן התורה. ועל פי סברא זו נהגו רב הנשים שאינן מתפללין י"ח בתמידות שחר וערב, לפי שאומרות מניד בבקר סמוך לנטילה איזה בקשה ומן התורה יוצאות בזה, ואפשר שאף חכמים לא חיבונו יותר.

Although women and bondmen are exempt from reciting the Shema, they are obligated to pray, because praying is a positive commandment that is not dependent on time. For the times for prayer are of Rabbinic origin, but the mitzvah of prayer is essentially of Scriptural origin, as it is written, "And to serve Him with all your heart." [The Sages clarified the meaning of this verse, asking,] "What service is performed with the heart?" [and replying,] "This is prayer." It is only that the Torah did not prescribe a specific text for prayer, and every individual could pray with any wording he desired and at any time he desired. Having prayed once either by day or by night, he had fulfilled his obligation according to Scriptural Law.

Based upon this view, most women do not customarily recite Shemoneh Esreh regularly, morning and evening, because they make some request [of G-d] immediately in the morning, directly after they wash their hands. They fulfill their Scriptural obligation with this, and perhaps even the Sages did not obligate them further.

Even when aligning with the Ramban, there are circumstances when a woman may be exempt from prayer¹⁰.

The Shulchan Aruch in Se'if 1 writes the following:

TEXT SEVEN: SHULCHAN ARUCH 106:1

כָּל הַפְּטוּרִים מִקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע פְּטוּרִים מִתְפִּילָה וְכָל שְׁחֵיב בְּקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע חַיב בְּתְפִילָה.

All those who are exempt from the Recitation of the Shema are exempt from [the Amidah] prayer and all who are obligated in the Recitation of the Shema are obligated in [the Amidah] prayer.

The Mishna Berura elaborates on the exemptions from the obligation to recite the Shema.

TEXT SEVEN: MISHNA BERURAH 106:1

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵם עוֹסְקִים בְּמִצְוָה אוֹ שְׁטוּדִים טְרַדַּת מִצְוָה.

This is because they are engaged in, or preparing to engage in, a mitzvah.

It's noteworthy that the son of the author of the Mishna Berurah – The Chofetz Chaim mentioned, that although his father ruled that women are obligated to pray at least twice a day, his mother seldom did so. With her husband's approval, she focused on raising their family instead¹¹.

Regarding the halachic stance, Rabbi Mordechai Shmuel Ashkenazi of blessed memory, Chief Rabbi of Kfar Chabad from 1983 until his passing in 2015, addressed this matter in a 2010 article. He stated¹², "For mothers engrossed in the demanding tasks of child-rearing and household

¹⁰ Note from Rabbi Oberlander:

בש"ע רבינו (סי' קו"ב) נשים ועבדים אע"פ שפטורים מקריאת שמע חייבים בתפלה מפני שהוא מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא שזמני התפלה הם מדברי סופרים ועיקר מצות התפלה היא מן התורה שנאמר ולעבדו בכל לבבכם איזו עבודה שבלב זו תפלה אלא שאין לה נוסח ידוע מן התורה ויכול להתפלל בכל נוסח שירצה ובכל עת שירצה ומשהתפלל פעם אחד ביום או בלילה יצא ידי חובתו מן התורה ועל פי סברא זו נהגו רוב הנשים שאינן מתפללין י"ח בתמידות שחר וערב לפי שאומרות מיד בבקר סמוך לנטילה איזה בקשה ומן התורה יוצאות בזה ואפשר שאף חכמים לא חייבו יותר אבל יש אומרים שעיקר מצות תפלה היא מדברי סופרים שהם אנשי כנסת הגדולה שתיקנו י"ח ברכות על הסדר להתפלל אותן שחרית ומנחה חובה וערבית רשות ואע"פ שהוא מצות עשה מדברי סופרים שהזמן גרמא והנשים פטורות מכל מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא אפילו היא מדברי סופרים כגון הלל וקידוש הלבנה אע"פ כחייבו אותן בתפלת שחרית ומנחה הואיל ותפלה היא בקשת רחמים וכן עיקר. אבל תפלת ערבית רשות אע"פ שעכשיו כבר קבלוהו עליהם כל ישראל לחובה מ"מ הנשים לא קבלו עליהם ורובן אינן מתפללות ערבית כמו"ש:

¹¹ See (דוגמא מדרכי אבי - אות כז)

אמי ז"ל כמעט לא התפללה, כל זמן שלא יצאנו מתחת ידה, באמרה לי, כי אבי פטרה מזה, משום שהיא עוסקת בגדול בניה.

My late mother hardly prayed as long as we were under her care. She told me my father had exempted her from it because she was occupied with raising her children.

¹² For the full article, see <https://bit.ly/tefila01>.

נשים שיש להן ילדים ומשום כך הן עסוקות מאוד בגדולם ובענייני הבית, בדיעבד ובשעת הדחק אם לא מצאו זמן כמה דקות פנויות במשך היום בכדי להתפלל שמונה עשרה, אם אמרו ברכות השחר ופסוק 'שמע ישראל' מתוך פונה לקבל עליהן על מלכות שמים בקריאה זו, וברכת "ויציב" עד "גאל ישראל" – יש להן על מה לסמוך להסתפק בכך. ובמקרה זה תאמר ברכת "ויציב" ואם יתפנה לה זמן תתפלל שמונה עשרה אף שתפלה זו אינה סמוכה לגאולה.

responsibilities, should they not manage to carve out a few moments for the Amida prayer during the day, there is a halachic foundation to rely on. This is provided they have recited the morning blessings and the 'Shema' verse with the conscious intention of affirming their allegiance to Hashem through these prayers and have continued through to the 'Vayatziv' blessing, concluding with 'Ga'al Yisroel.' In such instances, it is sufficient. Nonetheless, the 'Vayatziv' blessing should be recited, and should an opportunity arise later; the Amida prayer ought to be performed."

To conclude with an intriguing anecdote, there was once an elderly woman who struggled to complete her morning prayers each day. Desiring to streamline her prayer routine, she contacted the Lubavitcher Rebbe for guidance, seeking advice on which prayers were less essential and could be omitted. The Rebbe's response to her inquiry was as follows¹³:

TEXT EIGHT: LETTER OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

ועל זה ענה הרבי:

במיחד בגילה אין כדאי לקצר בתפלה אשר רחמי ניהו

כי אם (1) להתפלל בהפסקות (כמובן באפן המותר)

(2) לאכל כפי הדרוש בזמן הדרוש. וראה היום יום י' שבט

And on this, the Rebbe answered:

Especially at her age, it is not advisable to shorten the prayer, which ask Hashem for blessings .

Rather,

- 1) to pray in intervals (in a permitted way) and
- 2) to eat as necessary at the required times. And see, The Hayom Yom for the 10th of Shevat."

The 'Hayom Yom,' which translates to 'Today is the Day,' is a collection authored by the Rebbe in 1943. It offers a daily thought, each derived from the discourses and correspondences of the

¹³ The original wording:

מענה לא' שפתב לרבי: אמי זקנתי מתנהגת זה הרבה שנים שמתפללת הני תפלות בכל יום אבל כעת מפני זקנותה פאלט איר דאס זייער שווער, ולזה בבקר טועמות מעט קדם התפלה ומתפללת רק קריאת שמע ושמונה עשרה אבל גם זה פאלט איר שווער וכן תפלות מנחה ומעריב - ובקשה לשאול במה יוכל להקל עלי' בזה.

A Response to one who wrote to the Rebbe: My elderly mother has been praying every day for many years, but now, due to her age, it is very difficult for her. Therefore, in the morning, she tastes a little before the prayer and prays only the Shema and the Amidah, but even this is very hard for her, as well as the Mincha and Maariv prayers. I seek to ask how I can ease this for her.

sixth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn. In Chabad tradition, engaging with the 'Hayom Yom' forms an integral component of our daily study regimen.

The entry for the 10th of Shevat reads as follows:

TEXT NINE: HAYOM YOM YUD SHEVAT

אמי זקנתי (הרבנית מרת רבקה נשמתה ע"ד) בהיותה כבת שמונה עשרה שנה - בשנת תרי"א - חלתה, וצוה הרופא אשר תאכל תבן בקומה משנתה, אמנם היא לא חפצה לטעם קדם התפלה, והיתה מתפללת בהשכמה, ואחר התפלה היתה אוכלת פת שחרית. כשנודע הדבר לחותנה אדננו מורנו ורבנו הצמח צדק אמר לה: א איד דארף זיין געזונד און א בעל כח. אויף מצות שטייט וחי בהם, איז דער טייטש וחי בהם, מען דארף אריינבריינגען א חיות אין מצות. בקדי אז מען זאל קענען אריינבריינגען א חיות אין מצות, מוז מען זיין א בעל כח און זיין בשמחה. וסיים: דו דארפסט ניט זיין קיין ניקטערע. בעסער עסען צוליב דאווענען ווי דאווענען צוליב עסען. וברכה באריכות ימים, - (נולדה בשנת תקצ"ג ונפטרה י' שבט תרע"ד).

מאמר זה אמר אדוני אבי מורי ורבי לאחד על יחידות, והוסיף: און מען דארף עס טאן בשמחה.

When my grandmother, Rebbetzin Rivka, was eighteen (in 5611, 1851) she fell ill, and the physician ordered her to eat immediately upon awakening. She, however, did not wish to eat before davening; so she davened very early, then ate breakfast. When her father-in-law, the Tzemach Tzedek, learned of this he said to her: "A Jew must be healthy and strong. The Torah says about mitzvot, 'Live in them,' meaning bring vitality into the mitzvot. To be able to infuse mitzvot with vitality, one must be strong and joyful." Then he concluded: "You should not be without food. Better to eat for the sake of davening rather than to daven for the sake of eating;" he then blessed her with long life. [She was born in 5593 (1833) and passed away on Sh'vat 10, 5674 (1914)]

My father told this teaching of the Tzemach Tzedek to someone at Yechidus, adding, "And this must be done with joy."

The takeaway from this story is the profound significance of daily prayer in Jewish life and its role in fostering a connection with God. While it is traditionally preferred to refrain from eating before prayer, the Tzemach Tzedek advised his daughter-in-law to prioritize her health so that she could pray with full intention, or Kavana. This teaches us the importance of seizing any moment available to engage in prayer, thereby embracing the opportunity God provides for us to connect with Him through this sacred practice.

LESSON ONE SUMMARY:

The lesson explores the fundamental question of why we pray and the source of this obligation. This topic has been debated among the Rishonim, with a notable dispute between the Rambam and the Ramban.

1. **Rambam's View:** The Rambam views prayer as a biblical commandment, designating it as positive mitzvah number 5 in his Sefer HaMitzvos. He explains that although the specific prayers we recite are not explicitly biblical, the foundation of prayer is rooted in the Torah. As a result, all Jews, including women, have an obligation to pray. The time-sensitive aspects of prayer were introduced by Ezra and his court after the destruction of the first Temple. The Rambam emphasizes that the mitzvah of prayer serves a dual purpose: to praise Hashem for the wondrous creation of the world and the daily blessings bestowed upon us, and to provide an avenue to ask Hashem for our needs and desires.
2. **Ramban's View:** The Ramban disagrees with the Rambam regarding the origin of prayer. According to the Ramban, prayer is entirely a rabbinic commandment. Any biblical obligation to pray would only arise during times of trouble, where we have a mitzvah to pray to God. Otherwise, daily prayer is considered a rabbinic mitzvah. Because of the Ramban's assertion that prayer is entirely of rabbinic origin, he believes that women are obligated to pray at the set times, just like men.
3. **Practical Halacha:** The Shulchan Aruch addresses the practical aspect of prayer and states that women and servants, even though they are exempt from the Recitation of the Shema, are obligated in [the Amidah] prayer, because it is a positive mitzvah that is not limited by time.
4. **Takeaway:** The lesson concludes with an anecdote about an elderly woman who sought advice from the Lubavitcher Rebbe on streamlining her prayer routine. The Rebbe advised her to prioritize her health so that she could pray with full intention, or Kavana. This story underscores the profound significance of daily prayer in Jewish life and its role in fostering a connection with God.

