



3 Heshvan 5763; Oct. 9, 2002

## Questions in Halakha by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

# *To Daven Alone Or With A Minyan*

### **Question:**

*Is it better to pray in a minyan without proper devotion (kavanah) in prayer or to pray in private with kavanah? This is especially important when referring to the kavanot of the Mekubalim.*

### **Answer:**

We must never underestimate the value of davening in a minyan, three times a day for each of our tefilot. However, in our many sins, not all minyanim focus on a slow recitation of tefilah to make sure that those davening can do so with kavanah. This becomes an especially acute point when we refer to those who pray according to the Kabbalistic minhag with the kavanot of uniting the upper worlds. The prayers of the Mekubalim sustain multiple worlds.

Most Mekubalim, however cannot daven outside of a minyan of their own because the prayers move too fast and the Mekubalim are not given the necessary time to perform their sacred tasks. Under such circumstances, we will see that it is actually better for those Mekubalim to pray alone, without a minyan, than to pray with a minyan and not be able to properly perform their holy obligations.

However, this application is not limited only to Mekubalim. Even those who do not pray according to the Kabbalah must pray with devotion. If the sincere layman cannot find an appropriate minyan in which to express his spiritual aspiration, he might better serve his Creator to daven alone. This view, as will be shown, is firmly established in Halakha.

Rabbi Ya'akov Katzin, in his *Katzini Aretz (O.H. 6, page 42)* is one of the Hakhamim who expresses the above opinion. The following is a synopsis of his rationale.





stand to pray. Yet, as we learned above (in *O.H. 89:8*) standing to pray, takes precedence over reciting Geulah immediately before the Amidah. We also learned (*O.H. 111:3*) that reciting Geulah before the Amidah takes precedence over praying with the congregation (the minyan).

To sum up, the importance of devotion in prayer exempts one from standing, which exempts one from reciting Geulah before the Amidah, which exempts one from davening with the minyan. Therefore, in brief, the importance of devotion (kavanah) in prayer certainly takes precedence over davening with congregation (minyan). This concludes the rationale as expressed by Rabbi Katzin in his *Katzini Aretz*.

Rabbi Katzin also quotes the *Sha'arei Teshuva (O.H. 52:1)* that states that one who normally prays slowly and with devotion and who cannot maintain his level of devotion if praying with a minyan should not pray with them. (He should rather daven alone). He also quotes the *RiDBaZ (3, 472)* who states that one should only pray in a place where his devotion and thoughts will not be disturbed. If this means that one will need daven alone and not in the Synagogue, then so be it.

Rabbi Katzin, however, concludes that one must make sure that if one does daven alone, that indeed one's devotion (kavanah) in pray must be significant. Rabbi Katzin quotes the *Zohar (1, 234a)* to show that if one were to pray alone without proper devotion, then it would be better for such a one to always pray in a public minyan. G-d closely examines the prayer of the individual, to investigate its worthiness. This is not so of the public prayers. This G-d accepts with less scrutiny.

Rabbi Katzin is not the only one to express the opinion that it is better to daven alone with devotion rather than in a minyan without it. Rabbi Katzin's response to this question was based on the earlier words of *Sefer Sha'arei Rahamim (2, 87a)*.

This view is also expressed as Halakha in *Sefer Divrei Shalom*, which outlines Halakha in accordance to the minhagim of the Ari'zal, the RaShaSh and the Hasidei Beit El of Yerushalayim. In *Vol. 2, O.H. 98:10*, the Divrei Shalom is asked the same question as above. Should one who wishes to pray alone with kavanah and quiet according to the Kabbalistic order of the RaShaSh (the true Nusah HaAri) do so, or pray in a minyan without them? The answer is the same as that expressed above.

Here, however, the Divrei Shalom questions whether davening in a minyan is actually required by halakha or not. He mentions the various opinions of the Sages. Some hold that it is definitely a requirement of our Rabbanim that one daven in a minyan. Others hold that it is not such a requirement (s'nif mitzvah). Yet, others hold that there is no such obligation at all. The Divrei Shalom takes the opinion of



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the middle group and agrees that there is an aspect of obligation (s'nif mitzvah) to davening in a minyan.

In conclusion, one who regularly davens with deep devotion (kavanah), especially those who follow the Kabbalistic kavanot, are permitted to daven all their prayers alone in the privacy of their homes or elsewhere. This permission, however is only when a minyan cannot provide for them a proper environment in which to maintain their level of devotion.

In our many sins, I have heard from numerous individuals that they wish to daven in private because their local minyanim are totally void of any spiritual content. During prayers today many people spend more time talking to one another than praying to G-d. Prayer is supposed to be a special time, when we talk with G-d "heart to heart." When we lack this simple, most basic devotion, then our prayers are not prayers.

If one sees a minyan where there is such an overt sense of disrespect towards prayer, one should leave that minyan and go find another. If it is the only minyan in town, then it is better for one to daven alone, with devotion of heart than to participate in such a public show that lacks all sense of respect towards our blessed Creator.

However, if one finds a good minyan where the members sincerely and truly devote their time and hearts to G-d, one should cling to such a group and become a regular member of them. A good minyan might be hard to find, but it is worth its weight in gold when found.

I do not wish to encourage individuals to daven alone. I rather wish to inspire minyanim to become places that shine with kavanah and truly elevate above the prayers of Klal Yisrael.