

The Practical Parameters of Prayer

What Everyone Needs To Know

Sephardic Halakha (Jewish Law)

& Kabbalistic Insights

(With A Word for the Benei Noah)

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

Introduction

All of us pray in one sort of fashion or another. Yet, I am well aware that not everyone can be a Kabbalist and pray as I have outlined here. Nonetheless, we have our obligations and these need to be addressed in light of how most people are living today in the modern world.

Every male Jew above the age of Bar Mitzvah (13) is required to daily recite the three prayer services. Yet, the order of Kabbalistic kavanot is obviously geared towards those Jewish men who have the time and ability to learn them and use them in prayer. Obviously this leaves out many of us. So, what are we to do when we are in a rush and don't have time to perform the kavanot? Many men are so rushed on weekday mornings that they do not even have time to recite the entire Morning Service. What should be done at times like these? This will soon be addressed.

Let's start discussing the topic of women. What is their relationship to kavanot prayer? Due to its spiritual importance, I will address this issue first.

Women in Prayer & Kavanot

Women are also required to pray sections of the traditional prayer services. However, there are three different minhagim (traditions) as to when women are to daven (pray).

According to **Ashkenazi** tradition women are required to pray three times a day, as are men.

The **Sephardic** tradition is quite more lenient. The *Rishon L'Tzion Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef* writes¹ that in fact a woman is required by law to pray only once a day. They may pray all three prayers daily if they so choose. Yet, they are not required to do so.

Another great **Sephardic** Sage, *Rabbi Ben Tzion Abba Shaul* has written that women are required to pray the morning and afternoon services but not the evening service.

Most Sephardic women follow the view of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef. Now that we have reviewed obligation, let us review prayer by choice.

Indeed, when we speak about the obligation to pray we are speaking specifically about the recitation of the *Amidah (Shemoneh Esrei)*. This is true of both men and women. While it is incumbent upon Jewish men to recite all the prayers, **women are only required to pray three specific parts of the prayer service:**

1. the **morning blessings**
(recited upon awakening)
2. the **Shema Yisrael** prayer (essentially women are only required to recite the first verse & *Barukh Shem*, however, in

¹ Ref: *Sefer Otzar HaDin L'Isha U'Bat* (3:1,2) by Rabbi Yitzhak (son of Rabbi Ovadiah) Yosef. All the Sephardic laws related to women are taken from here.

our day and age it is custom to recite the whole).

3. the **Amidah**

Women may recite the entire service if they wish, but these three prayers are obligatory.

The question to ask is being that women are not obligated by Jewish Law to recite the full service as are the men, are they then spiritually capable of performing the spiritual ascent and rectification that the men perform as spoken of above?

The general Kabbalistic rule is that if G-d did not command a certain segment of the Jewish population to perform a specific mitzvah (commandment) it was because that those souls could not perform the spiritual rectification that the mitzvah performs above.

The rule is that we are commanded to perform only those mitzvot that we have the ability to rectify their source above. This rule, however, does not prohibit everyone from performing specific mitzvot simply because they are not directly commanded to perform them.

Jewish women are generally permitted to observe those commandments which they are not directly commanded to do. The general rule is that any commandment that requires a physical action and that is incumbent upon a specific time of performance (for example waving the Lulav on Succot) women are not required to perform. In Hebrew this rule is called, "*mitzvah aseh sh'hazman g'rama, nashim paturot mehen.*"

The Kabbalistic reason for this is most profound. Originally when Adam and Eve sinned, Adam blemished all three realms of creation: the realms of Mind, space and time. Eve, however, did not blemish the realm of time. At the psychic spiritual level, women are always in sync with time, in a way men are not. The best example of this is the natural monthly cycle in the body of a woman. Her body knows the times. A man's body has no such inner clock. He

has no such inner sense and connection to time.

Thus when we were given commandments to rectify the areas which we had blemished, we were given specific commandments to rectify all three realms. However, for the women, who only blemished two realms, the number of commandments that they need to perform is less. This means, by Kabbalistic definition, that women are on a higher spiritual plane than are men. This is clearly documented throughout Kabbalistic and traditional Talmudic sources.

Women may indeed observe some of the positive commandments incumbent upon time if they so wish. Yet, they do not and cannot perform the spiritual rectification that the mitzvah was given for. Only one with a blemish can heal the blemish. One who is complete cannot become "more" complete.

If a woman is influenced by certain modern trends (against the spirit of Torah) and wishes to observe some positive commandments incumbent upon time, she may do so as long as she does not recite the traditional blessing said before the performance of that mitzvah. Being that she is not required to perform this specific practice she cannot honestly recite the words of the blessing which state, "*who has commanded us to perform . . .*" (*Vitzivanu*).

In Ashkenazi communities women are allowed to recite a blessing on positive commandments that are incumbent upon time. However, in light of the teachings of the Kabbalah, this tradition of theirs is not appropriate and a blessing said in vain. All true G-d fearing women should refrain from this inappropriate practice that degrades the high level of feminine spirituality.

Now, let's discuss women and kavanot. Women, indeed, must pray, at least once a day. Prayer is considered a service of the heart and this is not something incumbent upon time. When to pray is a matter incumbent upon time. How to pray is not!

Therefore, all women who wish to study the kavanot and use them fully in their prayers are totally within the correct realms and parameters of feminine spirituality to do so.

Indeed, we know throughout Jewish history of many great female prophetesses. They certainly did not attain their spiritual heights other than by performing meditations and most likely, kavanot. Following then in the footsteps of Sarah, Hannah and Hulda, it is a wise thing to encourage women to practice whatever kavanot in prayer that they have the time and discipline to learn.

If history is to teach us any lesson, it is to not underestimate the value of women's prayers. The Midrash teaches us that in merit of the prayers of the Jewish women in Egypt were the children of Israel redeemed. Indeed, another Midrash teaches that in merit of Jewish women's prayer will we merit the coming of Mashiah.



For those women who are not yet fluent in Hebrew, there is an excellent Sephardic prayerbook designed especially for women. It is entitled, "A Women's Prayers."² The excellent thing about this text is that it has three columns; one English, one Hebrew and one transliterated Hebrew. This siddur covers the three sections women are required to pray, plus a few extras. It is a handy learning tool which will endear women to that which is their very own.

² A Woman's Prayers in Three Columns by Rabbi Michael Haber. Yagdiyl Torah Publications 1996.

What To Do When You Are In A Rush

Unfortunately modern minyan (public prayer quorums reciting the prayer services) do not always have the best *kavana*. Many times, especially on weekday mornings, when the pressures of the workday are foremost on one's mind, morning prayer gets said in the most quickest and least inspirational way. I refer to these types of services as "racer" minyan.

One cannot have deep devotion in prayer all the while one's mind is not really paying attention to what one is praying. The mind cannot be split in two and as the Ba'al Shem Tov has taught, where one thinks is where one is at.³

Those who pray in this manner fulfill their obligations to recite the prayers only if they correctly recited the words of prayer. However, they are in no way fulfilling their obligations to have *kavana* in prayer. To pray with *kavana* is a separate law, ref. **Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Haim 98:1**. Just what this *required kavana* is has been discussed elsewhere.

If during prayer one simply mumbles the words all the while thinking about work, it is as if one is already on the job, and not at shul (synagogue)! Without the minimum focus of intent upon the words one recites in prayer and their correct pronunciation, one has not fulfilled his obligation to pray. Such a one must actually recite their prayers a second time, this time with meaning. Now that we have outlined the problem, let us also review a possible solution.

For those who are rushed in prayer, the answer is simple. Start fifteen minutes earlier. Regardless of how early one awakens in the morning, fifteen minutes earlier will not make one any more tired. That fifteen minutes allows one to move a little bit slower and to do things with a little bit more focus. Yet, even this is not enough.

³ Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Amud HaTefilah (Noah) 56

There are those who simply pray by rote. In other words they are accustomed to daven. This is what they do every day. This is how they do it, i.e., quickly and without *kavana*. And they have no intention to change! The Ba'al Shem Tov writes (**Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Shemot 1**), that people who pray in this fashion cause all their efforts to fall into the klipot (the dark side). There will be no good to come forth from such arrogant disrespect of Heaven.

For whatever reason sometimes it happens that one gets to shul late. In such a case the **Shulkhan Arukh, Orach Haim 52** has outlined an abridged order of prayers that one can recite. In this abridged service one still recites the most essential prayers and temporarily skips the non-essential ones. These prayers are then repeated privately after the minyan service is over.

The Abridged Shaharit Service

There are a number of different opinions with regards to what must be said and what can be skipped.

In order to assist the untrained reader with the following mentioned prayers; I will again refer to their locations (page numbers) in the Hebrew-English prayerbook **Siddur Kol Sasson**.

According to the **Kaf HaHaim** commentary on this section of the Shulkhan Arukh (**O.H. 52, letter Bet**) one should not skip any part of the prayer service. Quoting Kabbalistic sources, including the direction of author of the Shulkhan Arukh, Rabbi Yosef Karo's own angelic guide (**Magid Mesharim**), one who skips parts of the service "*Mihafekh HaTzinorot*" (reverses the heavenly flow).

Rabbi Yosef Karo himself is not as strict as the **Kaf HaHaim** who wrote nearly 350 years after him is. **Maran** (the Sephardic title for Rabbi Yosef Karo) outlines the following order:

*"If one comes to the synagogue and finds the congregation at the end of the **Pisukei D'Zimra** (the Yetziratic section where the Psalms and other songs of praise are*

*recited; **Kol Sasson pages 97-124**), one should say:*

- ✧ **Barukh Sh'Amar** (page 97)
- ✧ **Tehilah L'David** (Ashrei) (page 102)
- ✧ **Psalm 148** (page 109)
- ✧ **Psalm 150** (page 112)
- ✧ **Yishtabah** (page 122)

*One should recite **Yotzer** (page 127), the **Shema** (page 135) and its [other] blessings and pray [the **Amidah**] (page 148) with the congregation.*

*If he doesn't have time to do all this he should delete **Psalm 148**. If the congregation has already begun **Yotzer** and there is no time to recite the **Pisukei D'Zimra** even in abridged form; one should recite the **Shema** and its blessings with the congregation and pray [the **Amidah**] with them. Afterwards one should recite the entire **Pisukei D'Zimra** but without its opening blessing **Barukh Sh'Amar** or its closing blessing **Yishtabah**."*

The leading Sephardic Sage of our day, **Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef** also addresses this issue in a way very similar to Rabbi Yosef Karo. In his **Kitzur Shulkhan Arukh (Sections 45-54, law 26, page 60)** Rabbi Ovadiah writes:

"One who comes late to synagogue and finds the congregation finishing the Psalms, if he were to pray regularly he would miss praying with the congregation, he should:

- ✧ quickly put on his **Talit** and **Tefillin** with their blessings
- ✧ recites the blessing **Elohai Neshama** (page 3)
- ✧ say the **blessings over the Torah** (page 10)
- ✧ recite **Barukh Sh'Amar** (page 97)
- ✧ **Tehilah L'David** (Ashrei) (page 102)
- ✧ **Psalm 148** (page 109)
- ✧ **Psalm 150** (page 112)
- ✧ **Yishtabah** (page 122)

*He should then continue reciting **Yotzer Ohr** (page 127) and then follow the correct order so that he may join the congregation and the public reader."*

"If he still cannot catch up to the congregation and the reading of the public reader, he should completely skip the **Psalms** and begin with the blessing **Yotzer Ohr** so that he may join the congregation and the public reader."

"After prayer he should recite the remainder of the **morning blessings** earlier skipped (page 4-10) along with the portion of the **Akedah** (page 37), the portion of the **sacrificial offering** (page 55), and the Mishna **Ezehu Mekoman** (page 69). [He should continue and recite] **Hodu LaShem** (page 84) and all the other Psalms previously deleted. **However Barukh Sh'Amar** and **Yishtabah** should not be said, unless one recites them deleting mention to G-d's holy Name and Kingdom (i.e., the words **HaShem Elokeynu Melekh HaOlam**)."

"Even though the Kabbalists have said that if one abridges the Psalms and says them after the service that one is "Mihafekh HaTzinorot" (reversing the heavenly flow), this is only if done intentionally. However if one has no choice in order to pray with the congregation, then it doesn't matter, for the level of praying with the congregation is very sublime and it annuls the saying of the Psalms."

As is typical of him, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef does not always agree with the Kabbalah. So there are other Sephardic opinions, that disagree with Rabbi Ovadiah regarding what can and cannot be deleted from the prayer service and that are closer to the Kabbalistic view.

Another leading Sephardic Sage today, who became the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel after Rabbi Ovadiah, is **Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu**. He is a Kabbalist, son of a master Kabbalist. Rabbi Eliyahu is the son of **Rabbi Salmon Eliyahu**, author of the six-volume commentary to Rabbi Haim Vital's *Etz Haim*, entitled **Kerem Shlomo**.

In his siddur (prayerbook), "**Kol Eliyahu**" (in Hebrew only), Rabbi Mordechai also addresses the issue of what to do when one

comes late to shul to pray with the congregation. One **page 22** he writes,

"One who comes to the synagogue and sees that the congregation has already begun the Psalms and there is no other minyan that he could join to recite the entire service, or if one is in a rush and if he began his prayers according to the full order he would not suffice to finish them to pray the Amidah with the congregation this is what he should recite:

- ✧ The full order of **Birkot HaShahar** the morning blessings (page 4-10)
- ✧ the **blessings of the Torah** (page 10)
- ✧ **Lefikhakh Anahnu Hayavim** (therefore we are duty bound, page 51)
- ✧ the first verse of **Shema Yisrael** and **Barukh Shem**. [bottom of page 52]
- ✧ he should then say **Yihei Ratzon** (may it be your will, page 55)
- ✧ the **Tamid sacrifice offering**, (page 56)
- ✧ the **incense offering** along with its Rabbinical sections concluding with Rabbi Natan HaBabli (page 56-61)
- ✧ **Siah Siftoteynu** (that this utterance of our lips) until **V'Shahat Oto** (He shall slaughter it, bottom of page 68) then say
- ✧ **Hodu** (give thanks, page 84) until **U'b'nivi'av Al Tira'u** (and do not cause harm, page 85)
- ✧ then say the verse **El Nekamot HaShem** (you are a G-d of retribution, page 88)
- ✧ **HaShem Tzvaot Imanu** (HaShem, Master of Hosts is with us, page 88), **HaShem Tzvaot Ashrei Adam** (fortunate is the man, page 89), **HaShem Hoshia** (HaShem, save, page 89),
- ✧ then say **HaShem Melekh** (HaShem is King, bottom of page 92).
- ✧ **Lamnatzeah** (Psalm 67, page 95)
- ✧ **Barukh Sh'Amar** (page 97)
- ✧ **Mizmor L'Todah** (Psalm 100, page 99)
- ✧ **Yihei Kavod** (may the glory, page 100)
- ✧ **Ashrei** (Psalm 145, page 102)
- ✧ **Psalm 150** (page 112)
- ✧ **VayVarekh David** (then David blessed), page 114) until **Komo Even** (like a stone, top page 117)

- ☆ **HaShem Yimlokh** (*HaShem will reign, page 121*)
- ☆ **Yishtabah** (*page 122*)

Begin **Yotzer Ohr** and from here on do not skip a thing.

After prayer it is good to recite all that was missed. Even though one said the opening verses of **Hodu**, now should say the others. Yet, do not recite **Barukh Sh'Amar** or **Yishtabah** when you are saying abridged prayers. Following this order one will appropriately accomplish the order of the Morning Prayer as outlined by Sod (the Kabbalah). Ref. Rav Pa'alim, Vol. 2 Orah Haim 4, responsa of Rabbi Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai."

In spite of the fact that Rabbi Eliyahu's order is considerably longer than that outlined by the Shulkhan Arukh and Rabbi Ovadiah, nonetheless, most of Rabbi Eliyahu's editions are single verses and thus quick to recite.

Rabbi Toledano has also included instructions on what to pray when one arrives late to shul. His instructions are to be found in siddur Kol Sasson page 36.

So we have all these choices. What is a person to do? The answer is that **we follow the Halakha and this is defined for us by Rabbi Yosef Karo and his Shulkhan Arukh**. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef follows the Shulkhan Arukh and that is what makes his words most authoritative. Indeed the additional steps that he mentions: to put on Talit and Tefillin and to recite the morning and Torah blessing is in complete accord with the intentions of Rabbi Yosef Karo in the Shulkhan Arukh. Although Rabbi Ovadiah's words are the most authoritative, that does not make his words most advisable.

The path of the Kabbalah is many times stricter than that of standard Halakha. While there are those Halakhic opinions that require one to follow Kabbalistic practice regarding anything not mentioned

clearly in the Gemara,⁴ nonetheless, this rule is not observed by the majority of the religious community today.

Regardless whether the Kabbalistic way is required or optional, it still is very wise and holy to follow. Therefore, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu's outline follows that of the master Kabbalist, Rabbi Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai of Baghdad. This outline enables one to be brief in prayer and still fulfill both one's Halakhic and Kabbalistic obligations. *Nonetheless, if it is too much, then one can follow the outline of Rabbi Ovadiah and of the Shulkhan Arukh.*

Now, each of the scenarios spoken of above deal with the situation of one coming late to shul to daven with a minyan. What about one who davens at home by choice? Many are not able to attend a daily minyan. Yet, the obligation of prayer is no less. Is one praying alone required to pray the entire service, from beginning to end? The answer to this is an obvious yes, with one exception: if similar to being in a minyan, one is in a real rush.

To Pray in a Minyan

What is the Halakha? Must I really "drag myself" out of bed every morning and go daven in Shul? Alternatively, is there any Halakhic allowance for me to daven at home? I am asked these questions on a regular basis. Indeed Halakha does discuss this issue and so does the Kabbalah.

The value of davening in a minyan cannot be overestimated. Throughout the holy Zohar,⁵ davening with a minyan is compared to joining the angelic forces. It is taught⁶ that the prayers of an individual

⁴ Ref. Beit Yosef, Orah Haim 141

⁵ Zohar, Vol. 2, 250A; Vol. 2, 164B; Vol. 3, 230B; Vol. 2, 131B; Tikunei Zohar, 69 (105B).

⁶ **Zohar Vol. 1, 234A** "The prayer of an individual only enters before the Holy One, blessed be He with great effort. Prior to admitting it, the Holy One, blessed be He examines it and views the merits and guilt of that person. This is not done with public prayers."

Zohar, Vol. 2, 245B "The prayers of an individual ascend until the doors of the palace, if they are worthy, immediately the doors are opened. If not [the prayer] is rejected."

only ascend above if that person is worthy of such. However, the prayers of the minyan always ascend.⁷ Thus, it appears wise to join a minyan; for which of us can say for sure that we are worthy that our prayers should ascend on high?

There is only one good reason to be praying alone and that is if the minyan is meeting for morning prayers at any time after the crack of dawn. According to the Talmud⁸ and Shulkhan Arukh,⁹ the *Shema Yisrael* prayer should be recited immediately before dawn (which means that Shaharit would have to begin approximately one-half hour before this) so that the Amidah can be recited at the exact crack of dawn. Even Kabbalah and Hasidut write that this is the correct time for prayer. Indeed, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* has written that if one does not have a minyan that davens at **henetz hahama** (the crack of dawn) one should then pray alone rather than wait for a minyan and miss this most important time.

These are the words of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* as found in Tzva'at HaRivash:¹⁰

"One should be careful that prayer, whether in summer or winter, be before henetz hahama (the rising of the sun). The difference between before the netz (sunrise) and after it is like the distance between east and west. The Ba'al Shem Tov was very meticulous with this. At times, when there was no minyan, he would pray alone."

Even the author of the Mishneh Berurah commentary, in his **Beur Halakha 58:3**, writes the following:

Tikunei Zohar 21 (45A) "Prayer that is not worthy are cast to the dogs."

Zohar, Vol. 1, 23B "if one's prayers are not complete a number of accusing angels pursue after it."

⁷ Zohar, Vol. 1, 167B

⁸ Ref. the Mishna on the bottom of Berakhot 22B and the Gemara discussion on 25B.

⁹ **Shulkhan Arukh, Orach Haim 58:1** calls this tradition a "Mitzvah Min HaMuvhar" (the best way to perform the mitzvah).

¹⁰ **Tzva'at HaRivash**, Makhon Da'at Yosef edition, Jerusalem 1991, Vol. 1, Chapter 2:2-4. Reference in detail the *Even Yisrael* commentary.

"Know that those who are meticulous to read (the Shema) like the Vatikim (the ancient ones), it is permitted for them to read and pray alone if they have no minyan."

The *netz* minyan is referred to by the Ashkenazim as a **Vatikim** minyan. This is based upon a Mishna in Berakhot, chapter 5, which speaks of the ancient ones (the holy community of Sages in Jerusalem during Temple times) who would rise to daven at this early hour.

According to the Kabbalah, this is the *only* correct time for prayer. Prayer at any later hour is only acceptable *de facto*. However, Rabbi Yosef Karo in his **Shulkhan Arukh (Orach Haim 68:1)** recognizes with prophetic insight, like the Talmudic Sages before him, (and all the Sages after him) that not everyone is able to rise so early to recite their prayers. Quoting earlier Talmudic decisions he writes that the earliest (and best) time (see note 7 above) to recite the Shema is before the *netz* but it can be said for the first three hours of the day.

As a guiding rule, Rabbi Yosef Him writes in his **Ben Ish Hai (Shana Rishona, VaEra 3)** that it is best to begin reciting the Shema approximately six minutes before sunrise and then proceed to the Amidah.

As a matter of Halakha, it is always the right thing to do to force yourself out of bed every morning and go daven in Shul. However if you observe the traditions of the Kabbalists, and you rise to pray Shaharit every morning beginning a half hour before sunrise so as to recite the Shema Yisrael just before sunrise and the Amidah at sunrise, and there is no *netz* (Vatikim) minyan that you can attend, then, yes, in this case, one is allowed to daven at home in private.

The only other instance in which I would be lenient is with someone who lives too far from a shul or simply is in a rush on a specific morning. Prayer should be recited daily in shul, but if one cannot get to shul for whatever reason, at least one should daven at home. G-d knows our hearts and

it is He and not we who accepts or rejects prayers. G-d is our judge and knows why or why not we attend shul.

Keep It Quiet

Another point about prayer that the Ari'zal¹¹ was very meticulous about was to always recite his prayers in the softest of voices. Always, even during the recitation of the *Zemirot* (Psalms) he would hardly raise his voice above a whisper. The Ba'al Shem Tov¹² was also quite strict about this. He said one should pray with a "*kol namukh* (soft voice) and to "*yitzak b'lahash*" (scream in silence). The holy Zohar is the source of this tradition to pray in a soft whisper.¹³ Loud praying is something no self respecting Kabbalist or true Hasid does.

Unfortunately, there has developed an almost cultic practice observed by some misguided souls where they believe that they can "*scan*" their prayers and that this somehow fulfills their obligations both Halakhically and Kabbalistically.

Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. In the holy **Zohar**¹⁴ it is written:

*"Every prayer and supplication that a person makes before the Holy One, blessed be He, requires that his words come forth from his mouth. **For if he does not speak them out loud, his prayer is not a prayer, nor is his supplication a supplication.** However, being that the words do come forth they penetrate the air and ascend."*

Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag in **his Sulam commentary (to the Idra Zuta 294B, Vol. 16, page 69)** has written that for a human there is no manifestation of the supernal lights (mohin) other than by what one speaks.

I am sorry but I must be forceful and say that this practice of scanning is outright wrong and those who believe in it are

causing themselves severe spiritual harm. Not only are such people not reciting any prayers at all, they are deceived into believing that they are doing something that they are not. Whoever is aware of anyone performing this sorrowful practice is required to advise them of its cultic nature and advise them that true kosher Kabbalah demands that prayers be recited out loud, granted in a whisper, but out loud nonetheless.

Learning To Pray – in HEBREW

I am very well aware that not everyone knows how to pray the full Morning Service. I know that many do not even know how to read Hebrew. I know that there are many that don't care enough to fulfill their obligations to pray.

For those of you who want to learn to pray in Hebrew I will here recommend some excellent learning texts. Alas, for those who don't care enough to want to learn about their prayer obligations, these I cannot help. Without a change of heart there cannot be a change of action on their parts. To those who want to pray or to learn how to pray correctly these words are intended.

When one who was not raised as a Torah observant Jew comes to view the siddur (prayerbook) the prayers therein appear to be long and dry. When one accepts upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven (*Ohl Malkhut Shamayim*), one becomes a *Ba'al Teshuva* (a master of repentance). A master is one who is in control. A *Ba'al Teshuva* is in control of his/her repentance and that path is followed fully.

It is easy and most enjoyable to observe the Shabat, to gather with friends, enjoy good foods and to sing all night. Keeping kosher is smart because it is healthy. Dressing modestly, either for a man or woman shows self-respect and personal dignity. Yet, prayer, davening from the siddur is not found to be of equal joy. This is where the problem begins.

Most do not understand the real reason why we pray. I have addressed this issue in

¹¹ Reference Sha'ar HaKavanot 1B

¹² Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Amud HaTefilah (Noah) 69.

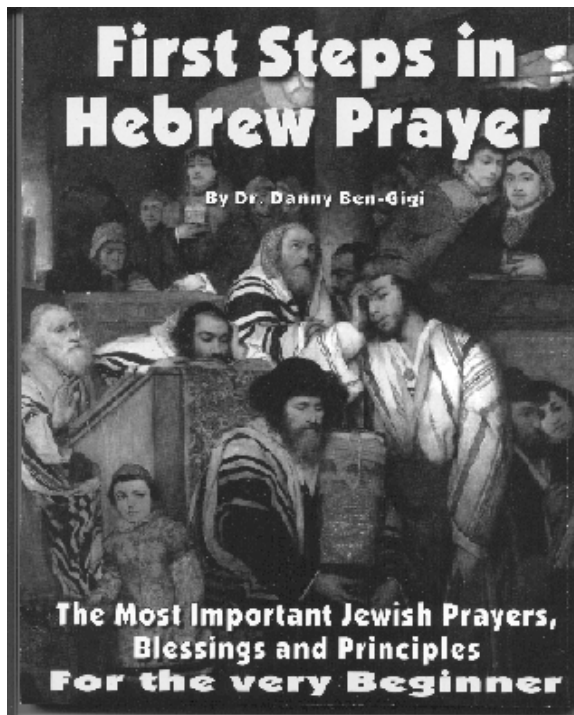
¹³ Zohar, Vol. 2, 202A, Vol. 3, 230B.

¹⁴ Zohar, Vol. 3, 294B

the previous essay. The importance of prayer cannot be overestimated. Yet, even those who acknowledge this still find conquering the siddur to be a formidable task.

Barukh HaShem there have been a number of other authors who have recognized this problem and have come to the rescue. There are now a number of excellent books that teach one how to read and learn the siddur. The **Artscroll** and **Orot** siddurs are excellent tools in that they contain various laws, customs and commentaries. But at a more basic level there are books that teach people how to read Hebrew and thus how to pray in Hebrew. Before I address the issue of prayer in languages other than Hebrew, I wish to recommend here two excellent texts that are very helpful in teaching one what the prayers are and how to recite them in Hebrew.

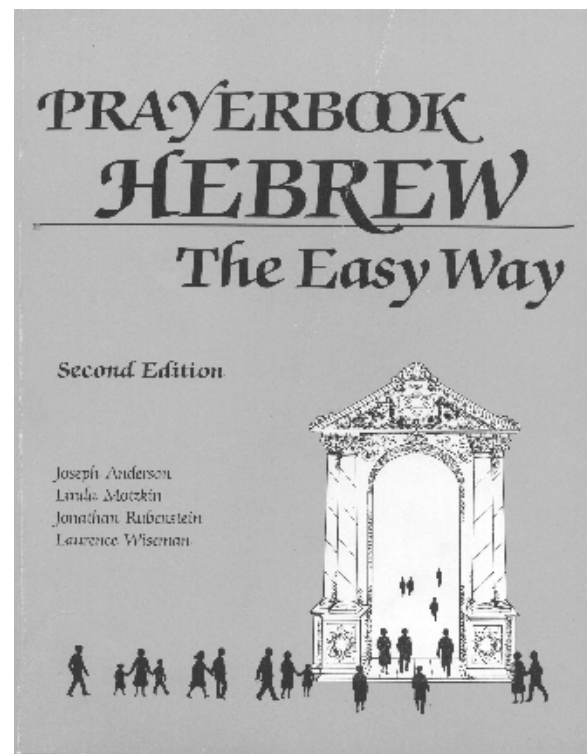
The first of these texts is entitled, "**First Steps in Hebrew Prayer**" by a Dr. Danny Ben-Gigi¹⁵. This book is written, as its cover says, "for the very beginner".



¹⁵ First Steps in Hebrew Prayer by Dr. Danny Ben-Gigi. Published by Living Israeli Hebrew, Scottsdale AZ. They can be contacted directly at 1-800-998-5698.

While it is very basic, in my opinion, it is an excellent tool. Dr. Ben-Gigi covers basic prayers and observances, and includes transliterations of everything so that one reading the Hebrew has the assistance to know what the words are supposed to sound like. More than this Dr. Ben-Gigi has included a CD-ROM disk that has everything sounded out. So not only can one learn the Hebrew, one can learn correct pronunciation and syntax as well. This work is beautifully illustrated and is sure to be of great assistance to anyone who is struggling with his or her Hebrew. Although the text follows the Ashkenazi form of the prayers the transliterations are in Sephardic Hebrew.

The next best text actually teaches one the Hebrew language, but instead of using modern Hebrew, the text uses the siddur to teach Hebrew grammar and vocabulary. This text is entitled, "**Prayerbook Hebrew, The Easy Way.**"¹⁶ The best advantage of this text is that not only will one learn Hebrew, one will learn the prayers.



¹⁶ Prayerbook Hebrew, The Easy Way, 2nd edition. Published by EKS Publ. Co. of Oakland, CA.

Both of these texts should be available through your local Jewish book dealer. One who follows the lessons in both of these books will be speaking and praying in Hebrew in just a few short months. With the littlest amount of effort one can have a great amount of results. Yet, in the mean time what does Jewish Law and the Kabbalah have to say about praying in English?

Praying In the Vernacular

To pray in Hebrew is indeed a great thing. We Jews have been praying in Hebrew for over 3,000 years. Hebrew is the common denominator between Jews from all over the world. It is our language, the language of the Torah and the language spoken by G-d when He created the universe. Yet, as we all know not all Jews are raised speaking Hebrew. Most of us had to learn Hebrew as a second language. Moreover, it takes time to learn another language. This gives rise to some questions:

- ✧ What language should we pray in all the while that we are not yet fluent in Hebrew?
- ✧ Should we recite our prayers in Hebrew although we do not understand what it is that we are saying?
- ✧ What about kavana in prayer? How can one have kavana while speaking words that one does not understand?
- ✧ Is praying in Hebrew so important that it supercedes kavana? Alternatively, is it best to simply pray in the language that one knows best?

Let's review what Halakha and Kabbalah have to say about these matters.

The **Shulkhan Arukh (Orah Haim 62:2, 101:4)** clearly states that one can say their prayers in any language that they understand. If one does not understand Hebrew, one is permitted to pray in any language. Rabbi Karo, however, insists that if one does recite their prayers in a language other than Hebrew, the words must be properly and clearly pronounced.

The *Mishneh Berurah* and the *Kaf HaHaim* both quote a number of Halakhic authorities to prove that although one is permitted to say prayers in any language, it

is still best to recite one's prayers in Hebrew, *even if one does not understand the language*. The *Kaf HaHaim* specifically quotes the authority of the holy Zohar and Ari'zal to make the case that prayer in Hebrew contains Kabbalistic secrets and regardless of what one understands or not, praying in Hebrew should not be compromised. Although one is allowed to individually pray in a foreign language, it is still best that one learns Hebrew and prays in it, regardless of one's level of comprehension.

All that we have discussed regarding this has to do with individual prayer. Public prayer in the synagogue is an entirely different matter. Here the recitation of prayers in Hebrew must not be compromised.

In matter of fact, it is the ***Mishneh Berurah*** commentary that provides the most profound reason, almost a prophetic one, why public prayer in the synagogue must always be conducted in Hebrew. In his **commentary (101:4)**, he writes:

"To permanently establish the public prayer reader (i.e., the Cantor or Hazan) [to read in any language other than Hebrew] causes them (the congregation) to forget Hebrew entirely. This must not be done under any circumstances

Also, there are many other compelling reasons that the leaders of our time have written in the book Divrei HaBrit and they agreed that it is completely forbidden to do this.

There are new groups that have spread outside of the country with this and it is written there [in Divrei HaBrit] how their entire order of [public] prayer is in the language of their country. This sin causes many others.

They have deleted the blessing for the ingathering of the exiles and the blessing V'lirushalayim Irkha (for the rebuilding of Jerusalem). Just as they wish for the memory of Jerusalem to be forgotten so do

they also wish for the Hebrew language to be forgotten by Israel

[We should remember that in the days of Egypt one of the reasons why] we were redeemed was because we did not change our language.

May the Holy One, blessed be he protect us from apostate opinions such as these.”

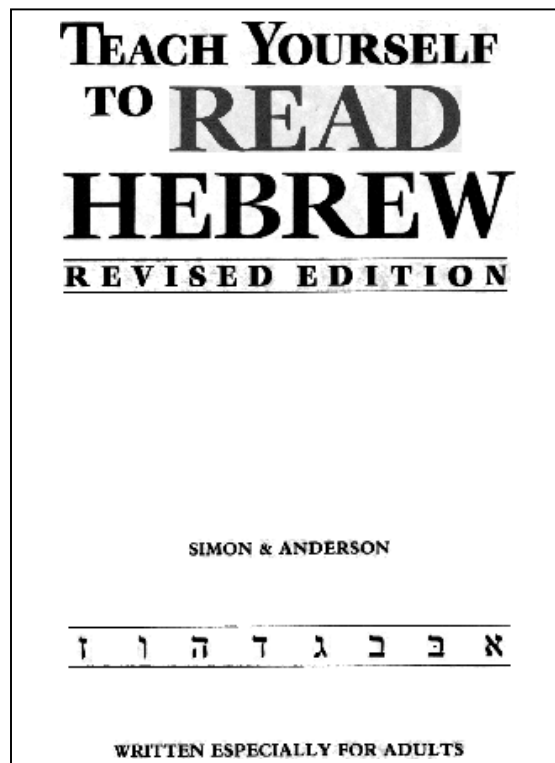
Recognizing that the psychic identity of a nation is integrally caught up with its language, the author of *the Mishneh Berurah* correctly foresaw that the loss of knowledge of Hebrew would lead to the loss of Jewish identity. This has proven itself so true today. Therefore, public prayer, in the synagogue must always be maintained in Hebrew. Yet, when it comes to the individual we see that there is greater leniency.

Today, it is easy to learn to pray in Hebrew. One of the added benefits of the *Kol Sasson* siddur is that it is linear. In other words, each prayer is broken up line by line and put aside its English translation line by line. In this way one does not have to memorize entire paragraphs of prayers and their translations all the while not knowing the meaning of the individual words. Now the words in prayer can be learned in small, easy amounts. In this way, one can learn to pray in Hebrew and follow along in the service in English both at the same time. Things are so easy for us now. Maybe this is a sign that the coming of Mashiah is very close.

Learn To Read!

To summarize this matter, it is indeed best to recite our prayers in their original Hebrew even if one is not fluent in the language. If one does not know how to read Hebrew one should make efforts to learn. Learning to read Hebrew is easy and can be learned rather quickly. There really isn't any excuse why one cannot learn to read. Granted, learning the vocabulary takes times, most likely years of speaking and practice. But as the great Sage Hillel would say, "if not now, then when?" (Avot 1:14).

The best book, in my opinion, to teach one how to read Hebrew is entitled, "Teach Yourself To Read Hebrew" by Simon & Anderson¹⁷.



This book teaches the letters and vowels in easy to follow small lessons. Using this book, I have taught people to read Hebrew fluently in as little as two weeks. All it requires of you is practice. In light of the spiritual importance of Hebrew, don't you feel that you can make the time?

Conclusion

There is much more to learn about prayer that what has been written here. *Barukh HaShem* that there are so many kosher Torah materials on this subject available today. Even at the simplistic (pshat) level, the words of prayer are packed with powerful devotional meaning and intense emotion. They should be reviewed and studied. Even we Rabbis review and study the meanings of our prayers, though we have recited them for years. As for me, I always find something new and inspirational. Most likely, you will too.

¹⁷ Published by EKS Publ. Co. of Oakland, CA.

The Relationship of the Ger Toshav (Righteous Gentile) to Jewish Prayer Halakhic & Kabbalistic Insights

Introduction

My Jewish readers may well be surprised to learn that there are a growing number of Gentiles who have abandoned the idolatry of the Christian churches and who are now seeking spiritual direction from Torah Judaism.

RaMBaM¹⁸ speaks about these “righteous Gentiles” who accepts upon themselves the universal seven laws of the children of Noah. In his **Hilkhot Melakhim**,¹⁹ he refers to the righteous Gentile as a Ger Toshav, the Biblical term, translated as a “resident alien”. It was only these Gentiles, who acknowledged the truth of G-d and His Torah, all the while maintaining their status as non-Jews that were allowed to live and work in the Land of Israel in Biblical times.

Even after the many centuries of two major false religions and other perversions of Torah, many Gentiles are now awakening to

the empty inheritance of the Church and are seeking truth again from Torah.

While we Jews have studied and developed our mitzvot for millennia, the Ger Toshav, unfortunately, has never had such organization to address their spiritual issues. Many of these righteous Gentiles approach me and other Rabbis asking for guidance. Specifically, they wish to know how are they supposed to worship HaShem?

Church services are clearly idolatry. A righteous Gentile cannot participate in these. For reasons to be seen, Jewish prayer is also not an option for the righteous Gentile. If one cannot go backwards and apparently not move forward either, it appears that they are stuck.

This, of course, is not true at all. **We Jews have a Divine obligation²⁰ to teach the Gentiles about the truth of Torah and how they are to observe their laws.**

In light of this obligation, I address this information to both teacher and student: to my Jewish brethren to teach our Gentile neighbors and to our Ger Toshav friends who together with us pray to the true King, who is the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

¹⁸ For those not familiar, RaMBaM is the acronym for Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, the most famous of all medieval Rabbinic Sages. He was a master physician, philosopher and legalist. His law code, the “*Mishneh Torah*” was and still is a masterful work of Jewish Law whose authority lasts to this day.

¹⁹ RaMBaM, Hilkhot Melakhim 8:10. Specifically, RaMBaM writes that in order for a righteous Gentile to officially become a Ger Toshav the Gentile must appear before a Jewish court (Beit Din) and publicly acknowledge his/her commitment to the 7 laws. However, the commentary quoting Hilkhot Avodah Zarah 10:6 makes clear that this practice was observed only in Temple times. While such a practice might not be obligatory today, it still may be a good idea for Rabbinic courts to open registries for the righteous Gentiles as a means of learning and communication.

²⁰ RaMBaM, Hilkhot Melakhim 8:10, “*Moses was commanded by the Almighty to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the laws given to Noah’s descendants.* (Moznaim version, page 168). Reference the commentary there for the sources that teach how this is to be accomplished in our days.

Jewish Souls & Gentile Souls

I know that the non-Jewish readers of this material on prayer might feel somewhat left out. This does not have to be true. Granted, it is indeed forbidden by Halakha and Kabbalah for a Gentile to pray some Jewish prayers, but of course, this only refers to specific prayers, like the *Shema* and *Amidah*.

The reason why Gentiles may not pray Jewish prayers is because the Gentile soul is different from the Jewish soul. While each of us share the Adamic mission to rectify the world, our methods of accomplishing this task differ.²¹

G-d chose the Jewish people to receive His Torah. The Jewish role in rectifying the world is accomplished by acting as the conduit to elevate the fallen sparks of holiness and to bring down to the earth new Divine energy, *shefa*.

This is where the role of the Gentile comes into play. Once the Jewish people have accomplished their task of bringing the Divine *shefa* down into the world, the Gentile is charged to distribute it.

In order to bring the *shefa* down to earth the Jew must manifest the flow of *shefa* through the conduit of the 613 commandments of the Torah. For the reason of sefirotic *shefa* flow were Jews given the mitzvot. This is why we Jews must perform them. The Divine energy of *Kedusha* (holiness) can only come through *shefa*, and *shefa* can only come through the mitzvot.

Yet, once the *shefa* comes to earth, the Gentile is charged to distribute it everywhere. This can only be accomplished by the observance of their seven categories

²¹ I have fully covered the topic of the Divine service obligations of the righteous Gentile in a special double-edition of *Panu Derekh* (issue 16-17). In it, I covered all the seven categories of laws and their spiritual parameters. Also included in that work is an anti-missionary piece explaining, in his own words, why Yeshu, the Christian "messiah" was a false prophet and an evil person. This issue of Panu Derekh can be ordered from the Y.B.N. catalogue published in this work. It is important reading for Jew and Gentile alike.

of laws, the ***Sheva Mitzvot Benei Noah*** (the seven laws of the children of Noah). This act of distribution of Divine energy is accomplished when Gentiles abandon idolatry and acknowledge the True G-d. Only then are they able to establish moral and just societies. The imposition of law, justice and morality is what creates a stable world. This stability enables the *shefa* to be distributed throughout. Only the Gentile can do this by establishing moral and righteous governments.

To think in terms of the Jewish role as being better than the Gentile is not an appropriate view of things. We Jews are in charge of the vertical flow of Divine light. The Gentiles are in charge of the horizontal flow.

Thus, it becomes important that the two tasks do not become confused. To this end has G-d commanded that Gentiles do not perform any action or mitzvah that is an exclusive commandment of Jewish identity, such as the wearing of Tefillin or the observance of the Shabat.²² For these commandments are what enables the Jew to accomplish his task.

A Gentile performing these tasks will not accomplish the same spiritual results. On the contrary, by performing the task of the Jew they spiritually detach themselves from their own source and Divine service. Thus, instead of exclusive Jewish mitzvot enhancing a Gentile's spirituality, they can detract from it.

Gentiles have their own commandments and these must be studied and observed by them, for this is their Divine inheritance. Yet, this does not mean that a Gentile cannot observe rules of holiness for the sake of their own personal spiritual elevation.²³ In this light, a Gentile may chose to eat kosher foods, or separate from marital relationship during the wife's monthly cycle. These mitzvot are not

²² RaMBaM, Hilkhot Melakhim 10:9

²³ RaMBaM Hilkhot Melakhim 10:10 states clearly, "we should not prevent a Gentile who desires to perform one of the Torah's mitzvot in order to receive reward from doing so, [provided] he performs it as required."

exclusive Jewish observances. Their purpose is to elevate *individual Kedusha* (holiness). Gentiles are not required to acquire *Kedusha*, as are Jews. Nonetheless, they may perform certain personal acts of *Kedusha* on a voluntary basis. The Gentile just must be careful not to confuse his identity with that of being a Jew.

Righteous Gentile Prayer

Being that the Gentile cannot thus prayer "Jewish" prayers, what prayers can they recite? The answer to this is almost everything! Moreover, ***the place to begin with is the holy Book of Psalms.*** These special prayers of the heart are universal in nature and speak the words of every human soul, Jew and Gentile alike.

Gentile prayer should consist of Psalms, the holy ancient words. These themselves are sacred in holiness only second to Torah and are a very worthy addition to the life and spiritual practices of every Gentile and Jew.

Other Jewish prayers, which are universal in nature, may also be recited. Indeed, in my opinion, it is meritorious for Gentiles to recite certain prayers that proclaim G-d's Kingdom, such as the ***Aleinu L'Shabeah*** prayer that concludes Shacharit.

Gentiles may recite Scripture recitals, such as the sacrifice of Yitzhak (the Akedah), as a statement of their faith in G-d.

Actually, any and all other prayers in the Jewish siddur may be said by Gentiles, with the obvious exceptions of those prayers which speak exclusively about Israel and the Exodus. A Gentile cannot recite prayers that proclaim a remembrance of the exodus for they did not partake in that historical event. Granted, Christian churches praise G-d for the exodus all the time, but they also falsely identify themselves as the children of Israel. Therefore, in order to avoid association with this false Christian belief, an honest Gentile will not allow him/herself to confuse the issue.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). This sentiment is ingrained in the heart of all that are faithful to HaShem, Jew and Gentile alike. Therefore, the Gentile who prays for Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the holy Temple (may it be built speedily and in our days) and the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land of Israel are indeed participating in a great and holy thing.

Indeed these events once they occur will benefit the entire world. It is these events that will bring spiritual fulfillment to the Jew by bring holiness to the earth and to the Gentile by establishing the highest of righteous governments: the government of G-d's Mashiah.

In light of the wealth of material that Gentiles can use for daily ritual prayer recitals, the question to ask is whether a specific Benei Noah (Ger Toshav) siddur should be established? While I myself have discussed this with many of my fellow Rabbis, nonetheless, it does not seem like a project that any leading Rabbinic authority is willing to invest time and effort into at this time. Very simply, there hasn't been that much interest expressed by those Righteous Gentiles who are involved with Rabbis and Jewish affairs. If this were to change and a group of serious Righteous Gentiles were to come forward, proud of their association with Israel and equally proud of their denunciation of Church and Yeshu, some of the powers that be I am sure will take notice.

There is one last point that I wish to make with regards to the Righteous Gentile. In ***Tractate Derekh Eretz Zuta 1:18***²⁴ it states that throughout time only nine people were found worthy not to die and ascended alive into Heaven (Gan Eden). Of those nine, five of them were Righteous Gentiles. Let this serve as a statement of encouragement to our Gentile friends that when they observe their commandments *"the sky is the limits."*

²⁴ Published in Hebrew in Siddur Kol Eliyahu, the order of prayer according to the Sephardic Sage, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, page 656.