



## Do Women Have to Pray Mincha?

### Is Prayer a Positive Time Bound Mitzvah from which Women are Exempt?

Here we go, another parasha replete with קרבנות/*korbanot* (sacrifices). “How can I possibly find even a hint of halacha in *Parashat Tzav*?” I asked myself. Then Hashem sent me a flash. Today our prayers are substituted for the *korbanot*. It’s long overdue to discuss women’s responsibility in prayer. Our prayers are vital, especially at these trying times when we are all working on bettering ourselves, being struck by how our fate is completely in Hashem’s hand. Since the laws of women’s prayer obligation aren’t so clear to many of us, we have often become lackadaisical. Now is the time to intensify prayers, so, let’s try to clarify. First of all, the word קרבן/*korban* literally means ‘to come close.’ Prayer is ‘the service of the heart’ through which we draw ourselves closer to Hashem. In memory of the sacrifices, we pray facing Yerushalayim. By the way, that is not always מזרח/*Mizrach* – ‘East,’ as it depends where in the world we are located. This should be obvious, but I’ve often had visitors from abroad and even those who have lived in Israel for several decades, asking me the direction of Mizrach for purposes of prayer. I then point out that here, in Bat Ayin, we pray facing North, since we are situated South of Jerusalem. The source for substituting prayers for sacrifices is from the prophet Hoshea:

**ספר הושע פרק יד פסוק ג קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל השם אמרו אליו כל תשא עון ונקח טוב ונשלמה פרים שפתינו:**

“Take words with yourselves and return to Hashem. Say, ‘You shall forgive all iniquity and teach us [the] good [way] and let us render [for] bulls [the offering of] our lips” (*Hoshea* 14:3).

Just as the purpose of the sacrifices was to bring us into a state of repentance, which brought about at-one-ment, so, too, is the purpose of prayer. “Therefore, all sacrifices could be brought by both men and women” (Rambam, [Hilchot Ma’aseh Hakorbanot 3:2](#)). In addition, there were special sacrifices for women after giving birth (*Vayikra* 12:7). “Thus, it is a positive commandment [also for women] to pray every day, as it is written: “You shall serve Hashem your G-d.” (*Shemot* 23:25) ...This service is prayer, as it states, “Serve G-d with all of your heart” (*Devarim* 10:12). The sages explained, what is service of the heart? This is prayer. The number of prayers is not biblical. The form of prayer is not biblical and prayer has no biblically fixed time. Therefore, women... are obligated to pray because it is a positive non-time-bound mitzvah (Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah* 1:1-2).

### The Minimum Prayer Obligation for Women

The Sages of the Talmud state that women are obligated to pray (*Berachot* 20b). The question is how much and which prayers a woman is obligated to pray. The answer is that it depends. The prayer service, as found in the siddur, is Rabbinic, because the Torah gives no obligating measure for prayer. I love that prayer is so flexible for women. If a woman is busy taking care of small children, she can rely on the minimum Torah obligation, as explained by Rambam, “A person should supplicate and pray every day and relate the praise of G-d and afterwards ask for his/her needs as a request and a supplication, and then thank G-d for the good that has been bestowed upon him/her, each person according to his/her ability (Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah* 1:1-2). This implies that a woman can fulfill her obligation to pray by talking to Hashem in her own words. Even one sentence that includes words of praise, request and thanks may suffice. (*Magen Avraham, Shulchan Aruch, OH* 106:1). Yet, this is the minimum of minimum. Some authorities like Ramban holds that the rabbinic

decree to pray (as found in the siddur) applies to men and women alike. Most halachic authorities obligate even childrearing women to recite [Birkot HaShachar including Birkot HaTorah](#), which contains the three main aspects of prayer (Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, *Peninei Halacha, Women's Prayer* 2:4). It takes about 5 minutes to recite *Birkat Hashachar* (unless you choose to struggle through it in unfamiliar Hebrew). I can't imagine any woman too busy to spare 5 minutes a day, for fulfilling her minimum requirement of prayer. What about women who aren't taking care of small children? Well, I don't take care of little children, but I still cannot find the time to pray the entire prayer-service that my husband and sons pray. I'm embarrassed to say, but 15-20 minutes in the morning and 10-15 minutes in the afternoon is all I can fit into my schedule. So, what should I skip? When discussing women's prayer obligation with one of my friends, who is also the Rebbetzin of a midrasha, she claimed that a woman can pray whatever prayer she connects with, and it is therefore unnecessary to clarify the order of priority in prayer for women. While, *kavana* (intention) in prayer is a must, I believe that it is still important for us busy women to know the priority for women's prayers so that when we have less time, we will know what to skip first.

### The Centrality of the Silent Prayer

The word תְּפִלָּה/*tefilah* in the Talmud refers specifically to the silent prayer, also called the *Amidah* or *Shemoneh Esre*. This prayer was originally composed by a woman – the biblical Chana – is the heart of our prayers. It is the prayer formula, which more than any other prayer, reaches the Throne of Glory. This is the prayer not to be missed, for it affords an intense Divine encounter and is highly effective for requesting our needs. Most halachic authorities agree that after *Birkot Hashachar*, women who are not tied up by small children, must pray the Amidah. Yet, there is a dispute whether a woman is obligated to recite the Amidah both for *shacharit* (morning prayer) and *mincha* (afternoon prayer) or just for shacharit. These different opinions stem from the *machloket* (dispute) as to whether the origin of tefilah is a Torah obligation or rabbinic. According to Rambam the essence of the commandment of tefilah is biblical, while the times of tefilah are rabbinic. Yet, "according to Ramban, the essence of the mitzvah of tefilah is Rabbinic... [Since the Rabbis] ordained the required prayers of shacharit, mincha and the optional prayer of Aravit, women are obligated to pray shacharit and mincha just like men, since tefilah is a request for mercy" (R. Yisrael Meir HaKohen, *Mishnah Berurah* on *Shulchan Aruch* 106:1). The Sephardi opinion goes according to Rambam and requires only one Amidah, whereas, the Ashkenazi opinion goes according to Ramban and requires both shacharit and mincha. Everyone exempts women from *ma'ariv*, since that was originally an optional prayer for men alone, as it does not correspond to any sacrifice.

### Mincha – Time of Divine Favor for Praying for a Soulmate

As an Ashkenazi who is not busy with little children, I am not exempted from the mincha prayer. Yet, I've always found it very challenging to pull myself away from whatever I'm in the middle of doing and turn to Hashem in prayer before the sun sets. Every year for Rosh Hashana, I took upon myself again and again to daven mincha. Yet, I kept slipping. Mourning for my father, somehow, helped me to be consistent in fulfilling my prayer obligations. The following commentary of Rabbi Efraim Luntschitz inspires me to be careful to pray mincha. "Eliyahu was only answered through his mincha prayer (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 6b). Yitzchak, our father, was answered immediately through his mincha prayer. We may assume that Yitzchak prayed for his soulmate when he went to pray mincha in the field. Immediately after he prayed for her, "He lifted his eyes and saw, behold camels were coming" ...After completing his prayer, he lifted his eyes and saw that he was instantly answered by the camels bringing his soulmate. From this we learn, that a person is answered mostly through the mincha prayer. The reason for this is that *midat hadin* (the attribute of judgment) accuses specifically at night. Whereas, both the morning and the evening prayer are close to the night, mincha is far from the night. Therefore, there are no accusing forces attached to this prayer (Kli Yakar, *Bereishit* 24:63).

## The Order of Prayer Priority for Women

Although there are halachot about prayer priorities for women, tefilah is very personal, especially for women. Perhaps this is why there is such a lack of clarity on the topic. One of our teachers brought a certain prayer chart for women to the students of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, which didn't make sense to me. When I decided to look deeply into the sources and create our own prayer chart for women, I realized the complexity of this task. Thus, the chart I have created, based on many sources, especially *Mishna Berurah*, and [Peninei Halakha Laws of Women's Prayer](#) may still be up for dispute. Knowledge of prayer priorities leaves leeway for each woman to choose the prayers that she connects with. Each of us must find the balance between halachic priority and personal preference. There is an interesting [discussion forum on women's prayer obligation](#), which brings many different views on the topic. From another online forum [Imamother Connecting Frum Women What Tefillos do you daven?](#) we see that women's prayer practice is exceedingly varied and individualized. One woman on the forum became offended when someone else wrote to her: "There are halochos what tefillos are important to say daily. You can't just decide to say Shemonei Esra and Aleinu and skip Shema..." By the way, that particularly preaching woman seemed to have the priorities wrong, when she later noted *P'sukei D'zimra* as priority, without even mentioning the Amidah. Since prayer is the service of the heart, each woman knows her own heart best. As the offended woman concluded, "You are not me and you haven't walked in my place. I'm doing the best I can and I'm sure that Hashem knows that." Having said all this, please take my attempt to clarify and organize women's prayer priority as a general guideline that you can adapt to the service of your own heart.

	Minimum requirement for women occupied with childcare	Obligated prayer	Required prayer <i>l'chatchila</i>	Higher way of fulfilling required prayer	Highly recommended <i>l'chatchila</i>	Non required recommended	Voluntary non required
<i>Birkat HaShachar</i> including <i>Birkat HaTorah</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Baruch Sh'amar, Ashrei, Yistabach</i> Six <i>Halelukas</i>						✓	
Remaining <i>Pesukei d'Zimra</i>							✓
First (two verse(s) of <i>Keriat Shema</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Three paragraphs of <i>Shema</i>					✓		
<i>Emet v'yatziv</i> between <i>Shema</i> and <i>Amidah</i>			✓	✓	✓		
One daily <i>Amidah</i> (preferably <i>Shacharit</i> )		✓	✓	✓	✓		
One additional <i>Amidah</i> for <i>Mincha</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Bedtime <i>Shema</i> & <i>Hamapil</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		