



## STUDY GUIDE: HOW FAR SHOULD WE GO TO PRAY WITH A MINYAN?

Synagogue attendance is a central aspect of Jewish life. There are many reasons to attend synagogue, one of which is the ability to pray with a minyan. The idea of praying with a minyan, which is also known as *tefillah b'tzibbur*, has received a lot of attention since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning, minyan, for the most part, was not an option,

even while other events requiring ten men did take place such as weddings and funerals (albeit with minimal attendance). This may have led some to conclude that *tefillah b'tzibbur* is not “essential.” A few months later, we figured out ways to safely gather as a minyan, first outdoors and then indoors. Like the unofficial U.S. Postal Service motto, “neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night” deterred

people who were dedicated to praying with a minyan. Their commitment conveys a message that we should really go the extra mile to pray with a minyan. How important is *tefillah b'tzibbur*? How much effort should we expend to pray with a minyan? What should we do when it conflicts with something else? In this study guide, we will explore these issues.

### Introductory Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What are some examples in your own experience (non-COVID related) where you had to decide between attending minyan or something else? What factors went into the decision-making process?
- 2) Attending minyan sometimes requires an investment of extra time beyond the time of the actual prayer service. This may be due to travel time or because the minyan doesn't start at an ideal time. How much extra time should we expend to attend minyan?

## Source#1a: Pesachim 46a

א"ר אבהו אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש לגבל ולתפלה ולנטילת ידיים ארבעה מילין.

*R. Avahu said in the name of R. Shimon ben Lakish: for mixing dough (and how far one has to travel to immerse the utensils), for prayer and for washing one's hands, one must travel up to four mil (a mil is the distance that one can walk in approximately eighteen minutes).*

## Source #1b: Rashi, Pesachim 46a

לתפלה אם מהלך אדם בדרך ובא עת ללון ולהתפלל אם יש בית הכנסת לפניו ברחוק ארבע מילין הולך ומתפלל שם ולן שם.  
*For prayer — if an individual is travelling on the road and it*

*is time to pull over for the night, if there is a synagogue along the way in the next four mil, one should continue travelling and pray there.*

## Source #1c: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 90:16

ההולך בדרך והגיע לעיר ורוצה ללון בה אם לפניו עד ד' מילין מקום שמתפללים בל' צריך לילך שם ולאחריו צריך לחזור עד מיל כדי להתפלל בל'.

*If one is travelling and reaches a city where he wants to sleep. If there is a place to pray with a minyan within the next four mil, one should continue travelling. If the minyan is in the opposite direction, one should travel up to one mil.*

### Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What are the differences between Rashi's formulation of this rule, and the formulation found in *Shulchan Aruch*?
- 2) If travelling many miles is the only way to purchase matzah for Pesach or hear the Megillah on Purim, we are obligated to do so. Why do you think there is only a requirement to travel one mil out of the way for prayer with a minyan?

## Source#2a: Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 8:1

תפלת הציבור נשמעת תמיד ואפילו היו בהן חוטאים אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מואס בתפלתן של רבים. לפיכך צריך אדם לשתף עצמו עם הציבור ולא יתפלל ביחיד כל זמן שיכול להתפלל עם הציבור.  
*Congregation prayer is always heard. Even if there are sinners in the congregation, the Holy One Blessed Be He does not despise public prayers. Therefore, one is required to join with the congregation, and one should not pray individually whenever one can pray with the congregation.*

## Source #2b: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 90:16

ישתדל אדם להתפלל בבית הכנסת עם הצבור ואם הוא אנוס שאינו יכול לבוא לבית הכנסת יכוין להתפלל בשעה שהצבור מתפללים.  
*One should try to pray in the synagogue with the congregation. If circumstances don't allow one to attend synagogue, one should pray at the same time that the congregation is praying.*

### Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What are the differences between Rambam's formulation and *Shulchan Aruch*'s formulation?
- 2) Does the language of *Shulchan Aruch*, "one should try," conflict with the quantitative requirement he provides (Source #1c) regarding how far we should travel to attend minyan? Why or why not?

## Source #3a: R. Aryeh Pomeranchik, Emek Beracha, Hilchos Birchos Kerias Sh'ma

דתפלה בצבור מצד עצמה אינה מצוה ולפיכך אין שוב חיוב להתפלל עם הצבור אלא כיון שאין תפלת היחיד נשמעת בכל עת אלא בצבור ולפיכך צריך האדם להשתדל להתפלל עם הצבור כדי שתקובל תפלתו וזהו כל הענין של תפלה בצבור וכן מבואר הוא בלשון הרמב"ם רפ"ח

מתפלה ... ולשונו זה ולא יתפלל יחיד כ"ז שיכול להתפלל עם הצבור מורה להדיא שאינו חיוב כלל אלא השתדלות שתקובל תפלתו.  
*There is no inherent mitzvah to pray with a minyan. Therefore, there is no obligation to pray with a minyan. Rather, since individual prayer isn't always heard and congregation prayer is, one should try to pray with the congregation so that one's prayers are accepted. This is the whole idea behind*

congregational prayer. This is apparent from the formulation of Rambam in the eighth chapter of Hilchos Tefillah (Source #2a). His language, "one should not pray individually whenever one can pray with the congregation," indicates clearly that there is no obligation, but rather, we try [to pray with a minyan] so that our prayers are accepted.

### Source #3b: R. Moshe Feinstein, Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:27

אם ת"ח רשאי להתפלל ביחידות באשר שרוצה ללמוד בזמן מאוחר בלילה ויקשה לפניו לקום להתפלל בצבור ... הנה להתפלל בעשרה הוא חיוב מצוה על האדם ולא רק הדור ומעלה בעלמא דהא לפרש"י פסחים דף מ"ו וחולין דף קכ"ב מחוייב לילך עד ד' מילין כשהוא לפניו בהולך בדרך אף שטוב לפניו יותר ללון כאן ... כיון שחזינן שצריך לטרוח הרבה מוכרחין לומר שהוא חיוב מצוה על האדם להתפלל בעשרה, ומה שלא חייבו אף לטרוח טובא הוא משום דאף במ"ע דאורייתא איכא שיעורים ... דהא כשצריך להוציא הרבה ממון הוא אונס לפוטרו מהעשה, לכן גם טירחא היה שייך להחשיב אונס אך הוא אונס קטן לגבי מצות הרבה ... ואין לדייק מלשון ישתדל אדם להתפלל בביהכ"נ עם הצבור שבסעיף ט' לומר שהוא רק מעלה בעלמא, דגם על חיוב שייך לשון זה ... כיון דיצטרך בעצמו לדון זה שיש דבר שהוא טירחא לזה ולא לזה, לכן אמר לשון ישתדל אדם דהכוונה הוא שלא יקל לדמות כל טירחא לטירחא דיותר ממיל אלא יחמיר בהרבה פעמים שלא יהיה לו ברור שהוא טירחא גדולה דצריך שידון בכבוד ראש על זה.

*Is a Torah scholar — who wants to stay up late into the night studying Torah, and by doing so, won't be able to attend*

morning services — permitted to do so? ... Praying with a minyan is an obligation and not just an enhancement of prayer as we see from Rashi's comments in Pesachim 46 (Source #1b) and Chullin 122 that one must travel up to four mil further on one's trip (to find a minyan) even if one is ready to rest for the night ... we see that since there is an obligation to exert a lot of effort, we must say that it is an obligation upon each individual to pray with a minyan. The reason there is no requirement to travel an even greater distance is that even Biblical mitzvos have limitations ... for example, when performance of a mitzvah is going to cost an exorbitant amount of money, it is considered an extenuating circumstance and one is exempt. Similarly, the effort (to attend minyan when travelling a great distance) can be called an extenuating circumstance for this mitzvah, even though it would not be considered extenuating for other mitzvos ... One should not infer from the language in Shulchan Aruch (Source #2b), "One should try to pray in the synagogue with the congregation," that it is only an enhancement of prayer, because this language is relevant even if it is obligatory ... because one [who is in other circumstances where it is difficult to attend minyan] must try to evaluate whether the effort to attend minyan is similar to travelling a great distance. Therefore, Shulchan Aruch states "one should try," so that we don't automatically compare our own situation to travelling more than a mil (out of the way), but rather seriously consider whether this situation is indeed a comparable level of effort.

### Questions for Discussion:

- 1) R. Pomeranchik infers from Rambam that prayer with a minyan is not obligatory. Can this approach fit into the opinion of Rashi (Source #1b) and Shulchan Aruch (Source #1c)?
- 2) R. Feinstein considers prayer with a minyan to be obligatory, but the effort required to fulfill the obligation is not as great as other mitzvos. Besides time, what other factors might be legitimate reasons to exempt oneself from minyan?

### Source #4a: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 52:1

ואם כבר התחילו הצבור יוצר ואין שהות לומר פסוקי דזמרה אפי' בדילוג יקרא ק"ש וברכותיה עם הציבור ויתפלל עמהם ואחר כך יקרא כל פסוקי דזמרה בלא ברכה שלפניהם ולא של אחריהם.

*If (one came late) and the congregation already began Yotzer (Birchos Kerias Sh'ma) and there is no time to recite Pesukei D'Zimra, even with skipping (and then still recite the Amidah together with the minyan), one should recite Kerias Sh'ma with its berachos together with the congregation and recite the Amidah with them and afterwards, recite Pesukei D'Zimra*

*without Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach.*

### Source #4b: Mishna Berurah 52:6

ובתשובת משכנות יעקב האריך בזה והוכיח דברכת ב"ש וישתבח תקנה קדומה היא מימי התנאים וע"כ מוטב להתפלל ביחיד משידלג לגמרי ברכת ב"ש וישתבח.

*There is a lengthy responsum in Mishkenos Yaakov about this topic and he proved that the berachos of Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach are an ancient institution from the time of the Mishna, and therefore, it is better to pray individually than to completely skip Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach.*

## Source #4c: Mishna Berurah 90:29

ואם הוא אונס ממון שמחמת השתדלותו להתפלל עם הצבור יבוא לידי הפסד יכול להתפלל בביתו ביחיד או בבהכ"נ בלא צבור אבל משום מניעת ריוח לא ימנע מלהתפלל עם הצבור דחילוק יש בין מניעת ריוח לבין הפסד מכיסו.

*If there are extenuating circumstances of a financial nature such that attending minyan will cause one to lose money, one may pray individually at home or in the synagogue. However, if it is simply a lost opportunity to profit, one should not miss minyan because there is a difference between actual loss of money and a lost opportunity to profit.*

### Questions for Discussion:

- 1) R. Pomeranchik explains that the reason *Mishkenos Yaakov* and *Mishna Berurah* don't allow skipping Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach to recite the Amidah with the minyan is that Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach are obligatory and *tefillah b'tzibbur* is optional. How do you think R. Feinstein would explain why we don't skip Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach?
- 2) How would you explain the difference between actual loss of money and a lost opportunity to profit according to R. Pomeranchik? According to R. Feinstein?

### Summary and Concluding Questions

- The Gemara presents a minimum distance we should travel for prayer. Rashi states that this refers to prayer in a synagogue. *Shulchan Aruch* states that this refers to prayer with a minyan.
- *Shulchan Aruch* also states that we should try to pray with a minyan. We saw two approaches to understand this statement. First (R. Pomeranchik), prayer with a minyan is inherently optional and the reason to try to pray with a minyan is so that our prayers are heard. According to this approach, the measurements of how far we should travel to find a minyan are recommendations, not requirements. Second (R. Feinstein), prayer with a minyan is obligatory unless there are extenuating circumstances. *Shulchan Aruch* tells us to try to pray with a minyan so that when we are in a situation that we deem to be an extenuating circumstance, we should think twice before comparing it travelling a great distance. This idea may be highlighted by the fact that we should attend minyan even if doing so will lead to a lost opportunity to profit.
- While R. Feinstein maintains that attending minyan is obligatory, when there is a conflict between this obligation and other prayer obligations the other prayer obligations take precedence. This is why we cannot skip Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach to catch up to the congregation.

### Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Based on what you learned, how would you apply our discussion to the examples you gave in Introductory Question #1?
- 2) Do you think the pandemic will have a lasting impact on minyan attendance? How?



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