

Shoel U'Mashiv

To Minyan or Not to Minyan, That Is the Question

Rabbi Noah Whittenburg

Q - "I had a meeting that ran over. I'm just leaving work now and I won't make it back in time for *Minyan*. If I *Daven* on my own, I'll make it back in time for your class or I can go to the closer synagogue, but then I'll be late for your class. What should I do?"

A - What is the obligation to *Daven* with a *Minyan*?

The first question we have to examine is what kind of obligation does a person have to *Daven* with a *Minyan*? The *Gemara Brachos* 8a says that when a *Minyan* gathers, *Hashem* listens to their prayers. But the question remains whether this is an obligation or just a recommendation. The *Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 90:9 says a person should "make an effort" to *Daven* in a synagogue with a *Minyan*. Despite the ambiguous language of the *Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe O.C.* 2:27) says that *Davening* with a *Minyan* is an absolute obligation. He says the reason the *Shulchan Aruch* says to "make an effort" is because there are extenuating circumstances that exempt a person from *Minyan*, but nevertheless a person should try their best to be honest with themselves about whether their circumstances meet those criteria or not.

Does *Minyan* always take precedence?

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halichos Shlomo, Tefillah* 5:16) was asked about someone who woke up late and missed the *Minyan* they usually attend. Should they go to a later *Minyan* and be late to learning with a *Chevrusa* or should they *Daven* on their own to ensure that they will be on time? He said to do the latter, *Daven* on their own and be on time for their *Chevrusa*. Essentially, he felt performing a passing *Mitzvah* takes precedence over davening with a *Minyan*.

What should our friend do?

Based on the discussion above, it seems that while he has an absolute obligation to *Daven* with a *Minyan*, in this situation he should *Daven* alone and be on time for the class. Since the class is something he attends on a weekly basis and it is made of a small group, it is like a *Chevrusa*.