**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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**This shiur is dedicated *le-zekher nishmot***

**Amelia Ray and Morris Ray   
by their children Patti Ray and Allen Ray**

**on the occasion of their twelfth *yahrtzeits***

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*Korbanot* and *Pesukei De-zimra*

What are korbanot and pesukei de-zimra? Should women say them?

**By Deracheha Staff; Laurie Novick, Director**

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# *Korbanot*

After *Birchot Ha-shachar*, many people recite portions of the Torah, Mishna, and Talmud describing some of the sacrifices offered in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. This section of *tefilla* is known as “*korbanot*,” sacrifices. Should women recite it?

The Talmud teaches that engaging in Torah study about a sacrificial offering can stand in place of making that offering:

*Menachot* 110a

Rabbi Yitzchak said: What is written, "This is the Torah of the sin offering" and "This is the Torah of the guilt offering?" Whoever occupies himself with the Torah of the sin offering, it is as though he has sacrificed a sin offering, and whoever occupies himself with the Torah of the guilt offering, it is as though he has sacrificed a guilt offering.

Today, when we do not have *Beit Ha-mikdash* (the Temple) and it is impossible to offer sacrifices, the closest we can come to this holy endeavor is engaging in learning about them. Another talmudic passage has God saying making this point to Avraham Avinu:

Ta'anit 27b

He [God] said to him [Avraham]: I already established for them [the children of Israel to recite] the order of sacrifices. At the time when they read them before Me, I count it for them as though they have sacrificed before Me, and I forgive them for all their sins.

It is particularly fitting to do this in the context of prayer, since some aspects of our formal prayer, such as the timing of the daily *tefillot*, were enacted to correspond with the *korban tamid* (the daily morning and afternoon offering) and other sacrifices and, in the absence of sacrifices, also replace them.

Additionally, it makes sense to recite the *korbanot* at the beginning of *shacharit* because reciting these passages of *korbanot* is also an act of learning Torah, appropriate on the heels of saying the *birchot ha-Torah*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Tur* singles out reciting the portion of *korban tamid* (Bemidbar 28:1-8) as an "established" recitation, perhaps because of the *tamid's* connection to daily *tefilla*:

Tur OC 48

They established reading the portion about the *korban tamid*, as is found in the midrash, "At the time when there is no Temple, what will become of them [the children of Israel]? He [God] said to him [Avraham]: I already provided for them in advance [reading] the order of korbanot. Any time that they occupy themselves with them, I count it for them as though they have sacrificed before Me."

Although this source makes it sound as though reciting the portion of the *tamid* is obligatory, *Tur's* treatment of the other *korbanot* passages is closer to encouragement (as we also find in *Shulchan Aruch).*[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Tur* OC Laws of Morning Practice 1

It is good to say the portion of the *akeida …* and the portion of the *korbanot*, such as the portion of the burnt offering and the meal offering and the peace offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering. Indeed, it is better to say the *korbanot* passages in the daytime, because they are in place of offering a sacrifice, whose time is during the day.

*Tur* writes that "It is good to say" these passages, including the Torah's description of the binding of Isaac, the *akeida*. His choice of language implies that we are not bound to recite the *korbanot* passages other than *korban tamid*. *Tur* also adds another point here. "It is better" to recite *korbanot* during the daytime, when offerings were made. However, since this timing is only preferable and not strictly obligatory, reciting *korbanot* is not time-bound.

# Women Reciting *Korbanot*

In fourteenth-century Ashkenaz, Maharil writes that women should recite *korbanot* as part of the general obligation to pray.

New Responsa Maharil, 45

And are women not obligated in the morning *tamid* offering and sacrificial offerings like men? For they are obligated in prayer which they [the Men of the Great Assembly] enacted to correspond with the *korban tamid,* and if so they are also obligated to recite the matters of the sacrifices.…

Maharil sees *korbanot* as part of the customary prayer service. Women, like men, are subject to this custom and therefore recite *korbanot* as well.

Although Maharil refers to "the morning *tamid* offering and [other verses of] sacrificial offerings," Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Ba'al Ha-Tanya, rules that women need only recite the verses about the *korban tamid.*

*Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav* OC 47

In reciting the portion of the *tamid* they [women] are equal to men, for *tefilla* [in which women are obligated] was enacted in place of the *tamid.*

Why only the verses about the *tamid?* Women are obligated in *tefillot* whose timing is based on that of the *tamid.* Additionally, we have seen that Tur treats the *tamid* portion with more stringency than the rest of *korbanot.* It stands to reason, then, that women should recite the *tamid* versesregularly*.*

Other halachic authorities, however, maintain that reciting *korbanot* is not obligatory for women or men.

Chida, Responsa *Yosef Ometz* 67

For women are obligated in all the sacrifices…but they have no obligation to learn the laws of the sacrifices, this is the truth… For even men have no obligation to read the *korbanot.*

Chida teaches us that women are obligated in offering sacrifices when relevant, but not in learning about them. (He suggests women need not learn about them at all!)

Many women and men, skip *korbanot* during *tefilla*. Reciting them is still praiseworthy, though, especially the *tamid*.

Rav Eliezer Melamed suggests that if time is short, a woman can choose to recite the verses about the *tamid* right after *birchot ha-Torah,* instead of *birkat kohanim*. This position goes back to treating *korbanot* as a form of Torah learning following recitation of the *berachot*.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# Pesukei De-Zimra

Why say *Pesukei De-zimra*?

The Talmud teaches us that we should always praise God before praying:

*Berachot* 32a

Rabbi Simlai expounded: A person should always set out praise of God and afterwards, pray.

We could understand this as referring to the structure of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, where praise precedes request. However, another Talmudic passage suggests that one should aspire to recite some verses in praise of God every day:

*Shabbat* 118b

Rabbi Yosei said: May my portion be among those who complete *hallel* [lit., praise] every day. Really? But Master said: One who recites *Hallel* every day, is blaspheming and reviling! When we said this [wishing to be among the reciters of *hallel* daily] it was about *Pesukei De-zimra* [verses of praise].

In this passage, the Talmud concludes that we should not recite *Hallel* every day, because that would drastically dilute its impact. Rather, we should say verses of song that praise God daily, and these are called "*Pesukei De-zimra*."

Piecing these two talmudic passages together, we can deduce that we should recite verses of praise every day as a preliminary to prayer, even before we begin *Shemoneh Esrei.*

Tosafot write explicitly that *Pesukei De-zimra* serve as a preparation for prayer:

Tosafot *Berachot* 31a, s.v. *Rabbanan*

We do not pray from [a mind frame of] levity and mirth, but rather from [a mind frame of] gravity and the joy of mitzva, as if one were occupied with words of Torah. Therefore, it is customary to recite *Pesukei De-zimra* and *Ashrei* prior to prayer.

Tosafot understand *Pesukei De-zimra* as a means to achieve the serious, yet joyful, state of mind appropriate for prayer. One can enter a similar mind frame by studying Torah.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Perhaps because *Pesukei De-zimra* really belong prior to prayer, Shulchan Aruch rules that a person who omits *Pesukei De-zimra* can recite the verses after *shacharit*, but without the *berachot*, since they are meant to be said prior to *shacharit*. [[5]](#footnote-5)

# What Texts?

Which verses of praise should we say?

Rashi tells us that the *Pesukei De-Zimra* to which the Talmud refers are *Tehillim* 148 and 150.

Rashi *Shabbat* 118b, s.v. *Pesukei De-zimra*

Two *tehillim* of praise: *Hallelu et Hashem min ha-shamayim* (148), *Hallelu E-l be-kodesh* (150).

These individual *tehillim* are particularly broad in scope, a kind of grand finale to the book of *Tehillim*. The first urges praise of God from all corners of the cosmos, and the second concludes *Tehillim* with a call to every living soul to praise God in song.

What else should we recite? A third Talmudic passage teaches that we should make an effort to say *Tehilla le-David* (*Tehillim* 145, known as *Ashrei* for the final verse of *Tehillim* 144with which we open it) three times a day:

*Berachot* 4b

Rabbi Eliezer said in the name of Rabbi Avina: Whoever says "*Tehilla le-David"* three times every day, is assured a place in the world to come.

*Ashrei* is significant because it both includes a comprehensive list of praise to God, running acrostically from aleph to tav, and also makes special reference to God's role as our sustainer, "You open Your hands and satisfy all living creatures according to [Your] will."[[6]](#footnote-6)

According to Rif[[7]](#footnote-7) and Rambam, *Ashrei* and the five chapters of *Tehillim* that follow it (which include the two chapters Rashi mentioned above) are the centerpiece of *Pesukei De-zimra.*

*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer 7:12

The sages praised one who recites songs from *Tehillim* every day, from *Tehilla le-David* to the end of the book, and they have already become accustomed to reciting verses before and after them. They have established a *beracha* before the songs, which is *Baruch She-amar,* and a *beracha* after them, which is *Yishtabach*. Afterwards, one makes the *beracha* on reciting *Shema* and recites *Shema*.

As Rambam notes, we frame our recitation of these chapters of *Tehillim* with *berachot* of praise: *Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabach,* and then go on to recite Shema and its *berachot.* Over time, recitation of additional verses of praise has been added to the beginning of prayer, including *Hodu,* *Mizmor Le-todah*, *Az Yashir*, and *Vayvarech David*, each of which teaches about a different praiseworthy facet of God.

Rambam also teaches that "the sages praise one who reads songs from *Tehillim."* We can infer that recitation of *Pesukei De-zimra* merits praise, yet is not fully obligatory. Nowadays, it has the status of a binding custom.

# When Time is Short

If someone arrives late to synagogue in the morning*, Pesukei De-zimra* can and should be shortened in order to enable one to recite *Shemoneh Esrei* together with the congregation. Shulchan Aruch and Rema present a system for cutting the recitation down, depending on how much time is available.

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 52:1

If one arrived at synagogue and found the congregation at the end of *Pesukei De-zimra*, he says: *Baruch She-amar* until *mehulal ba-tishbachot*, and then *Tehilla Le-David* until *me-ata ve-ad olam halleluya*, and then *Hallelu et Hashem min ha-shamayim* until *li-vnei Yisrael am kerovo halleluya*. If there is not enough time, he should also skip *hallelu et Hashem min ha-shamayim*. Rema: If there is even less time, he should only say *Baruch She-amar, Tehilla Le-David*, and *Yishtabach*.

A person who might miss *Shemoneh Esrei* with the congregation can catch up by skipping part of *Pesukei De-zimra*. We can also recite an abbreviated *Pesukei De-zimra* when time is short for other reasons. The minimum is to recite the two *berachot* of *Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabach* with *Ashrei* in the middle. If there is more time, we add in the two *tehillim* mentioned by Rashi (the 3rd and 5th *Halleluyas)*. If there is more time, we can begin with *Ashrei,* as Rambam describes, and recite the rest of the *tehillim* straight through*.*

In practice, many men and women, when they are in a rush, rarely manage to recite more than *Ashrei* between the *berachot.*

**Women Reciting *Pesukei De-zimra***

In general, reciting *Pesukei De-zimra* is a binding custom and not a full-fledged obligation. Does this custom apply equally to women and men?

Halachic authorities line up on both sides of this question.

**Binding Custom** We saw above that Maharil maintains that women are obligated in *korbanot.* Hementions *Pesukei De-zimra* in the same passage*.*

New Responsa Maharil 45

For women accept upon themselves [the obligation] of reciting *Shema* and are also obligated in *Pesukei De-zimra*.

Maharil understands *Pesukei De-zimra* as a standard part of a woman's *tefilla,* in which women "are also obligated."

So too, when Aruch Ha-shulchan discusses *Pesukei De-zimra,* he uses wording that indicates that women have accepted it as a binding custom.

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 47:25

They [women] have also accepted upon themselves as an obligation *Keri'at Shema* and *Pesukei De-zimra* and *Shirat Ha-yam.*

We can understand why it is considered customary for women to recite *Pesukei De-zimra.* If *Pesukei De-zimra* are a preparation for prayer, women have every reason to recite them. After all, women have an obligation to pray and therefore also need to prepare for prayer. Mishna Berura says this.

*Mishna Berura* 70:2

*Pesukei De-zimra*… was enacted primarily for the sake of *tefilla.* If so, they [women] are obviously obligated…*.*

**Optional** Not everyone agrees that women need say *Pesukei De-zimra.* Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi writes, without explanation, that recitation is fully optional:

*Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav* ,OC 70

If they [women] also want to recite *Pesukei De-zimra* and its blessings, they are permitted.

If a woman so desires, she is "permitted" to recite *Pesukei De-zimra*. In his *Sha'ar Ha-tziyun*, Mishna Berura quotes this opinion and notes that the question requires further investigation.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Surprisingly, Aruch Ha-shulchan, too, writes in one place that *Pesukei De-zimra* is optional for women:

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 70

*Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabach* are not obligatory upon them [women] and they may say them. Why shouldn't they be able to sing to God as Miriam and all the women of Israel did at the splitting of the sea?

Saying women "can say" *Pesukei De-zimra*" is difficult to reconcile with the statement we quoted earlier in which *Aruch ha-Shulchan* himself referred to *Pesukei De-zimra* as a binding custom.

Why would it be merely optional for women?

Perhaps Ba'al Ha-Tanya and Aruch ha-Shulchan were influenced here by the fact that women's obligation to recite a full *Shemoneh Esrei* was called into question by Magen Avraham.[[9]](#footnote-9) Given that many women do not recite *Shemoneh Esrei* to start with, it is difficult to require all women to recite more than that.

Rav Ovadya Yosef gives further insight into why *Pesukei De-zimra* might not be necessary for women. He maintains that *Pesukei De-zimra* are time-bound, because one may recite them with their *berachot* only within the time frame before *shacharit*. Someone who has already prayed *shacharit* can no longer say the *berachot.* The Talmud teaches us that women have an obligation in *tefilla* because *tefilla* is *rachamei*, seeking mercy. Since the nature of *Pesukei De-zimra* is praise and "not *rachamei*," there is no reason to obligate women.

Responsa *Yabi'a Omer* II OC 6:10

Women should not recite the *berachot* of *Pesukei De-zimra*, since *Pesukei De-zimra* also have a specific time, for they were enacted [to be recited] specifically before *shacharit…*. Since they are not *rachamei* [seeking mercy], even though they are for the sake of *tefilla*, women are exempt, as Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi and *Aruch Ha-shulchan* wrote in the name of later authorities, and see what *Mishna Berura* wrote about this. In any case, if women wish to say them, they should recite the *berachot* of *Pesukei De-zimra*…without mentioning God’s name.

**Berachot** Beyond explaining why women might be exempt, Rav Ovadya writes that a woman who wishes to recite *Pesukei De-zimra* should omit the name of God from the framing *berachot*, so as not to say a *beracha le-vatala,* a *beracha* in vain.

As we saw in [our discussion](http://www.deracheha.org/https:/deracheha.org/beracha-on-voluntary-performance/) of the topic, Rav Ovadya opposes making *berachot* on voluntary mitzva performance. He rules against making a *beracha* on voluntary recitation of *Peseukei De-zimra* out of the same concern. As we noted there, others, including some Sefardi authorities, disagree.

Here too, Rav Ben Tziyon Abba Sha'ul permits a woman to make the *berachot*:

Responsa *Or Le-Tziyon* II:5

Although women are not obligated in *Pesukei De-zimra*, in any event, they are permitted to recite *Pesukei De-Zimra* with the *berachot, Baruch She'amar* at the beginning and *Yishtabach* at the end, with mention of God's name and kingship.

Those who permit women to recite *berachot* on voluntary performance should have no objection to women reciting *berachot* here – especially since *Pesukei De-zimra* may be binding for women*.*

Furthermore, these are *berachot* of praise to God, not *berachot* on a mitzva. Even Rav Yosef Karo, who objects to women saying *berachot* on voluntary mitzva performance, may only object to women saying a *beracha* that includes the word *"ve-tzivanu."* Thisleaves open the possibility of reciting the *berachot* on *Pesukei De-zimra* even for a woman who does not usually recite *berachot* on voluntary mitzva performance, since neither the opening nor the closing *beracha* includes the word "*ve-tzivanu."* Rav Ovadya Yosef himself concedes that Ashkenazi women may recite these *berachot.[[10]](#footnote-10)*

**Summary** On the one hand, *Pesukei De-zimra* may be considered time-bound because they are said as preparation for prayer, and the time-bound element therefore might lead to their being fully optional for women. On the other hand, if *Pesukei De-zimra* are part and parcel of preparing for prayer, then women should say *Pesukei De-zimra,* since women are fully obligated to pray.

Since there are opinions that women have a binding custom to recite *Pesukei De-zimra*, and since even those who hold that women are exempt still permit women to recite them, there is good reason for women to say them whenever possible, at least in abbreviated form, *berachot* included. Women who follow the halachic rulings of Rav Ovadya Yosef should simply omit the name of God from the *“Baruch Ata Hashem”* line of the *berachot.*

## ● Why do many women recite *Tehillim*, but not *Pesukei De-zimra*?

It is fascinating to compare *Pesukei De-zimra* with the custom to recite *Tehillim*. Recitation of *Tehillim* was considered particularly praiseworthy for those who could not engage in more formal Torah study, so it comes as no surprise that women in particular are known for reciting *Tehillim* at any opportunity and for making efforts to complete the full book on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, sometimes in groups.

The main texts of *Pesukei De-zimra are* chapters of *Tehillim.* However, while the recitation of *Pesukei De-zimra* takes place before *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei,* women reading other chapters of *Tehillim* can recite them at any point during the day. *Pesukei de-zimra* is a binding custom, while reciting *Tehillim* is fully optional. The *berachot Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabach* bookend *Pesukei De-zimra*, while the recitation of *Tehillim* has optional supplicatory prayers before and afterwards. Because *berachot* come before and after them, *Pesukei De-zimra* cannot be easily interrupted. *Tehillim* recitation, however can be interrupted at will, making it more flexible and particularly suited to the lives of women whose time to pray may be unpredictable

*Pesukei De-zimra* helpsprepare us to address God in prayer with proper knowledge of before Whom we stand. Recitation of *Tehillim,* however, is generally an independent act of prayer. When reciting *Tehillim*, we express and connectto the poetic, emotional, and personal meaning of David Ha-melech's words. Since saying *Tehillim* is framed as a plea, it presumably does not violate the caution that one who recites *Hallel* each day is as one who "reviles and blasphemes."

The ideal would be for women and men to recite *Pesukei De-zimra* daily before *shacharit* and additionally to recite *Tehillim* at any appropriate opportunity. Since the timing of *Pesukei De-zimra* is more limited, since interrupting them is more complicated, and since they really belong to the formal world of prayer, it is no surprise that, in parallel, many women have seized on the more fluid, flexible, and emotional framework of *Tehillim* as an opportunity to address God. Some may also feel that *Pesukei De-zimra*, when recited as a group of chapters from *Tehillim*, belongs specifically to the synagogue, where men take the lead. Women can recite *Tehillim* together in any location, defining it as a space for women's prayers.

1. In his early version of the *siddur*, Rav Amram Gaon explains *korbanot* this way:

   *Seder Rav Amram Ga'on, Birchot Ha-shachar*

   The order that we wrote to read from [parashat] *Tzav* [the *tamid* offering] and to learn *Eizehu Mekoman* [a mishnaic chapter on sacrifice] and to expound with Rabbi Yishmael, thus is found in responsa, and so is the custom of all Israel in Mesopotamia. Proof is from where? That Rav Safra said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua son of Chananya: What is it that is written "And you should repeat them"? Don't read “repeat them” but "triple them."

   Note that Rav also Amram describes reciting *korbanot* as a matter of custom. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Shulchan Aruch* OC 1:9

   Some have the custom to recite the portion of the laver (*Shemot* 30:17-21), and afterwards the portion of the removal of the ashes (*Vayikra* 6:1-6) and afterwards the portion of the *tamid* (*Bemidbar* 28:1-8) and afterwards the portion of the altar, the offering of incense (*Shemot* 30:7-10) and the portion of the ingredients of the incense and its preparation (*Shemot* 30:34-36).

   Rabbeinu Yona maintains that reciting *korbanot* is a full-fledged obligation, though by writing *"parashat ha-korbanot"* the portion of *korbanot* in the singular, he may refer specifically to the *tamid* portion.

   *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona Berachot* 5a

   They established one could recite the portion of *korbanot* by heart every day, because [saying] it is obligatory. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rav Eliezer Melamed, "*Korbanot U-psukei De-zimra*," *Tefillat Nashim*.

   Available here: [https://ph.yhb.org.il/03-15-01](https://ph.yhb.org.il/03-15-01/) and in English at <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/03-15-01/> Nevertheless, we can suggest that after *Birchot Ha-Torah*, instead of reciting the verses of *Birkat Kohanim* and the *baraita* of “*Elu devarim*…,” women should recite the Tamid passage… [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In his Jahrzeit lectures, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik goes a step farther, defining *Pesukei De-zimra* as a form of Torah study to get us in the correct frame of mind for prayer. See "*Be-inyan Pesukei De-Zimra*," *Shi'urim Le-zecher Abba Mari Za"l*, vol. II, pp. 17-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Shulchan Aruch* OC 52:1

   If the congregation has already begun “*Yotzer*” and there is no time to recite even an abbreviated *Pesukei De-zimra*, one should recite *Keri’at Shema* and its *berachot* with the congregation and pray [*Shmoneh Esrei*] with them, and afterwards one should recite all of *Pesukei De-zimra* without a *beracha* before or after. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Berachot* 4b

   What is the reason? If you say that it is because comes with the aleph-bet – let us say “*Ashrei Temimei derech*” (*Tehillim* 119), which comes with eight aspects [of the aleph-bet]. Rather, because it includes “Open up Your hand.” So let us say the great Hallel (*Tehillim* 136) in which it is written “He gives bread to all flesh!” Rather, because it includes both. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rif *Shabbat* 44a

   As we say in *Pesukei De-zimra*. And what are they? From *Tehilla Le-David* until “*kol ha-neshama tehallel Y-h*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Sha'ar Ha-Tziyyun* 70:4

   But Rav Schneuer Zalman of Liadi wrote the opposite and this requires investigation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Aruch Ha-shulchan's position on this is unclear. When discussing *Birchot Ha-Torah*, he seems to accept Maharil, understanding him as saying women have obligated themselves:

   *Aruch Ha-shulchan* 47:25

   And they established upon themselves as an obligation also *Keri’at Shema* and *Pesukei De-zimra* and *Shirat Ha-yam*, and there are also those who maintain that they are required to learn their laws, and thus they are accustomed to recite *berachot* upon all the positive time-bound mitzvot and also in *Birkat Ha-mazon* they say “and on Your Torah that You taught us.” And therefore, for all these reasons, they are permitted to recite a *beracha*.

   However, when discussing *Pesukei De-zimra*, he says that women have no obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Yechaveh Da'at III:3

    But Ashkenazi women, if they recite *berachot* on *Pesukei De-zimra, Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabach,* one should not protest, because they have [authorities] on whom to rely. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)