**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

Prayer 9: End of Prayer and Priorities

What are *birchot Keri'at Shema*? Should women Say them?

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# End of Prayer

The prayers following *Shemoneh Esrei* are, for the most part, a binding custom for men. With the possible exceptions of *Ashrei* and *Aleinu,* many women do not recite these prayers when praying alone. This seems to indicate that women never accepted their recitation as a binding custom.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As we might expect, then, the halachic discussion of women and the end of prayer is rather sparse. Here is a brief summary of the main issues:[[2]](#footnote-2)

**I. *Tachanun*** We recite *tachanun* in order to add a personal plea to God at the end of prayer. Originally the language of *tachanun* was individual, though now it is more fixed. *Tachanun* in the presence of a *sefer Torah* is traditionally recited “falling on one’s face” – sitting down and with the forehead resting on the forearm. We say it falling on our faces so that, like Moshe Rabbeinu, we can appeal to God from every physical position.

*Tur* OC 131

Rav Natrunai wrote that *nefilat apayim* [falling on one's face, used here to mean reciting *tachanun* in general] in the congregation after *tefilla* is optional…because we have prayed in every way that a person can pray: seated and standing and with *nefilat apayim* as Moshe Rabbeinu did, as is written "And I sat on the mountain" and it is written "And I stood on the mountain, etc." and "And I fell down before God." Now that we don't have the power to pray in any other fashion, we say, "And we don't know."

Note that *tachanun* here is described as optional (*reshut*),not obligatory. For this reason, its recitation can be omitted with great ease:

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 131:2

Tur wrote in the name of Rav Natrunei Gaon that *nefilat apayim* is optional and not obligatory (see there). Therefore, we waive it with ease.

In practice, many women do not say *tachanun* when praying alone.

**II. Ashrei** The Talmud teaches us that reciting *Ashrei* three times a day (twice at *shacharit* and once at *mincha*) is praiseworthy and beneficial. This should apply to women and men alike. (See more here.)

*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.

Reciting *Ashrei* at the end of *tefilla* is also a way to praise God for the opportunity to dwell longer in the synagogue, God's home:

*Shibbolei Ha-leket, Tefilla* 44

I found in the name of Rabbeinu Shelomo [Rashi]: The custom of the early authorities was to linger for an hour after their prayer, as is taught in the mishna, "The early pious ones would linger for an hour etc." (*Berachot* 5:1) Therefore, they added saying *Ashrei yoshevei veitecha* [at the end of prayer], i.e., [happy are] those who linger in Your house like "you shall dwell in sanctity" (*Devarim* 1:46).

A woman with time to continue praying after *Shemoneh Esrei* can also acknowledge the privilege of extending her time to dwell with God, especially if she is able to pray in a house of prayer.

**III. U-va Le-tziyon, Ve-ata Kadosh** According to *Shibolei Ha-leket, U-va Le-Tziyon*and *va-ani zot beriti*substitute for the time devoted to daily Torah study after prayer that most of us are unable to commit:

*Shibbolei Ha-leket, Tefilla*, 44

According to the words of Rabbeinu Shelomo [Rashi], While lingering an hour after *tefilla*, they would bring books and read Torah and Prophets and Mishna and Talmud…Since poverty has grown and they needed to work, they were unable to occupy themselves with Torah as much….Even so, they would read these two verses of Navi, *Uva le-Tziyon* and *Va-ani zot beriti,* which are something like an abbreviated reading of Torah.

Rashi provides a similar explanation of *Ve-ata kadosh,* also known as *kedusha de-sidra*:

*Rashi Sota* 49a s.v., *A-kedusha De-sidra*

A recitation of *kedusha* that they enacted so that all Israel would occupy themselves with a bit of Torah each day. He reads and translates [the verses], and it is as if they are occupied with Torah. Since this is the custom in all of Israel, among scholars and the ignorant, and it has the two elements of sanctifying God and learning Torah, it is beloved.

Rashi explicitly adds that *kedusha de-sidra* is said by scholars and laity alike.

Since women are exempt from the formal mitzva of *talmud Torah,* one might argue that a woman need not recite any of these verses. But any woman with the interest and ability to infuse the first moments after prayer with Torah can do so and join a beloved practice of "all of Israel."

**IV. *Shir Shel yom* and *Pitum Ha-ketoret*** These are recited in commemoration of the Temple service; the first recalls the songs sung over the sacrifices and the second describes the incense. A woman may choose to recite them, much as she may recite *korbanot.*

*Shir shel yom* is also an opportunity for all of us to remember Shabbat on a daily basis, since we begin by mentioning the day of the week as we count toward Shabbat.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**V. *Aleinu*** Of all of the prayers following *Shemoneh Esrei*, women most commonly recite *Aleinu.*

Originally a highlight of the *malchuyot service of* Rosh Ha-shana, *Aleinu* has become the signature finale to Jewish prayer.

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 133:1

Indeed, we are accustomed to say afterwards the great praise of *Aleinu le-shabei’ach*,which the early ones said Yehoshua bin Nun enacted at the conquest of Yericho. Ariza"l enjoined to say it after every prayer, aloud, standing, and with joy…

*Aleinu* reminds us of our ultimate vision for God's complete, recognized dominion. It is an exclamation point of a prayer.

# Priorities When Time is Short

If a woman has a lot of time to pray, she is encouraged to follow the words of *Kaf Ha-chayim*:

*Kaf Ha-chayim* OC I 70:1

Women who know how to learn are accustomed to pray the full order of prayers like men, no less.

But if a woman has very, very little time, she should make an effort to say the first verse of *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei.* It is absolutely better to say those and nothing more than to decide not to pray at all when there isn't enough time for more.

Often, a woman's time for prayer falls out somewhere in between. What is a good formula for prayer when a woman has more than the absolute minimum amount of time, but not that much more?

The following order is typical of the guidance a woman will find in practical Halacha books for prioritizing prayer:[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Classic Prayer Priorities List** (each item is added to the preceding one in the correct order)

1. *Shemoneh Esrei*

2. The first *pasuk* of *Shema* and *Emet Ve-yatziv*

3. Abbreviated *Pesukei De-zimra (Baruch She-amar, Ashrei, Yishtabach)*

4. *Birchot Ha-shachar*

5. *Birchot Ha-Torah* and verses after

6. Full *Keri’at Shema* with its *berachot*

7. More of *Pesukei De-zimra*

Where does this order come from? *Emet ve-yatziv* might be, according to Magen Avraham, a fulfillment of a Torah-level mitzva of *zecher yetzi'at Mitzrayim* and an opportunity to connect *ge'ula* to *tefilla.* (See more here.) There is no reason to exempt women from *Birchot Ha-Shachar. (*See more here*.) Birchot Ha-Torah* may also be obligatory for women as an expression of our basic connection to Torah or a prerequisite for the Torah learning we do outside the formal mitzva of *talmud Torah*. (See more here.) *Pesukei De-zimra* may be obligatory as preparation for prayer. (See more here.) The first verse of *Shema* may be obligatory, but is at least correct to recite, as acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. (See more here.) Once a woman is saying *Pesukei De-Zimra,* she should say as much as she can manage*.* (See more here.) It is praiseworthy to recite all of *Keri'at Shema.* (See more here.)

This makes sense, but we can question some of the recommendations:

Not everyone agrees with Magen Avraham regarding *Emet ve-yatziv,* but *Birchot Ha-shachar* are pretty clearly obligatory and *Birchot Ha-Torah* are extremely important. Both can be said at some point over the course of the morning without affecting whatever block of concentrated time is available for prayer*.*

The first verse of *Shema,* which takes only seconds to say (and according to Bach is obligatory) should always be able to fit into the time before *Shemoneh Esrei.*

Some women, especially those who are continuously occupied with the care of young children, do not recite *Shemoneh Esrei* at all, relying on Magen Avraham. (See more here.)

For these reasons, we would suggest the following modified guidelines:

**Morning Prayer Priorities Guide:**

I. Over the course of the early morning (even while engaged in other activities), a woman should try to recite: Morning *Berachot*, *Birchot Ha-shachar* and *Birchot Ha-Torah*. If she will have no additional time for prayer, she should also recite the first *pasuk* of *Shema* (and *Baruch Shem*).

II. If she has five minutes or more to devote to prayer, the priorities should be as follows:

1. When there are 5-10 minutes to set aside to pray: The first *pasuk* of *Shema* (and *Baruch Shem*)followed by *Shemoneh Esrei.* (For *shacharit,* recited by halachic midday. If she misses *shacharit* time, she can and should still recite *Shemoneh Esrei* during the afternoon at *mincha* time.)

2. When there are 10-15 minutes to set aside to pray: Abbreviated *Pesukei De-zimra (Baruch She-amar, Ashrei, Yishtabach),* first *pasuk* of *Shema* (and *Baruch Shem)* followed by *Emet Ve-yatziv* and *Shemoneh Esrei*

3. When there are 15-20 minutes to set aside to pray: Abbreviated *Pesukei De-zimra (Baruch She-amar, Ashrei, Yishtabach), Shema u-virchoteha, Shemoneh Esrei*, *Aleinu.*

4. When there is more time: Adding more of *Pesukei De-zimra/ Korban tamid* */* Ending prayers*,* as each woman sees fit.

## Is it really worth it to *daven* when there's no time to say all of the prayers?

Halachically, reciting whatever is possible is preferable to omitting formal prayer.

Spiritually, it is no less important. Rebbitzen Ariela Davis describes different stages she has gone through with prayer, and what a renewed commitment means to her now.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Ariela Davis, "Revitalizing Life by Finding Time for Tefillah," Ou.org

By the birth of my fourth child…it seemed like an impossibility to find time to daven in the morning.…Three years ago, I stood before Hashem on Rosh Hashana and … I committed to daven. That commitment has changed my life.…When frustrations are overwhelming, I now realize that I don’t have to carry it all; nor can I control it all. I can do my best and leave the rest for Hashem. When I’m tired, I ask G-d for strength and energy. When I don’t know what the best decision is with regards to parenting, to working with colleagues or congregants, I ask G-d for clarity and after davening, somehow, the answers seem more tangible. When things seem impossible, I ask G-d to carry me through…I will be honest and admit that I don’t say nearly as much of the siddur as I did when I was younger and stick to the Tefillos that the Mishna Brura states that women are obligated to say. I also won’t  lie and say that every Tefilla is an experience that moves Heaven and Earth; there are definitely days that I mumble through. What I can say is that more days than not, I find tremendous meaning in the words of the Tefilla, in a way that I never have before.

1. This is reminiscent of Mishna Berura's view regarding women and *ma'ariv*, discussed here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Here we follow the main points of the presentation in Rav David Auerbach, *Halichot Beitah,* chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ramban al Ha-Torah Shemot* 20:8

Israel counts every day in the name of Shabbat, *Echad* [one] of Shabbat, *Sheini* [the second day] of Shabbat, for this is from the mitzva in which we were commanded to remember it [Shabbat] always, each day. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, for example, Rav Yitzchak Ya'akov Fuchs, *Tefilla Ke-hilcheta,* p. 34, fn. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ariela Davis, "Revitalizing Life by Finding Time for Tefillah." Ou.org, August 23, 2018.

Available here: https://www.ou.org/life/inspiration/revitalizing-life-by-finding-time-for-tefilla/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)