

## Minyan During a Pandemic: At What Risk?

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### 1. Talmud, Berachot 6a (Koren translation)

תַּנְיָא, אָבָא בְּנִימִין אוֹמֵר: אִין תְּפִלָּה שֶׁל אָדָם נִשְׁמַעַת אֶלָּא בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת, שְׁנַאָמַר: "לְשִׁמְעֵ אֶל הָרִנָּה וְאֶל הַתְּפִלָּה". בְּמָקוֹם רִנָּה — שָׁם תְּהֵא תְּפִלָּה.

It was taught in a *baraita* that Abba Binyamin said: **One's prayer is only fully heard in a synagogue, as it is stated** with regard to King Solomon's prayer in the Temple: "Yet have You turned toward the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, Lord my G-d, **to listen to the song and the prayer** which Your servant prays before You on this day" (I Kings 8:28). The following verse concludes: "To hear the prayer Your servant directs toward this place" (I Kings 8:29). We see that one's prayer is heard specifically in the Temple, of which the synagogue is a microcosm (Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto). It may be inferred that **in a place of song**, a synagogue where G-d's praises are sung, **there prayer should be**.

### 2. Talmud, Berachot 8a (Koren translation)

מֵאֵי דְכֶתִיב "וְאֲנִי תְּפִלְתִּי לְךָ ה' עַת רְצוֹן". אֵימְתִי עַת רְצוֹן — בְּשַׁעֲה שֶׁהַצְּבוּר מְתַפְּלֵלִין.

What is the meaning of that which is written: **"But as for me, let my prayer be unto You, Lord, in a time of favor; O G-d, in the abundance of Your mercy, answer me with the truth of Your salvation"** (Psalms 69:14)? It appears that the individual is praying that his prayers will coincide with a special time of Divine favor. **When is a time of favor?** It is **at the time when the congregation is praying**. It is beneficial to pray together with the congregation, for G-d does not fail to respond to the entreaties of the congregation.

### 3. Talmud, Berachot 8a (Koren translation)

רַבִּי נָתַן אוֹמֵר: מִנֵּינן שְׂאִין הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹאֵס בְּתַפְּלַתְנָן שֶׁל רַבִּים שְׁנַאָמַר: "הֵן אֶל-ל פְּבִיר וְלֹא יִמָּאֵס", וְכַתִּיב: "פָּדָה בְּשָׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי מִקֶּרֶב לִי כִי בְּרַבִּים הָיוּ עִמָּדִי".

Rabbi Natan says: From where do we know that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not despise the prayer of the masses? As it is stated: "Behold, G-d does not despise the mighty," and it is written: "He has redeemed my soul in peace so that none came upon me."

### 4. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 8:1 (chabad.org translation)

תְּפִלַּת הַצְּבוּר נִשְׁמַעַת תָּמִיד וְנֹאפְלוּ הָיוּ בְּהֵן חוֹטְאִים אִין הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹאֵס בְּתַפְּלַתְנָן שֶׁל רַבִּים. לְפִיכָךְ צָרִיךְ אָדָם לְשַׁתַּף עִצְמוֹ עִם הַצְּבוּר. וְלֹא יִתְּפַלֵּל בְּיַחֲד כָּל זְמַן שִׁיכוּל לְהַתְּפַלֵּל עִם הַצְּבוּר. וְלַעוֹלָם יִשְׁפִּים אָדָם וְיִצְרִיב לְבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת שְׂאִין תְּפִלְתוֹ נִשְׁמַעַת בְּכָל עַת אֶלָּא בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת.

Communal prayer is always heard. Even when there are transgressors among [the congregation], the Holy One, blessed be He, does not reject the prayers of the many. Therefore, a person should include himself in the community and should not pray alone whenever he is able to pray with the community. One should always spend the early morning and evening [hours] in the synagogue, for prayer will not be heard at all times except [when recited] in the synagogue.

### 5. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Kesef Mishneh שם

כְּלוּמַר שְׁכַבֵּר אִפְשֵׁר שֶׁתִּשְׁמַע תְּפִלְתוֹ חוּץ לְבַה"כ אַבֵּל בְּכָל עַת אִינָה נִשְׁמַעַת אִלָּא בְּבַה"כ.

Meaning that it is possible for one's prayer to be heard outside of a synagogue, but it is not heard "at all times" outside of a synagogue

### 6. Talmud, Berachot 8a (Koren translation)

אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: כָּל מִי שֶׁיֵּשֶׁב לוֹ בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת בְּעִירוֹ, וְאִינוֹ נִכְנֵס שָׁם לְהַתְּפַלֵּל, נִקְרָא "שֶׁכֵּן רַע", שְׁנַאָמַר: "כֹּה אָמַר ה' עַל כָּל שֶׁכְּנֵי הָרַעִים הַנִּגְעִים בְּנִחְלָה אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵלְתִּי אֶת עַמִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל". וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שְׁגוֹרָם גְּלוּת לוֹ וְלִבְנָיו, שְׁנַאָמַר: "הִנְנִי נֹתֵשֵׁם מֵעַל אֲדָמְתָם וְאֶת בֵּית יְהוּדָה אֲתוֹשׁ מִתוֹכָם".

Reish Lakish said: One who has a synagogue in his city but does not enter to pray there is called an evil neighbor, as it is stated: "Thus said the Lord: As for all My evil neighbors who touch My inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit..." (Jeremiah 12:14).

## 7. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 90:16 (Sefaria translation)

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

One who travels and reaches a city and wishes to spend the night there, if there is a place up to 4 *mil* ahead of them where the inhabitants pray in a minyan, the traveller needs to go there. And if the place is behind them, they need to go to it up to a distance of 1 *mil*, in order to pray in a minyan....

## 8. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, Mishnah Berurah 90:29 (Feldheim translation)

אנוס - היינו שתש כחו אף שאינו חולה. ואם הוא אנוס 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 דהילוק יש בין מניעת ריוח לבין הפסד מכיסו וכ"כ בשם יעקב והעיד על הגאון מוה' זלמן מירל"ש אב"ד דק"ק האמבורג שפעם אחת הלך לבהכ"נ מעוטף בטלית ותפילין כדרכו ופגע בו אדם אחד שהיה לו למכור אבנים טובות ורצה שילך עמו לביתו והגאון השיב לו שימתין עד שיבוא מבהכ"נ"ס ובתוך כך מוכרן לאחר והאחר הרויח בהם כמה אלפים ר"ט ושמה הגאון שמחה גדולה שהשליך מנגד ממון רב עבור תפלת צבור [מגן גבורים].

Compelling circumstances - i.e., if one is weak, even though he is not ill. If one is restrained by monetary considerations from praying with the congregation, the ruling is as follows: If he would incur loss because of the effort to pray with the congregation, he may pray as an individual at home or in the Synagogue without the congregation. However, where [mere] abstention from profit is involved, he should not refrain from praying with the congregation, since there is a difference between abstention from profit and loss of what is already in one's pocket. This is likewise stated by the author of the work *Sheyu Ya'akov*. He testifies to the following story of the Gaon, our Rabbi and teacher, Zalman Mirels, who was head of the Beit Din in the holy congregation of Hamburg. On one occasion, the Gaon went to the synagogue wrapped in a *tallit* and wearing *tefillin*, as was his practice. Someone who had precious stones to sell met him and wished that he should go home with him. The Gaon answered him that he should wait until he returns from the Synagogue. In the meanwhile, the person sold the precious stones to someone else, and the other person earned several thousand reichsthaler through them. The Gaon rejoiced with great joy at having cast aside much money for the sake of the mitzvah of praying with the congregation. [*Magen Giborim*]

## 9. Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, Kaf HaChaim, Orach Chaim 90:56

זקן שקשה עליו היציאה מביתו לבה"כ בזמ' הקור והגשמים מותר לו מן הדין להתפלל בביתו ביחיד...

An elderly person, for whom it is difficult to leave his house to go to the synagogue in times of cold weather and rain - it is permitted for him, according to the basic law, to pray alone in his house.

## 10. Talmud, Pesachim 8b (Koren translation)

והאמר רבי אלעזר: שלוחי מצוה אינן ניזוקין! - היכא דשכיח היזיקא שאני...

**But didn't Rabbi Elazar say that those on the path to perform a mitzva are not susceptible to harm throughout the process of performing the mitzva?** The Gemara responds: In a place **where danger is commonplace it is different**, as one should not rely on a miracle...

בעו מיניה מרב: הני בני בי רב דדיירי בבאגא מהו למיתי קדמא וחשוכא לבי רב? אמר להו: ניתו, עלי ועל צוארי. ניזיל מאי? אמר להו: לא ידענא.

**They raised a dilemma before Rav:** With regard to those members of the school of Rav who live in the fields [*baga*] far away from the city, **what is the halakha** as to whether they may **come early** before dawn **and** in the evening after **dark to Rav's school**, or should they be concerned about robbers? **He said to them: Let them come**, and responsibility for their safety is **upon me and my neck**. They asked him: **What is your opinion about returning home?** **He said to them: I do not know** if it is possible to rely on the protection of the mitzva when returning home.

## 11. Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, Kaf HaChaim, Orach Chaim 90:57

אסור לסכן בעצמו להשכים ולצאת יחידי בדרך חצי שעה קודם אור היום כדי להגיע לכפר ההוא להתפלל עמהם.

It is forbidden to endanger oneself to get up early and travel alone on the road a half hour before daybreak in order to arrive at a village [where there is a *minyan*] to pray with them.

## 12. Talmud, Pesachim 64b (Koren translation)

רבא אמר נועלין תנן ולא סמכינן אניסא.

**Rava said:** We learned in the mishnah that people would close the doors, and we do not rely on a miracle to ensure that the courtyard not become overly crowded.

## 13. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat 2:3 (chabad.org translation)

אָסוּר לְהִתְמַהֵמֵה בְּחִלּוּל שַׁבָּת לְחֹלָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ סִכְנָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה) "אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחַי בָּהֶם" וְלֹא שְׂיִמּוּת בָּהֶם. הָא לְמַדְתָּ שֶׁאִין מְשַׁפְּטֵי הַתּוֹרָה נִקְמָה בְּעוֹלָם אֲלֵא רַחֲמִים וְחֶסֶד וְשְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם. וְאֵלּוּ הָאֲפִיקוֹרוֹסִים שֶׁאֹמְרִים שֶׁזֶה חִלּוּל שַׁבָּת וְאִסוּר עֲלֵיהֶן הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר (יִחְזָקָל כ כה) "גַּם אֲנִי נָתַתִּי לָהֶם חֻקִּים לֹא טוֹבִים וּמְשַׁפְּטִים לֹא יִחְיּוּ בָהֶם."

It is forbidden to hesitate before transgressing the Sabbath [laws] on behalf of a person who is dangerously ill, as [reflected in the interpretation in the phrase of Leviticus 18:5,] "which a person shall perform to live through them," as "[to live through them] and not to die through them."

This teaches that the judgments of the Torah do not [bring] vengeance to the world, but rather bring mercy, kindness, and peace to the world. Concerning those non-believers who say that [administering such treatment] constitutes a violation of the Sabbath and is forbidden, one may apply the verse [Ezekiel 20:25]: "[As punishment,] I gave them harmful laws and judgments through which they cannot live."

## 14. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, p. 34 (Kaplan translation)

"The saving of a life overrides the commandments of the entire Torah; and he shall live by them and not die by them. Desecrate one Sabbath on his account that he may keep many Sabbaths" [Yoma 85b]. This law is the watchword of Judaism. "An authority who allows himself to be consulted [when a life is in danger] is reprehensible, and he who consults him (rather than speedily acting to save the life in danger) is a murderer" (Tur, Orah Hayyim 328). Maimonides, that master of conciseness, deviated from his regular manner and treated this issue with great elaborateness...

The teachings of the Torah do not oppose the laws of life and reality, for were they to clash with this world and were they to negate the value of concrete, physiological-biological existence, then they would contain not mercy, lovingkindness, and peace but vengeance and wrath.

## 15. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "Parshat Vayigash: Strength and Submissiveness" (chabad.org translation)

The Rebbe [Rayatz] once recounted that his [maternal] grandfather and namesake used to say that he made a point of praying together with a *minyan*. One day, when he was observed to be still deep in his prayers after all of that morning's *minyanim* had ended, he was asked how such a *davenen* could be called *tefillah betzibbur*, congregational prayer.

"*Tefillah betzibbur*," he replied, "means congregating and marshaling all ten faculties of one's soul."