

Prayer Priorities

Excerpted and adapted from a shiur by HaRav Chaim Weg

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https://baishavaad.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BER81_008_Vayishlach_Tefillah_Time_Tefillah_in_Times_of_Trouble_Mussaf_More.mp3

Please save me from my brother, from Eisav . . .

Bereishis 32:12

The Gemara (Brachos 26b) derives from the *pasuk* of “*Vayifga bamakom*” in *Parshas Vayeitzei* (Bereishis 28:11) that Yaakov instituted the daily *tefilah* of Ma’ariv. In this *pasuk* in *Parshas Vayishlach*, Yaakov engages in *tefilah b’eis tzarah* (prayer in a time of crisis) and asks Hashem to save him. These two forms of *tefilah* parallel the Rambam’s description of two *mitzvos d’Oraisa* of *tefilah*: daily *tefilah*, which the Rambam derives from the *pasuk* of “*Va’avadetem es Hashem Elokeichem*” (Shemos 23:25), and crying out to Hashem in times of distress, which the Rambam lists (Mitzvah 59) together with blowing the trumpets.

The Ramban (*Hasagah* 5) disagrees with the Rambam and considers daily *tefilah* a *mitzvah d’Rabanan*, though he seems to agree that *tefilah* during times of distress is a *d’Oraisa* obligation.

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 106:2) rules that women are obligated in the *mitzvah* of *tefilah* (i.e., *Shmoneh Esrei*) because it is not a time-bound *mitzvah*. According to the Magein Avraham, this ruling follows the Rambam that daily *tefilah* is a *mitzvah d’Oraisa* but no specific time is Biblically necessary. The Magein Avraham therefore holds that women must only say a short *tefilah* with a *bakashah* (request) daily but are exempt from the *mitzvah d’Rabanan* of a full *Shmoneh Esrei*.

The Ramban would hold that Chazal instituted *tefilah* (i.e., *Shmoneh Esrei*) as time-bound (Shacharis in the morning, Minchah in the afternoon, and Ma’ariv at night), but women are obligated (despite usually being exempt from time-bound *mitzvos*) because they, too, must daven to Hashem for mercy (see Brachos 20b). The Mishnah Brurah in fact rules, based on the Ramban, that women are obligated to recite the full *Shmoneh Esrei* of Shacharis and Minchah. Nevertheless, the Chafetz Chaim is reported (by his son in Sichos HeChafetz Chaim, Vol. 1, 27) to have told his wife she was exempt from Shacharis and Minchah while she was busy fulfilling the *mitzvah* of raising her young children.