

2. A woman who is so involved in caring for children that she cannot spare the short time necessary to recite *Shemoneh Esrey* is nevertheless obligated to recite a short prayer.² This prayer must begin with an expression of

time during the day. The time-bound aspects of this *mitzvah* derive from Rabbinic decrees, which set forth specific hours and wordings. In his view, the *mitzvah* requiring women to pray refers only to the commandment as required by Torah Law. The *Magen Avraham* 106:2 reports that, following the *Rambam's* ruling, it was customary for women to say some short prayer each day but not the *Shemoneh Esrey*. (The necessary elements of these short prayers are discussed in paragraph 2.)

The *Ramban*, on the other hand, maintains that Torah Law only requires prayer when one is in actual distress. In his view, the requirement of daily prayer is entirely Rabbinic and equally binding on both men and women. Women must recite the *Shacharith* and *Minchah Shemoneh Esrey* in spite of the fact that these prayers are to be recited within specific hours. The *Ramban* overrides the general exemption of women from time-bound *mitzvot* by interpreting *Chazal* (in Tractate *Berakhoth* 20b) to be saying that prayer, an act of requesting mercy from God, is equally incumbent on men and women, since they both need Divine beneficence.

The *Mishnah Berurah* rules: "The *Ramban's* opinion is accepted by the majority of halakhic authorities... Women should therefore be instructed to recite the entire *Shemoneh Esrey* twice each day, in the morning and afternoon."

A similar view is found in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Shmuel, Remez* 80): " 'And Channa prayed' — This is a source for a woman's obligation to pray, for Channa recited the Eighteen Blessings." (See also *Kaf HaChayim* 70:1.)

Most women do not recite the *Ma'ariv Shemoneh Esrey*. Although the Talmudic ruling that *Ma'ariv* is voluntary applies to men as well, men have accepted evening prayer as an obligation from early times. Women have not done so, and therefore it remains truly voluntary for them. See paragraph 31.

2. In *Sichoth Chafetz Chayim*, Chapter 1, par. 27, Rav Aryeh Leib, the son of the *Chafetz Chayim*, writes, "My mother, of Sainted Memory, hardly ever recited *Shemoneh Esrey* as long as we were in

praise to God (*shevach*), followed by a personal request (*bakashah*) and words of thanksgiving (*hoda'ah*).³

her care. She told me that my father had exempted her from this obligation because she was constantly involved in raising her children."

R. Dov Eisenberg, writing in *A Guide for the Jewish Woman and Girl*, p. 30, reports, "I have heard from HaGaon Rav Yaacov Kanievsky that a woman who is involved in child care has the halakhic status of one who is attending a sick person and is exempt from the obligation to pray." (See also *Mo'adim Uz'manim*, Vol. 1, Chapter 9.) Still, a woman who can find a few moments to recite *Shacharith* and *Minchah* is required to do so. In addition to fulfilling her obligations, she will be enriching the spiritual atmosphere of her home. Seeing their mother take time for prayer will definitely make a strong impression on children. She should not be overly concerned if she cannot concentrate properly during the entire *Shemoneh Esrey*. In strained circumstances, she can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Tefillah* even if she only concentrates during the first blessing. See *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim* 101:1.

3. According to the *Rambam's* view, cited in note 1, a woman's short prayer must include *shevach*, *bakashah* and *hoda'ah* to satisfy the minimum criteria of the *mitzvah* of *Tefillah*. Although he maintains that Torah Law does not require fixed or formal prayers, he does insist that they conform to a specific structure: "The obligation of this commandment is as follows: A person should supplicate and pray each day by relating words of praise to God (*shevach*) and afterwards asking [God to grant] his individual needs (*bakashah*)...Afterwards, he should express praise and thanksgiving to God for all the good that He has bestowed upon him (*hoda'ah*)" (*Hilkhoth Tefillah* 1:2). See also *Mo'adim Uz'manim*, Vol. 1, Chapter 9.

The *Pri Megadim*, in his introduction to the Laws of Prayer, states that a woman who has recited a specific prayer, even *Ma'ariv*, three times in a row, must continue the practice, as she is considered to have taken a vow. She may be released from it only by having the vow formally annulled. But *Rivevoth Ephrayim*, Vol. 1, No. 173, cites the decision of HaGaon Rav Eliezer Yehudah Valdenberg, who takes an opposing view, maintaining that it does not constitute a vow. See also *Noam*, Vol. 12, p. 140.