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DAVENING AT HOME

While many of us are confined to our homes during this period, one should remember that we are not helpless. Yakov Avinu describes his conquest of lands in Canaan as have being done "Becharbi Ubekashti", with my "sword and my bow". Onkelos translates these words as "Tzelusi UVa'usee", two different words for prayer. The Netziv (Nechemiah 8:2) explains that "Tzelusi" refers to the power of the study of Torah, and Va'usee refers to tefillah. Someone once asked Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlit"a, why did Yakov not simply say "I learned and I davened", and rather use a parable of a sword? Rav Chaim answered "it is not a mashal, it is real. Yakov Avinu understood that the real weaponry are his Torah and Tefillah!!"

With that in mind, we present some of the halachos one should be cognizant of when davening at home:

Proper Places for Davening

- One should be sure to daven in an area that is free of distraction. For example, one should avoid davening in an open area, like a field or park (Shulchan Aruch 90:5). However, a backyard that is enclosed by a fence is not considered open, and one may daven there (MB 12).
- Chazal state that one who establishes a set place for davening will receive assistance from Hashem, just like Avraham Avinu (Berachos 6b). Meiri explains that when one is in a new place, they find new things there to become distracted by. Although this also applies to establishing for oneself a set shul to daven in, and even a specific seat in shul, Rabbeinu Yonah comments that this halacha is primarily stated for one who is davening at home.
- Mishnah Berurah writes that the 4 amos radius of set place is considered to be all one spot. Therefore, if his spot is not accessible for some reason, one can sit within 7.5 feet and will satisfy this halacha.
- Although one is forbidden from davening in a shul that does not have a mechitzah, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe OC 1:39 and more) explains that this is only in a place that is open to the public, like a shul. Any area that people come by invitation only, no mechitzah is needed. (That is why people will daven at a chasuna, even without

a formal mechitza). Therefore, one davening at home, can do so without a mechitzah, even if there are members of the opposite gender in the room. It goes without saying that one may only daven in a room in which all the people are appropriately dressed.

Looking Around the Room

- One should not daven in the line of vision of pictures or murals hanging on the wall, as it will disturb concentration on the davening (see Ishei Yisroel 9:24). Certainly, a potential distraction sitting in one's hand or pocket should be put elsewhere before starting to daven.
- Also, one may not daven in front of a mirror, even with closing one's eyes (MB 90:71). This includes a glass door, especially at night, when images are reflected clearly. However, being that it is not an actual mirror, one who must daven in such a spot, may close their eyes while davening (see Shevet HaLevi 9:21).
- Chazal tell us that one should daven in a room that has a window(s). This adds a sense of awe to the davening and helps to focus on who we are davening to (SA 90:4, MB 8).
- We derive from King Chizkiyahu that it's advantageous to not have a separation between a person and the wall (Berachos 5b, MB 23). Something that is built into the wall or floor, like a bookcase, or even something not bolted down, but there permanently, is not a concern. Also, an item used to assist the person in davening such as a shtender, even if it is large, is not considered a separation. (MB 66, See Ishei Yisroel 9 ft 57).

Proper Attire

- Many have recently learnt the gemara in Mesechta Shabbos (10a) that one must wear proper attire for davening. Whatever that criteria is, it may not be lessened when davening at home. [When Rav Moshe Feinstein was bedridden with an illness, he suddenly got up, got fully dressed with his tie, frock and hat. His grandson asked him "is the Rosh Yeshiva going somewhere?" Rav Moshe responded, "I am davening Maariv!"]

The Davening

- Chazal tell us about the great benefit of davening with the sunrise (neitz hachama), known as kevasikin. Poskim deliberate if one who is always scrupulous to daven at this time can forgo on davening with a minyan (see Biur Halacha 58). However, in the current situation where a minyan is unavailable, it would certainly be preferable to daven “vasikin”.

- Poskim provide guidance for one running late, which parts of pesukei dezimra to skip in order to be able to daven shemonai esrei with the minyan. One who is davening alone does not have this leniency, and one should be sure to daven all parts of davening.

- Tachanun is not recited leaning on the arm, as this is only performed in the presence of a Sefer Torah. Although some poskim suggest to at least be seated while saying tachanun, Dayan Fuerst shlit”a maintains that it may be recited while standing.

Eating Before Davening Mincha/Maariv

- While the prohibition of eating before Shacharis is well known, the halacha that one may not eat a meal before davening Mincha or Maariv is less famous. (This also includes restrictions on engaging in work or napping.) This is because many people rely on the fact that if they have a set minyan for mincha/maariv, they may eat beforehand.

- This solution is not available to us now, and it would therefore be forbidden to eat a meal, nap or work, from one 1/2 hour before mincha ketana (2 and ¼ halachic hours before shekiya. This Thursday in Chicago that was at 5:19pm), until after davening Mincha. Similarly, once it reaches one half hour before nightfall (tzeis hakochovim) one would have to recite Krias Shema and daven maariv before engaging in these activities.

- There is a solution to appoint a shomer, a watchperson, who will remind them to daven. An affective shomer is only one who has either already davened, or has no obligation to daven. Dayan Fuerst shlit”a advises that setting an alarm is a valid alternative to a shomer (and might be even better, as it will not forget).

Shabbos Davening

- When reciting Lecha Dodi, even one davening alone should turn around to the west when reciting Bo’ee BeShalom (Ishei Yisroel 36 nt32 from Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlit”a).

- One who has a minhag to recite Yotzros may say them after Shacharis and Mussaf respectively

- One should read the week’s Parsha from a chumash. Besides for the mitzvah of Krias Hatorah, there is a second halacha, that every yid should read/hear the entire Torah

over one year. If needed this can be accomplished with the reading from a chumash (see Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 25:14, Igros Moshe OC 4:23). It can also be counted as part of Shenayim Mikra V’echad Targum.

- One should also read the week’s Haftarah.

- On Shabbos the majority of poskim rule that one davening alone should only recite the first “yekum purkan”, skipping the second one as well as the “mi shebeirach” that follows (Siddur Yaavetz, Derech Hachaim, Shaarei Efraim, see MB 101:19, Har Tzvi OC 64)

- One may recite Birchah Hachodesh even b’yichidus.

- At Shabbos Mincha, one should say “v’ani tefilasi etc.” even though there is no k’rias hatorah (MB 292:2)

Rosh Chodesh

- One may recite a beracha on the Hallel of Rosh Chodesh.