misconception: The main purpose of davening (praying) with a minyan is to be able to recite davenir shebekedushah (prayers with the status of sanctity), such as Kaddish, Kedushah and Baruch. Facts: There are many advantages to davening in shul with a minyan: creating community; davening slower and with more kavanah (concentration); responding to Kaddish, et cetera, and hearing the Torah reading. But the main halachic goal of praying with a minyan is to say Shemoneh Esrei simultaneously with a quorum—which is the technical definition of tefillah betzibbur (congregation prayer).

Background: The Mishnah Berurah (90:28), citing the Chaye Adam (19:1), sets the record straight. The main purpose of tefillah betzibbur is Shemoneh Esrei with the congregation.1

Significant authorities maintain that tefillah betzibbur necessitates that there be ten people actually davening together, not just ten people present. According to these posekim, if there are six people davening who are joined by four others who have not actually davened, the former may recite Kaddish and Kedushah, but they do not get the benefit of tefillah betzibbur. (This is not to imply that the saying of davenir shebekedushah is not a valid motivation for davening with a minyan, but the most significant reason to do so is to be able to recite the Shemoneh Esrei with the minyan.) The Tur notes that one’s prayers are “heard” only when recited with a minyan in a synagogue (OC 90, quoting and explaining Rabbenu Chananel, Berachot 2a).

We find in the Gemara (Berachot 2a) that Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, referring to the Minchah prayer (ibid., 5:6). In other words, certain mitzvot, like strengthening a “weak” minyan, blowing shofar for others and preventing another person’s desecration of Shabbat override tefillah betzibbur. The Mishnah Berurah (236a:14) rules that it is better to daven Minchah privately rather than do so with a minyan even if by doing so his replacement will violate Shabbat (ibid., 5:6). In other words, certain mitzvot, like strengthening a “weak” minyan, blowing shofar for others and preventing another person’s desecration of Shabbat override tefillah betzibbur.

There is a story told of Rav Archik who regularly does not finish Shemoneh Esrei in time for Kedushah, he should switch it so that he could daven with a minyan if by doing so his replacement will violate Shabbat (ibid., 5:6). In a similar vein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, following his grandfather, rules that it is preferable to daven privately rather than do so with a minyan that requires the recitation of Shema and its blessings after the proper time.

There is no obligation to pay people in order to make a minyan (MB 55:66). However, in a town that has trouble getting a minyan, those in the midst of learning Torah should take a break in order to help make one (MB 55:73). Some authorities hold that there is no requirement to experience either a loss of money or a significant amount of time in order to daven with a minyan (MB 90:29, MA 671:12).

The Magen Avraham (671:12) states that a person who, on occasion, is tied up with business is not obligated to attend shul. Interestingly, a sick person who was instructed by his physician to leave his house at most once a day was told by Rav Auerbach to use that opportunity to go to work rather than shul (Halichot Shlomo, 66, note 32).

Similarly, if one regularly davens at his house in Lomzha and Shavil, he should “make an effort” to daven with a minyan in shul, he would use that area. There is a story told of Rav Archik who regularly does not finish Shemoneh Esrei in time for Kedushah, he should switch it so that he could daven with a minyan if by doing so his replacement will violate Shabbat (ibid., 5:6). In a similar vein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, following his grandfather, rules that it is preferable to daven privately rather than do so with a minyan that requires the recitation of Shema and its blessings after the proper time.

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Therefore, if one is a “slow daver” and regularly does not finish Shemoneh Esrei in time for Kedushah, many authorities advise that he start Shemoneh Esrei with the congregation—then Shacharit and Shacharit—so that his Minchah will not finish in time for Kedushah, he should take a break in order to help make one (MB 55:73). Some authorities hold that there is no requirement to experience either a loss of money or a significant amount of time in order to daven with a minyan (MB 90:29, MA 671:12).

The Brisker Rav, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, had an open house in which the poor would make themselves at home, any time of day or night. They saw him as a private Rav. Sometimes, instead of davening with a minyan in shul, he would use that area. There is a story told of Rav Archik who regularly does not finish Shemoneh Esrei in time for Kedushah, he should switch it so that he could daven with a minyan if by doing so his replacement will violate Shabbat (ibid., 5:6). In a similar vein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, following his grandfather, rules that it is preferable to daven privately rather than do so with a minyan that requires the recitation of Shema and its blessings after the proper time.

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Perhaps the most notable inference of this is that one who lives near shul, has had gone shopping, and there was no one at home to offer a potential visitor a bite of food. Clearly, Rav Bakes attended minyan the majority of the time, but certain obligations supersede minyan attendance.

Having said all this, it is a mitzvah to daven with a minyan! The Shulchan Aruch (OC 90:9) writes that a person should “make an effort” (yitnudah) to daven with a minyan. Note that he does not write “one must.” Because of this, some deduce that it is meritorious but not obligatory to daven with a minyan. Rav Moshe (Iggerot Moshe OC 2:27) says that there is actually an obligation, and one should not deduce anything less from the Shulchan Aruch.2 Even those who disagree with Rav Moshe have to admit that the Shulchan Aruch requires that “one make a significant effort” to daven with a minyan. Thus, the mecha’erim rules (OC 90:16) that a person who is...
traveling not for the sake of a mitzvah must retrace his steps up to a mil (mile) and advance up to four mil to catch a minyan.

The Talmud (Berachot 47b) states that Rabbi Eliezer once freed a non-Jewish slave, thus granting him the status of a full-fledged Jew, so that he could be the tenth man in a minyan. He did this, despite the prohibition of freeing a non-Jewish slave, because of the importance of the mitzvah of minyan.

Minyan is so important that although one may not wake his father for great financial loss, he may wake him for minyan (Chayei Adam 67:11).

Are women obligated in minyan to the same degree as men? And if not, is there at least merit in their davening with a minyan? There is a story in the Talmud about a widow who used to daven in Rav Tochanani’s beit midrash (Sancta 22a). Rav Yochanan questioned the fact that she traveled to his beit midrash, which was much farther than her local shul. He did not, however, question her attendance per se, implying that it is virtuous for a woman to participate in communal prayer. Nonetheless, Shu”t Yosef Yitzchak CSF 3:54 and Shu”t Tzitz Teveshah Mekor Chaim 2:229 rule that a woman has no obligation to daven with a minyan. Because of this, the students of Rav Auerbach (Halichot Shlomo I, 61, note 10) point out that a woman who arrives late to shul has no reason to follow the rules about “catching up” that enable one to say Shemoneh Esrei with a minyan.

It may not be necessary for the ten to be together. Rav Soloveitchik ruled that even if one is in another room, he may still have the advantage of the minyan, just as he may daven shavel bekebechah (see Mignone Halakha [2001], 41). It may not be necessary to actually daven. Rav Auerbach (Halichot Shlomo 5:11, note 17) rules that a recent halal tevodah who does not know how to daven can count as part of the ten necessary for tefilah betzibbur because he understands the point of davening, and he beseeches God in his own way.

6. Halichot Shlomo 5:8, Iggro Moshe OC 1:28, Teshuvot Yehoshua 1:102. Rav Ovedi Yosef (Toyf 5745), 145, agreed on Vehava Dvar 5:7 and Rav YY. Weiss (Minachat Yitzchak 9:6-7, 10:10) disagree with this. To a limited extent, Rav Sternbach agrees (Teshuvot Yehoshua 1:102). See also Yeru Yosef, 102, note 15.

5. Rav Moshe was asked if a talmid chacham could stay up all night, knowing that he would miss morning minyan. One of Rav Moshe’s reasons for responding in the negative was that the individual would miss saying all of the davenin shebekebechah, which brings one’s davening to a higher level (Iggro Moshe OC 2:27, p. 210).

6. See Beit Yosef, s.v. be tezribul.

7. See Pesika who explains that the Tzu’s opinion is that even without a minyan, it is still preferable to daven in a shul. See the seemingly contradictory Rambam that implies that even communal prayer must be “kele vishalmon—with a sincere heart” in order to be accepted, and the resolution suggested by Rabbi Akiva Eiger on Ramah (Eduino Teshuvot 2:6). On the topic of prayers being answered, see the Melech Chacham to Deuteronomy 48:22. 19. As noted, not everyone requires starting with the tzibbur. The Pri Megadim (Eidelberg Avraham 422:21) suggests that on Rosh Chodesh the shavel bekebechah (seston) start Shemoneh Esrei of Shachrit ahead of the congregation so that he will reach Yisheleh Veyavo first, and then say those words aloud as a reminder to others. Many people miss starting Shmonim Evirot with the congregation on Rosh Chodesh when aflin are removed before Musaf (SC, 25:13, 423:4). Since some take longer than others to wrap their aflin, it’s a good idea to remove the aflin before Musaf but to wrap them afterwards.

10. Note that this does not work for Shachrit because linking gnudal to tefilah takes precedence over tefilah betzibbur. 11. An interesting opinion advises against skipping parts of pesukei dezimra in order to catch up. See Rabbi Chaim David Halevi, Meikor Chaim 5:176, 175–176. He notes that the specific order of prayer ordained by Chazal is of utmost significance (cf. Iggro Moshe OC 2:16). As such, one who arrives late to shul is faced with two conflicting concepts: tefilah betzibbur and the rabbinically prescribed sequence of prayer. The obvious ideal, emphasized by the “Maggid” to the meshivah (see Eitz Hayyim 52:1), is to get to shul on time. However, one who either comes late or who always daven slower than the congregation has a dilemma. The halachah, which is agreed upon by all earlier and later authorities, is that one should skip, says Rabbi Halevi. Nonetheless, there are those who advise testing all of davening in order (Shiurim Teshuvot 52:1 in the name of Yosef Ometz). It is reported that many great people acted in such a manner (Kaf HaChametz 52:2). Taking a highly unusual position, Rabbi Halevi concludes that it is hard for him to rule against the Shulchan Aruch—who like everybody else says that one should skip—and therefore he leaves it up to each person to determine whether he prefers to get the merits of tefilah betzibbur or that of pesukei dezimra. He concludes by saying, “Kol levavot doreich Hashem,” “For the Lord searches all hearts” (1 Chronicles 28:9).

12. See, however, Teitz Eliezer 14:6 for discussion and qualifications, and Iggro Moshe OC 4:68 who disagrees.


14. Vehava Dvar 5:22 who states the opposite.

15. See Nefesh HaRav, 114. I am indebted to Rabbi Avihu David for pointing this out to me.

16. See, however, Teshuvot Yehoshua 1:98. The exception is for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch and Rema OC 55:21 and Teshuvot Yehoshua and Beit Halachot loc. cit.).

17. Rav Yosef Pesach Feinhandler, Moser Yisrael (5755), 6:5, note 7, in the name of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv.

18. “Regularly” is defined as with a pattern (i.e., every day or every Rosh Chodesh, et cetera).


21. Ibid., 1267. See ibid Yosef 12:30, and note 72.

22. See Minachat Yitzchak 7:6 on the level of obligation, and for another way to understand the meshivah. 23. The two solutions explain that the mitzvah referred to is tefilah betzibbur. Surprisingly Rashi and Rosh understand that the mitzvah was that of saying davenin shebekebe- chah. The Shulchan Aruch (YD 267:79) rules that it is prohibited to free a non-Jewish slave, however, for a mitzvah, any mitzvah, even a rabbinical such as minyan, it is permitted (e.g., Aruch Hashulchan, 90:21; Shulchan Aruch Harav, 90:17). But the meshivah does not specify what aspect of minyan he is referring to.

24. For numerous sources on women’s obligation, or lack of one, to daven with a minyan, see note 13.

25. The story appears in Tzitz Teveshah Ekev 871.