

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 30:

1. **Tefillat Haderech - The traveler's prayer.** When a person makes a long journey, he says a prayer known as tefillat haderech. The gemara gives us text for this prayer: "May it be Your will, Lord our G-d, that You lead me in peace, lead me in the correct way, and assist me on my way in peace, and save me from harmful and dangerous people on the way. Give to me to be seen with charm, grace, kindness, and compassion in Your eyes and in the eyes of those who see me. Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Who hears our prayer." Today we say a similar version of this prayer, but in the plural. We do not pray simply for our own safety while traveling, but rather we pray as part of a community. As a general principle, it is better to use the plural while praying. That is because if you pray as an individual, G-d will judge you individually, scrutinizing all of your deeds and seeing the good and the bad, but if you pray for the community, G-d will judge the community as a whole and individual failings will be far less pronounced. Praying in the plural makes even more sense for tefillat haderech, because you really do need to pray for the community. If you're on a plane, for example, there are a lot of other people on the plane with you. Would you pray only for your own safety and ignore everyone else in the air with you? You should even pray for people on other planes, because air traffic control is a careful dance and your safety depends on that dance being successful for all the planes in the sky. In a car you may be by yourself, but there are other cars on the highway and it can be dangerous if any of them run into trouble. How do you look at yourself - as an island or as part of a whole? If you want to be just an individual, then you'd better be strong enough to stand on your own merits. Praying in the plural allows us to transcend that ego.
2. **When to say the traveler's prayer.** Tefillat haderech is only for journeys; it's not something you say when you're going downtown. Rabbi Yaakov says in the name of Rav Chisda that you should only say the prayer if you have gone a parsa (about four kilometers, the distance one can walk in 72 minutes) outside of your area. For example, if you live in New York City, you would have to leave the city, go past the suburbs, and travel another 72 minutes before saying the traveler's prayer. Rav Ovadia Yosef rules similarly about birchat hagomel, that it should be said after traveling 72 minutes beyond your area. Most Ashkenazik poskim, however, only require birchat hagomel to be recited after a more significant trip, like over an ocean. Rav Soloveitchik used to fly regularly between Boston and New York, and he would not say tefillat haderech on these trips because they felt simply like a commute. Today, most people say tefillat haderech anytime they get on a plane, because planes feel dangerous (though in reality, a person is more likely to be in a car accident than a plane accident). The prayer should be said at takeoff or soon after. It's called the traveler's prayer, but it's about taking leave of wherever you are. Therefore, some say that if you miss that window and you're already mid-flight, you shouldn't be saying it with Hashem's name.
3. **When entering and leaving an unfriendly town.** The gemara lists additional prayers for when you are traveling to an unfriendly town. It would be the kind of place that has a border and some kind of passport control, where it's not easy to get in and out. When you are entering the town, you should say "G-d, may it be Your will that I enter into this city in peace." Once you've entered, say, "I give acknowledgment and thanks before You, G-d, that I've entered in peace." Upon getting ready to leave, say, "May it be Your will that I should leave in peace." And once you've departed, say, "May it be Your will that I go in peace and I be assisted in peace and that my pathway be in peace, and that I be safe from any enemies on the way." One opinion says the gemara is referring to the type of town that will kill someone without a judge or jury. Another opinion says even if the town has a judicial system, you should still say the prayers. However,

many codifiers of halacha say that all of these prayers are part of tefillat haderech, so today we do not typically say them all separately.

4. **Praying on a plane.** You're riding on your donkey and the time comes to daven. What do you do? If there is someone with you who can hold your donkey, then dismount and daven. If not, stay on the donkey and daven there. Rebbe says even if there is someone who can hold the donkey, you do not need to dismount before davening. This is because when you're on the road your mind isn't settled, and getting off your donkey will make you even less settled. You would have more kavanah staying on the donkey. Rava says in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that the halacha is like Rebbe. So if you're driving, do you have to pull over to the side of the road to say tefillat haderech? That's often not safe, and most people don't do it. Of course, if you need to read the prayer from a siddur, you should definitely pull off the road to do that. Note that the gemara is not talking just about tefillat haderech but about prayer in general. What about on a plane? The majority of poskim say that there is no obligation, and in fact it might even be prohibited, to make a minyan on a plane. Sometimes people try to do it because it feels like the "religious" thing to do. But that doesn't make it right, any more than the people who insisted on having minyanim during the COVID-19 lockdown when everyone was saying to avoid gathering were right. Some say that, while traveling, you should daven in your seat, and then when you arrive at your destination you should daven again because you probably didn't really have kavanah the first time. But today, we don't have the custom to repeat our davening when we didn't have the right kavanah, because most of us almost never have the right kavanah anyway, so if we repeat the prayer we probably still wouldn't have kavanah.
5. **Dreaming of the Land.** If a person is praying and can't figure out the directions, he should intend his heart towards his Father in Heaven. If he is outside the land of Israel, he should intend his heart (Tosfot says this means he should face) Israel. If he is in Israel, he should face Jerusalem. If he is in Jerusalem, he should face the Beis Hamikdash. If he is in the Beis Hamikdash, he should face the Holy of Holies. If he is in the Holy of Holies, he should face the kapores. If he is on the other side of the kapores, he should see himself as if in front of the kapores. Wherever we are in the world, when we pray we face G-d's home, and we pray that He return His presence to it. So many of our prayers focus on rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. Some non-believers critique us for that, saying that if we didn't believe so strongly in Jerusalem we would have given up a long time ago. But this is our strength. We have an ancient homeland, and we've never given up on it. If we didn't constantly dream of returning to the Land, we could be subjugated. But we never stop. Throughout our history we have always dreamed of Israel and prayed for it. The founders of secular Zionism might not themselves have prayed, but they knew how central Israel is to our prayers. They knew how important it was to have a homeland that we could count on, that could protect us.
6. **Should Shemonah Esrei wait for Shema?** Some rabbis, who were lecturers, would wake up very early in the morning, before the time for saying the Shema. This would have been after dawn but before sunrise. So these rabbis would say the Shemonah Esrei, and then later, when they were on their travels and the time came for Shema, they would say Shema. A tanna taught a similar teaching: If you're traveling and it's too early to say the Shema, you can do other mitzvot that start after dawn, and then say the Shema when it is late enough. But Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says it is better to wait to say the Shemonah Esrei until later, so that you can say the Shema and then immediately say Shemonah Esrei, connecting the redemption to the tefillah. So if you have to get up early to travel, what should you do? If later you won't be able to stand for Shemonah Esrei because you're traveling, perhaps it's better to say it early when you can stand up. But it's not a simple answer. Most people do wait and try to say Shema and Shemonah Esrei together.

7. **Mussaf without a minyan.** Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says the mussaf prayer can only be said in a group. The sages disagree. Rabbi Yehuda says if there is a minyan happening but you're not part of it, you don't need to say mussaf on your own, but if there is no minyan at all, you should say it. Why would mussaf require a minyan? Shacharit doesn't. But mussaf is different because the mussaf offering was communal. The daily tamid offerings were also communal, but everyone agrees that we have a personal obligation to ask for Divine mercy with daily prayer. So we might think that without a community, we can say shacharit but should not say mussaf. Nonetheless, the halacha is that we can say mussaf without a minyan. Rav Ami and Rav Asi lived in Teveriah, where there were many minyanim, but they always prayed by themselves, between the pillars where they would study. It was important to them to connect the power of their Torah with the power of their prayers. They set a precedent for finding a spiritually powerful place to daven, even if there is no minyan in that place.
8. **Rosh Chodesh.** If you forget to mention Rosh Chodesh (ie. say *yaaleh v'yavo*) in maariv, you don't need to repeat it because you're going to say it again in the morning. If you forget in shacharit, you don't need to repeat it because you will say it in mussaf. And if you miss it in mussaf, you don't need to repeat it because you will say it in mincha. Rabbi Yochanan says that this only applies if you are davening in a shul where the chazzan is going to repeat the Shemonah Esrei. Since you will hear the chazzan this time, and say *yaaleh v'yavo* yourself in the next prayer, you don't need to repeat the current prayer. This is not actually the halacha today – with the exception of maariv, our practice is to repeat Shemonah Esrei if we forget *yaaleh v'yavo*. Why don't we repeat the Shemonah Esrei in maariv? Perhaps this makes sense when Rosh Chodesh is two days and you have the whole next day to say *yaaleh v'yavo*, but what if Rosh Chodesh is only one day? Rav Ashi explains that since the new month is only proclaimed during the day and not at night, we do not need to repeat the Shemonah Esrei at night. Let's dig deeper and try to understand Rosh Chodesh through the eyes of Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. Newton had a keen interest in Kabbalah, and this might have helped him understand things like gravity. Think about the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. It's a powerful place that draws things towards itself. It's like a center of gravity. Newtonian physics emphasizes the predictable and the calculable. In that sense, Rosh Chodesh is a way of measuring time. Rav Soloveitchik explains that we have a concept of sanctity taking effect on a day, even if it's not a day that we can't do melacha. On such a day, we can say hallel. On Rosh Chodesh there was a requirement, possibly a Biblical one, to say hallel in the Beis Hamikdash - the place where the mussaf offering was brought. The center of gravity of the day of Rosh Chodesh was the place where the korban sanctifying the new month was brought. Today, without the Beis Hamikdash, we commemorate the idea of sanctifying time and space in our prayers. But since this was something that could not be done at night, we do not repeat the Shemonah Esrei at night if we miss *yaaleh v'yavo*. Einstein, on the other hand, saw that there is more to time and space than meets the eye. Rav Tzadok tells a story of Rav, in Taanis 28b: Rav visited Bavel and saw people saying hallel on Rosh Chodesh. He thought that they were making a mistake, because in Israel hallel was not said on Rosh Chodesh outside of the Temple. But when he saw that they skipped some sections, he realized that it was a custom that the people of Bavel had. Rav Tzadok asks, why would they have said hallel on Rosh Chodesh in Bavel but not in Israel? And the answer is that hallel is said on a day when a miracle happened. Rosh Chodesh, at face value, is not miraculous. But as Einstein understood, time itself is a miracle, and when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt that will become obvious to all. The people in Bavel missed their connection to the Land and yearned for that day when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt. Outside the center of gravity of Israel, people started celebrating the miracle of time on Rosh Chodesh, in anticipation of the day when we all return to Israel and we all understand the miraculousness of time.

9. **Different ways to pray.** In describing Moses's prayers to G-d about his wish to enter Israel, the Torah uses the word "va'eschanan," which means "he beseeched." This type of prayer involves asking G-d for something that you don't deserve. It means asking for a gift, for grace. Elsewhere, we see "vayechal Moshe" - Moses entreated. In this instance, Moses held on to G-d and wouldn't let go, praying again and again. This is a kind of supercharged prayer, when you are praying even knowing that you don't have any rights. This type of prayer can be very powerful. You remove yourself from the equation and ask G-d for whatever He will grant. Another way to pray is to believe that your prayer has the potential to be answered because G-d told us that He will listen to our prayers.
10. **Davening with seriousness.** The early chassidim would spend an hour in preparation, in order to have the proper intention when praying. We must enter prayer with both joy and seriousness. There must be trepidation along with gladness; fear as well as passion and joyfulness. It should be light, but not frivolous.