

Guide for the “Halachic Minyan”

Elitzur A. and Michal
Bar-Asher Siegal
Shvat 5768

Intoduction	3
Minyan	8
Weekdays	8
Rosh Chodesh	9
Shabbat	10
The Three Major Festivals	
Pesach	12
Shavuot	14
Sukkot	15
Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah	16
Elul and the High Holy Days	
Selichot	17
High Holy Days	17
Rosh Hashanah	18
Yom Kippur	20
Days of Thanksgiving	
Hannukah	23
Arba Parshiot	23
Purim	23
Yom Ha'atzmaut	24
Yom Yerushalayim	24
Tisha B'Av and Other Fast Days	25

© Elitzur A. and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

michal.barasher@yale.edu

barasher@fas.harvard.edu

“It is a positive commandment to pray every day, as it is said, *You shall serve the Lord your God (Ex. 23:25)*. Tradition teaches that this “service” is prayer. It is written, *serving Him with all you heart and soul (Deut. 2:13)*, about which the Sages said, “What is service of the heart? Prayer.” The number of prayers is not fixed in the Torah, nor is their format, and neither the Torah prescribes a fixed time for prayer. Women and slaves are therefore obligated to pray, since it is a positive commandment without a fixed time. Rather, this commandment obligates each person to pray, supplicate, and praise the Holy One, blessed be He, to the best of his ability every day; to then request and plead for what he needs; and after that praise and thank God for all the He has showered on him.¹”

According to Maimonides, both men and women are obligated in the Mitsva of prayer. This guide’s goal is to indicate the parts of the prayer service that women may halachically lead. The guide is an outgrowth of deliberations conducted in the various prayer groups that have made it their aim to increase women’s participation in services, and it is the result of detailed study of the sources relating to holiday and Shabbat prayers.

From the perspective of the halakhic feasibility of women’s leadership, the prayer service may be divided into three categories:

1. Parts for which there is no reason to forbid women’s leadership. Typically these parts may be left out of the service, or may be led even by a child.
2. Parts of the service for which there is reason to think that women’s leadership would be problematic (*devarim shebikdusha*, sections that involve positive time-bound commandments or in which the leader fulfills the congregation’s obligation, etc.), but for which women’s

¹ Maimonides, *Laws concerning Prayer and Priestly Blessing*, 1: 1-2; Translated from the Hebrew by M. Kellner, *The Code of Maimonides, Book Two*, New Haven and London, 2004.

leadership is in fact explicitly licensed among some (if in certain cases only a minority of) halachic decisors.

3. Parts where women are apparently barred from fulfilling the congregation's obligation, though even here halachic solutions can be advanced.

These categories are exemplified in the three levels of obligation that characterize the recitation of Hallel on the various holidays.

On days in which only part of Hallel is recited, its recitation is considered a *minhag* and not obligatory. Therefore, as the Chafetz Chaim states in Biur Halacha (OH 422, "הלל"), there is no reason to forbid a woman from reciting Hallel on behalf of a man.

By contrast, on the three major festivals, the recitation of Hallel is considered obligatory, and a time-bound positive commandment. However, not every Hallel recited during these festivals has the same status. For example, in the opinion of the Tosafot (Bavli Sukkah 38a "מי שהיה עבר ואישה"), the Hallel recited on the first night of Pesach is an expression of gratitude for the miracle of the Exodus. Therefore, though this Hallel is time-bound, women are obligated to recite it like men, on the ground that "they too experienced the miracle." And since women are obligated in this Hallel, the congregation can fulfill its obligation through a woman's recitation..

Otherwise, though, the recitation of Hallel during festivals is obligatory only upon men, as it is a positive time-bound commandment, and women are therefore unable to fulfill the obligation of a congregation that includes men. However, there is no need for the prayer leader to fulfill the congregation's obligation, and if each person in the congregation makes sure to recite Hallel individually, as is the common practice in any case, there is no reason to prevent a woman from leading Hallel.

In this guide when the halachic consideration is of the first type generally no source is cited. For the second type, sources that allow

for women's leadership are cited. For cases of the third type, potential solutions that allow for women's leadership are suggested.

It should be emphasized that we have chosen, in this guide, to utilize halachic sources only according to their direct and plain meaning; their relevance to the current issue does not depend on inference or on a particular reading of the Talmudic texts underlying them. We have sought out and referenced only sources in which halachic decisors explicitly permit women to lead prayers.

This guide does not refer to parts of the tefillah that are categorized as *dvarin shbiqdusha*, in which the chazzan fulfills the congregation's obligation. It is not our intention to claim that communities in which women lead these parts of the prayer are not halachically justifiable.

We have also chosen to include in this guide descriptions of some of the practices adopted in certain "halachic minyanim" that do not bear on the issue of women's leadership of prayer, for example, ways of passing the Torah scroll through the men's and women's sections. These practices are offered as suggestions; they do not carry halachic weight.

This guide does not attempt to create a unified practice among different congregations. It means only to present to interested readers the conclusions reached by those who have founded and designed the various congregations. The guide outlines the practices that we have deemed permissible; each congregation should come to its own conclusions according to its reasoning and circumstances.

In conclusion, a word about the name "halachic minyan." The congregations for which this guide is intended have been described by many names. From among them this name has been chosen as it is meant to describe the essence of the process by which the practices of these congregations are determined and the nature of

their connection to the tradition of halachic decision making. Halachah is the basis upon which we stand. With the chosen name we mean to convey that, despite our departure from traditional practice to include women, we may only innovate as far as the Halachah, as recorded in the writings of traditional decisors, permits. The name thus functions descriptively, not contrastively. We do not at all mean implicitly to denigrate other practices and movements as non-halachic.

We are engaged in a continuous process of study and clarification. Therefore, this guide should not be taken as comprehensive, and no inference should be made from silence. If we do not explicitly indicate that women may lead a certain part of the prayer service, this does not mean that we have concluded that they may not. Such silences should be seen as invitations to further study of the sources that may eventually lead to the discovery of new grounds for permission.

First and foremost we wish to thank the Gaba'iyot and the Gaba'yim of the minyanim for raising the questions which initiated many of the discussions in this guide and especially to Rachel Milner-Gillers. We thank Eli Holzer, Menachem Loberbaum, Tzvi Novick, Ted Rosenbaum and Chaim Trachtman who read previous drafts of this guide and contributed to its form and content. Of course, the final responsibility for its content is ours alone.

In addition we wish to thank Benjamin Bokser and Tzvi Novick for the English translation of this guide.

Finally we express our gratitude towards Marcel and Belda Lindenbaum who initiated and supported the writing and publication of this guide, "he who sows righteousness (*tsdaka*) has a true reward" (Proverbs 10:18)

We are hopeful that this guide will be helpful for the various minyanim that seek to increase the dignity of the many who “praise and thank God for all the He has showered” on them.

“Act courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good”

(2nd Chronicles, 19:11)

Minyan

Whenever a minyan is required, it is common practice, to wait for 10 men and 10 women to start pray (as long as the time of tefilla [*Zman Tefilla*] has not passed) besides when women are counted for a minyan such as in the case of megilah reading on Purim.²

Weekdays

Morning Service

In communities where the chazzan starts with *birkot ha-shachar* a woman blesses and fulfills the congregation's obligation.³

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra until the end of Az Yashir. A man takes over at Yishtabach until after Kaddish Shalem.

Torah Service

A woman may lead the Torah service. In our congregations, it is the practice to take the Torah scroll through the women's section and then pass it to the man who led Shacharit, or another man, who takes it through the men's section to the *bima*, which is situated in front of both sections.

On days in which more than one Torah scroll is taken out of the ark, a common practice is to take one Torah scroll through the women's section and another through the men's section in order to save the congregation's time (*Torach Tzibur*).

² See below *Purim*.

³ See Yalkut Yosef vol. II, p. 147-148, for the opinions that do not consider these brachot as time bound.

Torah reading: at every day in which the Torah is read, whether in the morning or the afternoon, whether there are seven aliyot or fewer, women may read from the Torah and receive *aliyot*.⁴

A male Cohen and male Levi receive the first two *aliyot*. Some hold that even if there is no Kohen or Levi present, only men should receive the first two *aliyot*. However, there is Halahic basis for women receiving even the first two *aliyot*.⁵ Some congregations have, in the interest of modesty, ensured that only a man read from the Torah when a man receives an *aliyah* and that only a woman read from the Torah when a woman receives an *aliyah*, but this is not necessary. Some congregations reserve a majority of the *aliyot* for men.⁶

Both men and women can act as *gabbaim* in calling people up for *aliyot* and blessing them afterwards.

Hagbah and *gelilah* can be done by either men or women.

Rosh Chodesh

A woman may lead Hallel and fulfill the congregation's obligation, as recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is customary and not obligatory.⁷ A man leads the Musaf service. In congregations in which the custom is to bless before the Hallel, a woman may make the Beracha⁸

Torah reading on a weekday Rosh Chodesh: both men and women may receive *aliyot* and read the Torah.⁹

⁴ Shulchan Arukh OH 282:3, on the condition that the congregation "waives the honor due it." See also Rabbi Mendel Shapiro's comprehensive explanation: Rabbi Mendel Shapiro, "Qeri'at ha-Torah by Women: A Halakhic Analysis" (Edah 1:2). And in regards to days when there are less than 7 aliy'ot see Erech Lechem (on MHRYK"SH) on OH 135:13, based on the Mishneh Torah's Laws of Prayer 12:16. See also Beit Yosef YD 294 "ויז"ש שנוהגת" and Or Zarua 1:642.

⁵ Rabenu Nisim Megila 23a.

⁶ Based on the comments of the Rema ibid.

⁷ See Beur Halakha, OH 422 "הלל"

⁸ See Rabenu Tam in Tosafot tractate Arachin 10a "יה ימים"

⁹ See above, note 4.

Shabbat

Evening Service

Kabbalat Shabbat: a woman may lead from Lechu Neranena until before Barkhu.

Some congregations have girls and boys lead Aleinu and Yigdal.

Morning Service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra up to “*Hamelekh hayoshev al kisei ram v'nisa*,” and a man takes over for her at “*Shochan Ad*” until after Kaddish Shalem.

Torah Service: see above “morning services” on weekdays.

Torah Reading

Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.¹⁰

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings) even on Rosh Chodesh, festivals,¹¹ and the *Arba Parshiot*.¹²

A woman may lead the prayers between the *haftara* and the *Kaddish* before Musaf, including the blessing of the new month.

It is common practice that boys and girls lead the sections from *Ein Kelokeinu* until the end of the service.

¹⁰ See weekdays.

¹¹ According to the statement of the Mordechai in Megillah 809 in reference to a minor.

¹² See below.

Kiddush and Havdalah in the Synagogue

A woman may lead Kiddush and Havdalah for the congregation,¹³ both on Shabbat and on Yom Tov.¹⁴

Kiddush Levana

A woman may lead Kiddush Levana for both men and women.¹⁵

Shabbat Rosh Chodesh

A woman may lead Hallel and fulfills the congregation's obligation, as Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is only a custom. A woman may read the *maftir* and receive the *maftir aliyah* for Rosh Chodesh.

¹³ Shulchan Aruch OH 296:8.

¹⁴ For Kiddush on Yom Tov see Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilchata b, 47:6 pp. 92-93; and for Havdala on Yom Tov see there, 59:3 pp. 233-234.

¹⁵ According to the Hochmat Shlomo on the Shulchan Aruch 426.

The Three Major Festivals

Pesach

Pesach Night

In places where it is customary to recite Hallel on the first night, a woman may lead Hallel and fulfill the congregation's obligation, since "they were also in that miracle".¹⁶

Morning service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra until "*v'kol kravai et shem kodsho*" and a man must take over at "*Ha'e-l b'ta'atzumot*" until after Kaddish Shalem.

Hallel

On the First Day (and in the Diaspora, on the Second Day) – If a woman leads Hallel, the congregation must be careful not to depend on her to fulfill its obligation; every person should be sure to say Hallel to himself, as it is a time-bound positive commandment.

During the Rest of Pesach – A woman may lead Hallel and fulfill the congregation's obligation, as Hallel on these days is only a custom. And in congregation where Hallel is said with a blessing, a woman may bless for the congregation.¹⁷

Torah Service: see above "morning services" on weekdays.

¹⁶ Tosafot Sukkah 38a "מי שהיה עבד ואישה"

¹⁷ See above, Rosh Hodesh.

Torah Reading: Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.¹⁸

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).¹⁹

Yizkor on the seventh day (eighth day in the diaspora) of Pessah – A woman may lead Yizkor.

Shabbat Chol Hamoed

Shir Hashirim: when Shir Hashirim is read from a printed text and without a blessing, there is no reason a woman cannot read it aloud.²⁰

Sefirat HaOmer – A woman may say the blessing for Sefirat HaOmer.²¹ If she says it for the congregation, all must be sure to repeat the blessing and count the *omer* for themselves.

¹⁸ See weekdays.

¹⁹ See note 11

²⁰ See Shulchan Arukh OH 490:9 and the responsum of the Rema (Responso 35), which hold that the reading of the *Megillot* on the festivals is not an obligation.

²¹ See Magen Avraham OH 489:1

Shavuot

Morning service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra until “*v'kol kravai et shem kodsho*” and a man must take over at “*Ha'e-l b'ta'atzumot*” until after Kaddish Shalem.

Hallel

If a woman leads Hallel, the congregation must be careful not to depend on her to fulfill its obligation; every person should be sure to say Hallel to himself, as it is a time-bound positive commandment.

Torah Service: see above “morning services” on weekdays.

Megillat Ruth – when Ruth is read from a printed text and without a blessing, there is no reason a woman cannot read it aloud.²²

Torah Reading: Recitation of *Akdamut*: a woman may recite *Akdamut*; the congregation responds to each verse.

Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.²³

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).²⁴

Yizkor – A woman may lead Yizkor.

²² See Pesach.

²³ See weekdays.

²⁴ See Shabbat.

Sukkot

Morning service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra until “*v'kol kravai et shem kodsho*” and a man takes over at “*Ha'e-l b'ta'atzumot*” until after Kaddish Shalem.

Hallel

If a woman leads Hallel, the congregation must be careful not to depend on her to fulfill its obligation; every person should be sure to say Hallel to himself, as it is a time-bound positive commandment.

Hoshanot — A woman may lead the hymns recited during *Hoshanot*.

Men and women should take care to go around the *bima* separately.

Torah Service: see above “morning services” on weekdays.

Torah Reading: Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.²⁵

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).²⁶

Shabbat Chol Hamoed

Kohelet – when Kohelet is read from a printed text and without a blessing, there is no reason a woman cannot read it aloud.²⁷

²⁵ See weekdays.

²⁶ See Shabbat.

²⁷ See Pesach.

Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah

Morning service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra until “*v'kol kravai et shem kodsho*” and a man takes over at “*Ha'e-l b'ta'atzumot*” until after Kaddish Shalem.

Hallel

If a woman leads Hallel, the congregation must be careful not to depend on her to fulfill its obligation; every person should be sure to say Hallel to himself, as it is a time-bound positive commandment.

Torah Service: see above “morning services” on weekdays.

Hakafot – A woman may lead the hymns recited during and before Hakafot.

Torah Reading: Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.²⁸

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).

Chatan and Kalah Torah/Bereshit both men and women may be honored to complete the book of Deuteronomy and begin the book of Genesis.

Yizkor – A woman may lead Yizkor.

²⁸ See weekdays.

Elul and the High Holy Days

Selichot: A woman may lead the recitation of Selichot after the first Kaddish, but a man should read the last section and say Kaddish Shalem. In congregations where the Shofar is blown during the reading of the 13 Attributes, a woman may blow the Shofar.

High Holy Days

Introduction

In the High Holy days, some congregations have involved women in leading prayers unique to this period; women lead Selichot and other hymns that are a major part of the High Holy Day liturgy. There are two justifications for this practice: First, these sections of the service are not essential to prayer service; and in some congregations they are not said as part of the repetition of Amidah.²⁹ Second, the practice of Sefardi communities is that the members of the congregation, including those not yet *bar mitzvah*, lead the congregation in recitation of these section. The description below is based on the practice in a number of congregations; there is considerable room for adjustments based on local considerations.³⁰

In these congregations the practice is that during all prayers two readers, a man and a woman, stand in front of the congregation, each in the respective section, and they take turns leading the service based on the principles discussed above. In effect, the service is led by a man and a woman together.

²⁹ See the Tur OH 620 and the different costumes.

³⁰ The references below are according to the Ashkenazi costumes. In Sefardi communities a woman may lead in places where the congregation joins in the leading.

Rosh Hashanah

Morning service

First Day: A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra up until “*v’hanorah b’norateicha.*” In the reader’s repetition of the Amidah, a woman may lead from “*Even chug mitzok n’shiyah*” until the end of the hymn “*Hashem Melekh Hashem Malakh.*”

Second Day: A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra up until “*v’hanorah b’norateicha.*” In the reader’s repetition of the Amidah, a woman may lead from “*Sholachti bimlachat segel chaburah*” until the end of the hymn “*Hashem Melekh Hashem Malakh.*”

Torah Service: see above “morning services” on weekdays.

Torah Reading: Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.³¹

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).³²

³¹ See weekdays.

³² See Shabbat.

Blowing of the Shofar

A woman may announce the Shofar blasts and may assess their validity.

A woman may lead the prayers between the *haftara* and the Kaddish before Musaf.

Musaf

First Day: A woman may lead from the hymn “*Af Orach Mishpatecha*” until the end of the hymn “*L’adei Ad Yimlokh.*”

Yom Kippur

Kol Nidrei

There are two approaches to the status of Kol Nidrei. Some believe that it is an act of absolving past vows (thus most Sephardic decisors) and some believe that it is a prayer for the future (thus Ashkenazic decisors, following Rabenu Tam). On the first approach, a woman may not lead Kol Nidrei, and two men should stand beside the chazzan while saying Kol Nidrei to constitute a Bet Din, but on the second approach, a woman certainly may either lead the Kol Nidrei or hold a Sefer Torah. Therefore, if a woman leads Kol Nidrei it is necessary to explain to the congregation that the prayer does not affect absolution of past vows. There are some congregations that fear that some people will nonetheless depend on Kol Nidrei to absolve their vows and thus do not allow women to lead.

Following Kol Nidrei, the Sifrei Torah are passed both in the men and women's sections.

Evening Service

A woman may lead from after the Amidah, starting with the hymn "*Ya'aleh*" and until Avinu Malkenu.

Morning service

A woman may lead Pesukei D'Zimra up until "*v'hanorah b'noroteicha.*" In the reader's repetition of the Amidah, a woman may lead from the hymn "*Yichadta yom ze bashana*" until "*Yoshev T'hilot.*"

Torah Service: see above "morning services" on weekdays.

Torah Reading: Both men and women may receive *aliyot*.³³

A woman may receive the *maftir aliya* and read the *haftara* (with the blessings).³⁴

Yizkor – A woman may lead Yizkor.

A woman may lead the prayers between the *haftara* and the *Kaddish* before Musaf.

The Torah scroll may be returned as it was brought out – until the prayer “*Hineni HeAni Mima’as*”.

Musaf

A woman may lead from after “*Mchayei HaMetim*” until before Unetane Tokef. She may also lead from “*Chatanu Tzureinu*” until after the Vidui.

Mincha

Men and women may both receive *aliyot* and read from the Torah,³⁵ though some hold that men must receive the first two *aliyot*. A woman may receive the third *aliyah* and read the *haftara* from the Book of Jonah.³⁶

Neilah

A woman may lead from the hymn “*Ptach Lanu Sha’ar*” until “*vkol hanistarot v’haniglot ata yodea*”

³³ See weekdays.

³⁴ See Shabbat.

³⁵ See above.

³⁶ See above.

Blowing of the Shofar – A woman may blow the Shofar

at the end of Yom Kippur.

A woman may also lead Havdalah for the congregation.³⁷

Kiddush Levana

A woman may lead Kiddush Levana for both men and women.³⁸

³⁷ See above.

³⁸ See above note 15

Days of Thanksgiving

Hannukah

Candle Lighting at the Synagogue: women may recite the blessings and fulfill the congregation's obligation.³⁹

Hallel: A woman may lead Hallel and fulfill the congregation's obligation, as women were equally part of the miracle of Hannukah.⁴⁰

Maftir of the Arba Parshiot: a woman may receive the *aliyah* and read from the Torah for all of the *Arba Parshiot*,⁴¹ even on Shabbat Zachor.⁴²

Purim

Megillah Reading: For those who require a *minyan* for the Megillah reading, women can be counted for the *minyan*.⁴³ Women may fulfill the congregation's obligation for the Megillah reading.⁴⁴

Torah Reading: women and men may both read Torah and receive *aliyot*.⁴⁵

³⁹ See Shulchan Arukh OH 675:3.

⁴⁰ See Minchat Patim 683.

⁴¹ See Rema OH 282 in reference to a minor.

⁴² Based on the opinion that men and women are equally obligated to remember Amalek, as it is not a positive time-bound commandment. Since a woman is obligated just like a man, she can fulfill a man's obligation. For discussion see Yabia Omer Section 8, OH 54

⁴³ See Rabenu Nissim on the Rif Megillah 6b.

⁴⁴ Tur 289, based on Rashi.

⁴⁵ See above.

Yom Ha'atzmaut

Evening Service

A woman may lead all of the psalms of thanksgiving said before and after the evening service, and in places where Hallel is recited with a blessing, a woman may as well lead Hallel with a blessing, as women equally experienced the miracle.

A woman may blow the Shofar on Yom Ha'atzmaut.

Morning service

Hallel: a woman may lead Hallel, and in places where Hallel is recited with a blessing, a woman may lead Hallel with a blessing, as women equally experienced the miracle.

Where a *haftarah* is recited, a woman may receive the *maftir aliyah* and recite the *haftarah*.

Yom Yerushalayim

Hallel: a woman may lead Hallel, and in places where Hallel is recited with a blessing, a woman may lead Hallel with a blessing, as women equally experienced the miracle.

Tisha B'Av and Other Fast Days

Women may lead Selichot on fast days and Kinot on Tisha B'Av.

Torah Reading: Men and women may both read from the Torah and receive *aliyot*, both in the morning and the afternoon. And woman may receive the third aliy'a and read the haftarah.

Reading of Eicha: when Eicha is read from a printed text and without a blessing, there is no reason a woman cannot read it aloud.⁴⁶

Kiddush Levana

A woman may lead Kiddush Levana for both men and women.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See above.

⁴⁷ See above note 15