

Tefilas Haderech

Tefilas Haderech, the prayer recited when embarking upon a trip, is often a source of confusion: Should it be said, when should it be said, when is it too late to say it? This article will examine the laws of this important prayer.

The source for *Tefilas Haderech* is found in the Gemara in Brachos (29b-30a). The Gemara relates that Eliyahu Hanavi told Rav Yehuda, “When you set out on the way, seek permission from your Creator prior to leaving.” The Gemara explains that he was referring to *Tefilas Haderech*. Subsequently, the Gemara cites a statement from Rav Yaakov in the name of Rav Chisda that one who sets out on his way is required to recite *Tefilas Haderech*. The obvious question is, what is Rav Yaakov adding to the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi?

To answer this question, an analysis of the conclusion of this passage of Gemara is necessary. The Gemara concludes with another statement from Rav Yaakov in the name of Rav Chisda, that the obligation of *Tefilas Haderech* is dependent on a *parsa* (between 12,000-16,000 feet).

There is a dispute among the Rishonim (medieval authorities) regarding the understanding of this passage. Rashi (s.v *ad parsa*) explains that a *parsa* is the cutoff point at which one no longer can recite *Tefilas Haderech*. The Rashba (s.v. *eimas*), as well, writes that after a *parsa*, one can no longer recite the prayer, taking Rashi’s approach. Rabbeinu Yonah (20a dapei harif s.v *misha’a*) follows Rashi’s general approach to the Gemara. However, he writes that reciting *Tefilas Haderech* before travelling a *parsa* is preferable, but if one forgets, he can still recite *Tefilas Haderech*, so long as there is a significant distance remaining in his journey.

However, the Rosh (Brachos 4:18) is bothered as to why someone cannot recite *Tefilas Haderech* after a *parsa* if one still has a long journey ahead. The Rosh therefore follows the BaHaG’s approach that a *parsa* is referring to the minimal amount one has to travel to be required to recite *Tefilas Haderech*.

The Meiri (s.v *kol*) answers the Rosh’s question and explains that after a *parsa*, one has missed the opportunity to “seek permission” (as expressed by Eliyahu Hanavi) from his Creator.

The Tzlach (ibid.) cites the Shelah that one can discern if he has received permission to travel based on how fluently one’s lips are able to utter the prayer; this idea is based upon Brachos 34b, where a similar idea is expressed by Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa regarding his ability to discern if his prayers were accepted by Heaven. The Tzlach comments that since we are not on the level of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, the Gemara requires that *Tefilas Haderech* be said in the plural; by including the needs of the public, not just one’s personal needs, one can assume consent is granted.

Based on this, the Gemara cited earlier, as well as the dispute regarding how to understand the passage, can now be explained. Rashi understood that the primary obligation to recite *Tefilas Haderech* is predicated upon the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi. Rav Yaakov is adding that the obligation to seek permission is applicable to all people, including those who are not on the level of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. Hence, the essence of the *tefila* is to seek permission from Hashem. After a *parsa* into the trip, therefore, one has lost his opportunity. However, the Rosh and the BaHaG understood that the obligation to recite *Tefilas Haderech* is not connected with the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi of seeking permission from Hashem; rather, it is a separate idea of

reciting a *tefila* to protect the traveller upon his journey. Rav Yaakov is thus introducing the obligation to recite this *tefila* to protect us on our journey. Therefore, as long as there is a significant distance left in the trip, one is obligated to recite the *tefila*. However, it is unclear from Rav Yaakov's words how much distance must still be left in the journey for one to recite the *tefila*.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 110:7) follows the opinion of the BaHaG that a *parsa* is the minimal distance required to recite the *tefila*. He concludes that the *tefila* can be recited as long as one is not within the final *parsa* of his journey, where it is no longer considered a state of danger. The Rema argues, following the opinion of Rabbeinu Yonah, that one should preferably recite the *tefila* during the first *parsa*.

The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:7) rules that one only recites *Tefilas Haderech* for a trip that will be at least a *parsa*. Rabbi Chaim Na'eh (Ketzos Hashulchan 67: Badei Hashulchan 4) adds that this *parsa* is measured beginning past the outskirts of the city, which is, according to halacha, 70 *amos* (105-140 feet). However, there is a dispute among the *poskim* (halachic authorities) regarding the earliest point one can recite *Tefilas Haderech* when embarking upon such a trip. The Magen Avraham (ibid.:14) writes that this begins past the outskirts of the city (70 *amos* outside the city). The Taz (ibid.:7) argues that once someone decides to set out on a journey, he can recite the *tefila* in his home. The Mishna Berura (ibid.:29) concludes that it is preferable to follow the opinion of the Magen Avraham. However, Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:191) says that the Steipler (Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievski) recited it immediately upon entering the highway. He also notes that this has an added benefit according to Rashi's opinion since after a *parsa*, one has lost the opportunity to recite the *tefila*.

Another issue raised is how to measure a *parsa*. Is it measured by the time it takes one to travel a *parsa* by foot, which is 72 minutes, as this was the common method of travel in the times of the Gemara, or is it measured by the length of a *parsa*, which is 8,000 *amos* (between 12,000 and 16,000 feet). Rabbi Wosner (Shevet Halevi 10:21:2) cites the Zichron Yehuda that one measures by time, but notes that the Mishna Berura (ibid.:30) implies that distance is to be used. He concludes that both opinions have validity.

The invention of airplanes creates yet another question of whether one recites *Tefilas Haderech* when travelling upon one. Rabbi Betzalel Stern (Ahalech Baamitach, *Tefilas Haderech* fn. 7) cites in the name of the Rogatchover (Rabbi Yosef Rosen) that there is no requirement to recite *Tefilas Haderech* on airplanes. The basis of this ruling is a passage in Chullin (139b) regarding the Scriptural obligation to send away the mother bird before taking the eggs or children from the nest. The Torah says one must encounter the nest *baderech*, on the road, and the Gemara says that being in the air is not considered on a *derech*. However, Rabbi Stern argues that one cannot compare the language of the Torah with the language used by our Sages. He points out that the Gemara teaches in Yevamos (62b) that a man is obligated to be with his wife prior to departing upon a journey. The reason is that a woman yearns for her husband as he is about to leave on a *derech*. Would one suggest that when flying by plane, there is no such obligation? Of course not, as the same logic would apply. The same is true regarding *Tefilas Haderech*; the same logic applies, as there is a danger in flying as well.

When is the proper time to recite *Tefilas Haderech* when travelling by plane? Rabbi Ephraim Greenblat (Rivavos Ephraim 6:109) cites the Aderes who opined that when travelling by ship, one should recite *Tefilas Haderech* as soon as the ship moves, even prior to exiting the water

within the area of the city. The logic behind this ruling is that the reason to delay the *tefila* until exiting the city is out of concern that one will change his mind and return home. However, as a passenger on a boat, one has no authority to cancel the trip. Based on this, Rabbi Greenblatt writes the same is true on an airplane; as soon as the plane begins moving, one can recite the *tefila*.

In conclusion, *Tefilas Haderech* is an important prayer sourced in the Gemara. Knowing what situations require its recitation and the proper point for its recital will ensure that we are all protected throughout our journeys, especially as we enter the busy travel season of the summer months.