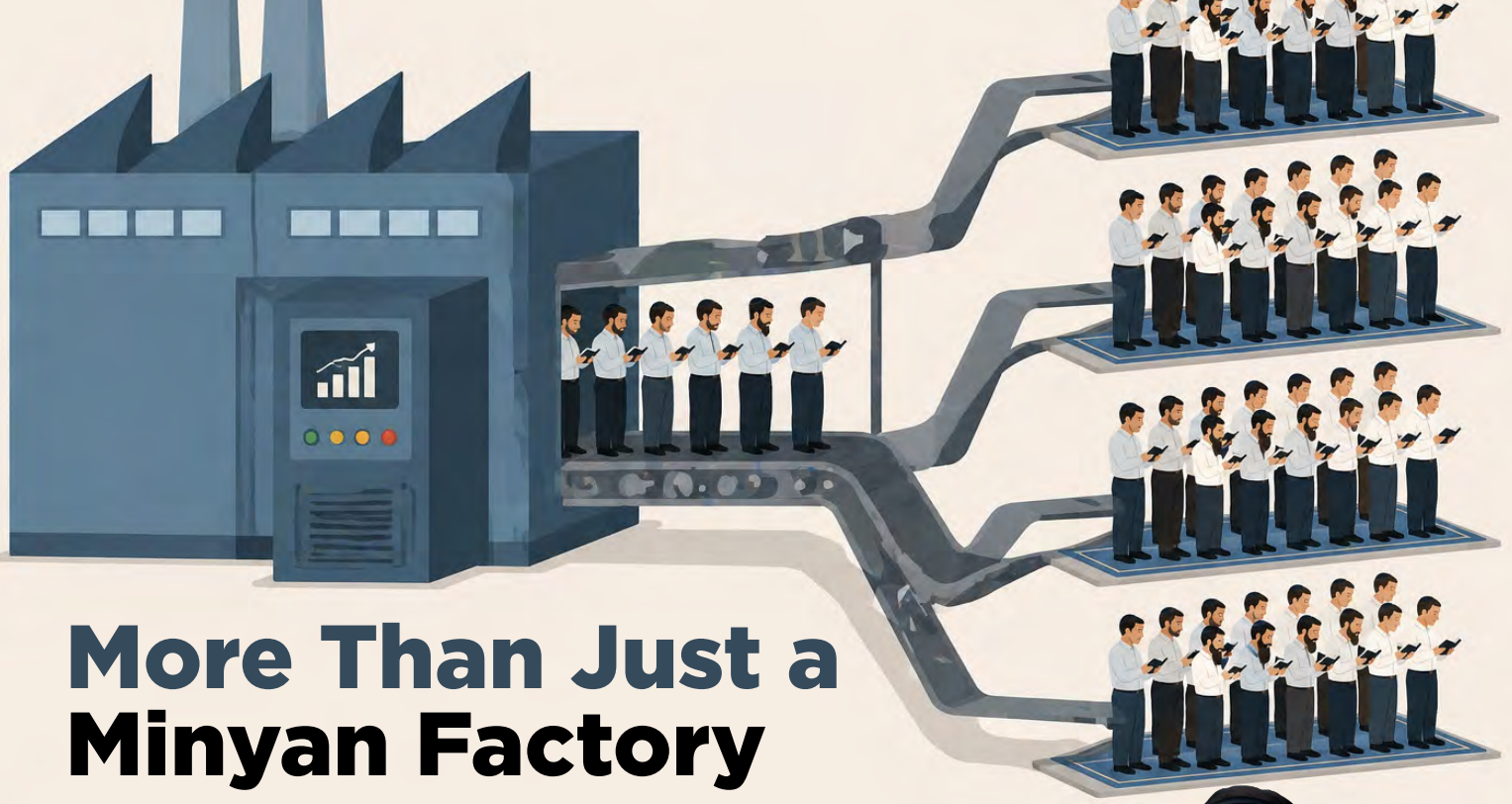




More Than Just a Minyan Factory

Some time ago, I was asked a perplexing question by a student. She had received a prestigious post-graduate training externship in a health field, and while she had been assured she would not have to work on Shabbos, it now seemed she would have Shabbos responsibilities after all. I consulted a senior posek, who said that she should not work on Shabbos, even in matters relating to *pikuach nefesh*. We used to see only medical doctors take positions like this. Expansion of this would be a major *pirtza* in our communal observance of Shabbos. What will Shabbos look like in our community if we allow more people to routinely work on Shabbos?

This was an unexpected answer. We're used to dealing with individual halachic questions by thinking about the implications for that individual in that particular situation. Moreover, this individualistic approach tends to color our understanding of our obligations and paradigms of Judaism. Is there a unique status of a community, a collective or is it

merely a group of individuals, each one trying to fulfill personal obligations?

The concept of a community emerges in several halachic frameworks. One example that is highly emphasized is *tefilla betzibur*, public prayer. *Tefilla betzibur* is rooted in the halachic concept of *tzibur*. We require a *tzibur* to recite Kaddish, Barechu, Chazaras Hashatz and Kedusha, since they are all considered *devarim shebekedusha*, which requires a minyan.

What is accomplished by this group tefilla? Rav Hershel Schachter points out (Rav Schachter on *Orach Chaim*, p 231, *Nefesh Harav* 115) from Rav Soloveitchik that the reason Kaddish or Barechu is recited at the beginning of each *tefilla betzibur* is so that the people gathered aren't just a group of individuals, but rather a *tzibur*. Therefore, we begin Shacharis with Kaddish then Barechu. Mussaf starts Chatzi Kaddish and then the Amida. Mincha starts with Ashrei, followed by Chatzi Kaddish and then the Amida and Ma'ariv starts with Barechu.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is why



Rabbi Reuven Boshnack, MSed LMHC
Undergraduate Torah Studies Rebbe and Mashgiach, Yeshiva University
Rabbi, Ocean Avenue Jewish Center

the Rambam (*Hilchos Tefilla* 9:1) writes that *tefilla betzibur* (of Shacharis) begins with Chatzi Kaddish. Similarly, the Rema (54:3) explains that one should not interrupt between Kaddish and Barechu, and *Shulchan Aruch* 52:1 (quoting Rabenu Yona) says if one comes late to shul and the *tzibur* has already started the first bracha of Shema, he should skip Psukei Dzimra and join the *tzibur*.

For this reason, if the minyan starts before the appropriate time for tallis and tefillin and reaches Yishtabach at the time for

tallis and tefillin, the congregation should put it on after reciting Yishtabach, yet the chazan should recite it before Yishtabach. This is because he should not have any interruption from Yishtabach through Kaddish and Barechu, since this is what establishes the group of people as a *tzibur*.

The concept of *tzibur* carries over to the Chazaras Hashatz. Why do we recite Chazaras Hashatz? Is it just to say Kedusha? The Rambam (*Hilchos Tefilla* 9:3) writes that the chazara is to benefit those who don't know the tefillos. Now that we have a printed siddur is there really a need for Chazaras Hashatz? Rav Soloveitchik explained that once Chazal instituted the concept of Chazaras Hashatz, it is not simply a pragmatic solution for those who don't know how to pray. The rabbis introduced Chazaras Hashatz as a *tefillas hatzibur*, a tefilla of the entire community. The *tzibur* is a new entity — a new personality has emerged, the community — and this is the prayer that the community offers (*Nefesh Harav*, 123-124).

Similarly, another law that emerges from the concept of *tzibur* is Krias Hatorah. Must an individual seek out Krias Hatorah? Why must the person receiving an Aliyah make a bracha before the reading commences? Shouldn't the Birchos Hatorah that every individual recites each morning suffice? The Rav explained (based on Rambam, *Hilchos Tefillah* 12:5) that Krias Hatorah is an act of communal Torah study. The *tzibur* is learning Torah together, not as a group of individuals, but a new entity called a *tzibur*. This obligation only occurs when there is a community present (*Mishna Megila* 23). This type of

communal learning is distinct and requires a separate bracha.

The communal tefilla experience described in halacha — the creation of a new entity called *tzibur*, that isn't simply a group of individuals gathering together to pray or learn Torah — is sometimes distant from what we personally experience. While we observe the halacha in creation of community, there are times when we enter into a “minyan factory”-style minyan and don't feel this sense of connection. We are very proud of the devotion our community shows to praying with a minyan. The level of commitment to minyan is inspiring. The convenience of having multiple minyanim helps busy people with full schedules have less stress in their lives as they juggle all of their obligations.

And yet, sometimes it feels like minyan attendance is more of a personal obligation than communal prayer, a group of individuals praying together, content that there are others in the room to assist these individuals to fulfill *tefilla betzibur*. We are alone in a room full of people we don't know, but hopefully nod at. Is it too nostalgic to think that a minyan should be a place where “everybody knows your name,” and they call to make sure everything is okay when you don't show up? Maybe it is a result of our highly individualistic society that we seek only to discharge our individual obligations without thinking more broadly.

Perhaps this is part of a constant swing of the pendulum as we seek to find the correct nuance to balance the individual and the community. Rav Kook

(*Maamarei Reiyah* 177–181) observed that we often revisit earlier times in our modern lives and feel the baggage of earlier ideological battles. One such battle is recorded in *Menachos* 65a, which cites the ancient scroll of fasts that records a victory over the Tzadukim and Beitusim in establishing the tamid offering and the holiday of Shavuot. These disputes were with groups who contested the veracity of the Torah Sheba'al Peh. In our Gemara, the students of Tzadok believed that an individual can donate the communal daily tamid offering and the students of Beitus disputed the halacha which permits harvesting the omer on Shabbos, which would shift Shavuot to a different date.

What was the debate?

Rav Kook explains that the Tzadukim and the Beitusim, while both erring in approach to Torah Sheba'al Peh, represented two different errors in understanding the Torah. The Tzadukim overemphasized the role of the individual within the community. What is a community but a group of individuals? This overemphasis of individuality led them to believe that an individual may donate a communal daily korban.

The Beitusim, however, misunderstood the role of the community. The omer offering, which is the centerpiece of this time of the year, escorts the Jewish people from the holiday of Pesach to Shavuot. Generally, our primary concern counting the omer and maintaining continuity, so that a bracha can be recited throughout *sefiras haomer*. It is mostly a focus on the individual. However, the mitzvos of *ketziras haomer* and *hakravas haomer* on the second day of Pesach are two parts of a communal korban. It is this korban that initiates the count. The conclusion of our count, the holiday of Shavuot, features a korban of two wheat breads, the *shte halechem*, which is also a communal korban.

One might think the Beitusim's opposition to harvesting the first barley on Shabbos



See more shiurim and articles from
Rabbi Boshnack at [www.yutorah.org/
teachers/Rabbi-Reuven-Boshnack](http://www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Reuven-Boshnack)

for the omer was their way of advocating for the sanctity of Shabbos in the face of an act of mundane farming. However, it was truly a rebellion against the sanctity of Jewish Peoplehood. If this was an act performed by an individual, the Beitusim would be correct — individual mitzvos don't override the sanctity of Shabbos. However, this seeming individual, secular act of farming grain was the foundation of the economy and peoplehood.

The Torah commands us to harvest this barley and bring it as a korban, transforming its simple nature into an act of spectacular national meaning. This act is on par with one of the acts of divine service in the Beis Hamikdash. There is a sanctity to the nation's seemingly earthly substance! This very act of agrarian first-born grain sets the date for the holiday of the giving of the Torah! The grain might be harvested by a single individual,

but it is done on behalf of the whole community. Communal acts performed for the service in the Beis HaMikdash override Shabbos.

It is our challenge to balance communal affiliation and personal obligation and meaning. The Torah calls on us to acknowledge the connection between individual and community, to draw strength and commitment from both aspects of our lives.



RIETS PRESS
PILLARS SOCIETY

Help RIETS Press publish the Torah of our Yeshiva! Become a RIETS Press Pillars Society Member!

RIETS Press Trustee

- Name listed among trustees in all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.
- Complimentary collection of full RIETS Press library and copies of all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.
- Receive an annual RIETS Press gift package.
- Access to exclusive events with RIETS Roshei Yeshiva and RIETS Press authors

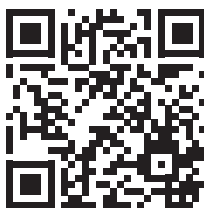
RIETS Press Supporter

- Name listed among pillars in all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.
- Complimentary collection of full RIETS Press library and copies of all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.
- Receive an annual RIETS Press gift package.

RIETS Press Friend

- Name listed among supporters in all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.
- Complimentary collection of full RIETS Press library and copies of all future RIETS Press publications for the duration of your membership in the society.

Scan the QR code
below to learn more



To learn more, visit us online at yu.edu/rietspresspillars