



Time to Pray

The *kiruv* seminar covered women's issues in Judaism. I sat there, listening to why men are counted for a minyan and women are not. We had covered some of the angles — and now the all-too-perky teacher moved on. She embarked on the old “it's-not-all-it's-cracked-up-to-be” argument.

This angle stuck in my head.

“Think about it, ladies,” said the teacher, bouncing on her heels as she spoke. “If you *had* to go to somewhere, even if it were Bloomingdale's, three times a day, morning, noon, and night, rain or shine, dead of winter or brutal summer heat, you wouldn't be so excited.”

That made sense. But then again, I was single at the time.

The teacher failed to mention the alternative to the thrice-daily shul obligation. To stay home. To stay home in the morning, searching for socks and permission slips. To stay home in the afternoon, mediating between a four-year-old and a six-year-old who can't stand the sight of each other, or of the bathtub. To stay home in the evening, praying that the toddler will quit his tantrums and just tell me what he needs. Bloomingdale's, here I come, three times a day. (I can go alone, right?)

Since that long-distant *kiruv* seminar, I've learned something about davening — with a minyan, or not; at home, in shul (and even in Bloomingdale's). I've realized that despite the less-than-conducive environment (or maybe even because of it), my *tefillos* have a unique flavor. They get into the cracks

and crevices of real life in a way that is potent and powerful. Shacharis, for example, would sound something like this:

Please, Hashem, help me to find my car keys easily (not like yesterday when it took me seven whole minutes until I realized they were in my coat pocket); please help so that Tzippy doesn't bite anybody in playgroup; and the ubiquitous, please Hashem, let the cleaning lady show up today (that means she and everyone in her immediate and extended family is in good health; there are no hospital visits; no funerals to go to; her kids won't be off from public school for no apparent reason; she won't get lost, or get on the wrong bus, or forget where I live).

An early Minchah might sound something like this: *Please, Hashem, make the coffee I just downed sustain me until I can actually crawl into bed later; please, help me find at least half the library books that were due yesterday; and please, please Hashem, help me to remember that I told Mrs. Stein I would drive her son home from school (last time she asked, I left him there by accident so I really need help with this one).*

And Maariv: *Please, Hashem, give me the wisdom to deal with my high-school daughter's latest drama; please help that my yeshivah bochur forgets for just one night that he doesn't like to be hugged anymore; and please, please let my baby sleep for more than three hours at a time.*

And, most important Hashem, please, no matter how tired I am, help me to find the smile my husband surely deserves upon his return from Maariv. ■