



חבורת מהות היהדות

Weekly Newsletter

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פרשת בשלח
י"ז שבט תשפ"ד

From the Chaburah
By: Adam Friedmann

How Much of the Shema is *Mideoraita*?

The Shema that we read every day consists of three paragraphs. Which part of this text is mandated *mideoraita* and which part is rabbinic? The Torah is ambiguous on this issue. We are told that certain “things” need to be in our hearts at all times and that we should talk about them (Devarim 6:6). It’s not clear what these things are and whether keeping them in our hearts is a direct commandment. There are several views among the Rishonim and Acharonim about how much of the Shema is biblically mandated:

1. **No mitzvah *mideoraita*:** The most minimalist view is that there is no biblical mitzvah to read the Shema at all. This is the view of Rav Yehuda as presented in the Gemara (*Berachot* 21a). It also seems to be taken by some Rishonim such as the Rosh (*Teshuvot Harosh* 4:21).
2. **First verse:** Perhaps only the first verse of “Shema Yisrael” is required biblically. This is indicated by the halachah we considered last week. Namely, that only the first verse of the Shema has to be said with intention. According to the Ramban (*Milchamot Hashem, Rosh Hashanah, 7a*) this proves that biblically only the first verse has to be read.
3. **First paragraph:** The Gemara (*Berachot* 16a) states that workers can interrupt their work to read the first paragraph of the Shema, but can only read the second paragraph if they are on a break. The fact that reading the first paragraph supersedes a worker’s responsibilities to his employer indicates that reading the first paragraph is a biblical requirement. This position seems to be taken by some Ashkenazi Rishonim including Rashi (*Berachot* 2a s.v. *Ad sof*) and Rabbi Yehudah HaChasid (cited in *Tur, Orach Chayim* 46). (see further, *Sha’agat Aryeh*, 2)
4. **First two paragraphs:** The Tosefta (*Berachot* 2:2) and the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berachot* 2:1) present some of the debates about how much of the Shema must be recited with intention against the assumption that only the first two paragraphs are

possible candidates. The Peri Chadash (*Orach Chayim* 67) takes these sources, among others, as proof that the first two paragraphs are mandated biblically. This position is also intimated by Tosfot (*Berachot* 14a s.v. *asher anochi*).

5. **All three paragraphs:** Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Shiurim LeZecher Aba Mori*, vol. 1) accepts his grandfather R' Chaim Soloveitchik's assumption that all three paragraphs of the Shema need to be read *mideoraita*. This is based on a close reading of the Rambam's language in the Mishneh Torah.

The extremes of this range are questionable. A vast majority of authorities reject the view that the Shema is only *miderabanan*. On the other end, the Gemara (*Berachot* 12b) seems to say quite plainly that Chazal, not the Torah, instituted the reading of the third paragraph. Taking the arguments at face value, one of the middle three positions seems to be the most likely.

However, the fact that there's so much ambiguity about how much of the Shema is biblical, may indicate something else: there is no biblically mandated text for the Shema. This possibility is raised by Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitz (*Yad Peshuta*, Introduction to *Hilchot Keriat Shema*). Perhaps the biblical mitzvah of reading the Shema is simply to accept the yoke of heaven, and remind ourselves as much as possible about the mitzvot and our basic religious beliefs. The text and format are left up to the Jewish People to decide. This explains why, at a minimum, one must recite at least one verse with the proper intention. This is the basic fulfillment of the mitzvah. But ideally one should not stop there. The more time spent contemplating the mitzvot and our beliefs, the greater the fulfillment of the mitzvah. This position also allows that Chazal may have instituted different amounts of reading in different situations, depending on the circumstances.

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When: Thursday nights at 8:45 (following Maariv)

Where: Kehillas Shivtei Yeshurun, Nachal Dolev 12, Bet Shemesh

Mishnah: A Philosophy of Life

By: Dovid Campbell

Berachot 2:5 — From Betrayal to Forgiveness (in Four Days)

Our mishnah teaches that a newly married husband is exempt from the mitzvah of *keriat Shema*. The Bartenura explains the reason – the husband is concerned that his wife has been unfaithful before marriage or is otherwise worried about consummating the marriage. Since this is a case of *tirda demitzvah*, preoccupation in the pursuit of a mitzvah, he is exempt from Shema. The question becomes, how long does this exemption last? Do we assume that the husband remains preoccupied indefinitely, until he consummates the marriage?

The mishnah therefore explains that this exemption lasts only until *motza'ei Shabbat*. Chazal assume that the couple were married on a Wednesday, which was the common practice in their time, and *motza'ei Shabbat* therefore marks four nights from the wedding. At this point, even if they have not consummated the marriage, the husband is no longer exempt and must recite Shema. Something changes on this fourth night.

Once again, the Bartenura explains the reason, but his language is cryptic. After four days, “*libo gas bah*” – his heart is “*gas*” with her. The Hebrew word *gas* generally connotes thickness, largeness, or inflation. But the Tosafot Yom Tov, citing the Aruch, writes that the word implies closeness or familiarity. After four days, even without physical intimacy, the husband feels close to his new wife.

How does this closeness alleviate his original concern? The Tosafot Yom Tov explains that even if he finds that she has not been faithful, he will forgive her. The husband is presumed to have undergone a substantial emotional transformation in a remarkably short period of time.

Let's consider for a moment the feelings of sadness and betrayal that a husband must feel after finding that his wife has deceived him. Indeed, Chazal preferred to hold weddings on Wednesdays because the local *beit din* would generally convene on Thursday, and if a new husband found that his wife had deceived him, he could bring her before the court the next morning, while he was still angry with her. Our mishnah teaches that even this profound anger and disappointment has a very limited window and is very quickly eclipsed by a feeling of marital closeness.

In our time, this is no shortage of books, programs, and educators that provide valuable advice for building a healthy marriage. Those who are struggling can find strategies for developing trust and communication, and these are certainly useful. But before pursuing specialized techniques, it may be worthwhile to reflect on the very natural closeness that develops between two people, simply by virtue of the fact that they have chosen to live and build a home together. According to our mishnah, this sense of companionship, which graces even a fledgling marriage, can easily overshadow even our deepest feelings of hurt.

Eilu v'Eilu
By: Dovid Campbell

Stop Crying and Walk — Hashem's Puzzling Response to Moshe

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel that they travel’” (*Shemot* 14:15).

It's difficult to understand exactly what Moshe did wrong here. Something about his crying out was inappropriate, but what? According to Rashi's first explanation, the issue was not Moshe's prayer itself but its length. Moshe should not have prolonged his prayer while the Jews were suffering.

Rashi's second explanation is substantially different. Hashem was essentially telling Moshe that this was His problem, not Moshe's. Rashi quotes *Yeshayahu* 45:11 to convey the idea: “Regarding My children and the work of My hands, will you command Me?”

R' Yosef Bechor Shor takes this approach further, offering his own reproduction of Hashem's response to Moshe: Is this My honor, that you should cry out before Me? And am I such that Israel should come here due to Me, on My assurance and on My command, and I should abandon them into the hands of the Egyptians? According to this approach, the implications of Moshe's crying out were deeply problematic, since it implied that Hashem might act unjustly.

However, others explain that Moshe had no doubt that the Jews were about to be saved – he simply didn't know how. According to R' Avraham ben HaRambam, Moshe asked to have this knowledge revealed to him, to which Hashem essentially replied, “There is no need to ask. I am about to show you.” Along similar lines, Ramban explains that Moshe was confident in their salvation but was unsure what he was supposed to do. Hashem did not rebuke Moshe for this uncertainty but told him there was no need to “cry out.” He should simply have asked what to do next.

Besides shedding light on the verse itself, these *mefarshim* also raise interesting points about the nature of prayer and *hashgacha pratit*. It seems that, under certain circumstances, crying out is not only unnecessary but even offensive to Hashem. This is particularly the case according to Rashi's second explanation and R' Bechor Shor. But what exactly are these circumstances, and do any of them apply to us today? According to Rashi's first explanation and the Ramban, it seems important to consider not only *what* we ask from Hashem but also *how* we ask it. In our longing for Hashem's help, we can easily forget the needs of those around us and the fact that Hashem has already promised us certain outcomes.

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