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**פרשת כי תבוא
י"ח אלול תשפ"ד**

Feedback? contact@essenceofjudaism.com

From the Chaburah
By: Adam Friedmann

The Mishnah (*Berachot* 2:1) records the halachah that one can interrupt reading the Shema to both initiate and respond to greetings from others. The way this rule is applied depends on where one is up to in their reading of the Shema and who the other person is. There's a debate in the mishnah about the details. The accepted position is Rabbi Yehudah's. He holds as follows:

- **In between paragraphs:** one may initiate a greeting out of respect (*kavod*) and respond to anyone's greeting.
- **In the middle of a paragraph:** one may initiate a greeting out of fear (*yirah*) and respond to a greeting out of respect.

The terms fear and respect refer to different groups of people who should be respected or feared.

Why can we interrupt the Shema?

The fact that we can interrupt reading the Shema for anything is surprising. Generally, an interruption in the middle of performing a mitzvah is a serious problem. Why is it that in this case of the Shema we are allowed to initiate an interruption ourselves? Two weeks ago, we discussed the halachah of reading the Shema with large pauses in the middle (*serugin*). In that case, we suggested that the Shema is in a category of mitzvot that are fulfilled by completing a process that's composed of many smaller pieces. In the case of the Shema, the smaller units are the ideas about Hashem and the mitzvot that we meditate on as we work our way through the text.

If this understanding is accurate, it would explain why the halachah can allow for breaks in the middle of the Shema to greet people. Interrupting our reading of the Shema is not the same as interrupting a mitzvah act like eating or immersing something. In those cases, the mitzvah is only meaningful as a complete action. Interruptions in those cases invalidate the whole performance of the mitzvah. But because the Shema is composed of smaller meaningful “mitzvah parts”, interrupting the reading in the middle does not undermine the whole process. Out of respect for the Shema, we don’t interrupt it for just anything. But we can interrupt it to give proper respect to other people.

There are two pieces of evidence that support this understanding:

First, we saw in our discussion of *serugin* that the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 34b) identified other mitzvot that can be fulfilled at intervals just like the Shema. They are: blowing the shofar, reciting Hallel, and reading the Megillah. The Gemara that discusses interrupting the Shema for greetings (*Berachot* 14a) explicitly extends this halachah to Hallel and the Megillah as well. This indicates that Chazal persistently grouped these mitzvot together and that the reasoning behind *serugin* and interruptions may be the same.

Second, there's the question of where in the Shema you can stop. We saw that the mishnah allows stopping within a paragraph. Does that mean anywhere in the paragraph, or only at the end of a verse? The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berachot* 2:1) indicates that one can interrupt the Shema even in the middle of a verse. However, Rabenu Manoach (cited in *Kesef Mishneh, Hilchot Keriat Shema* 2:15) clarifies that this does not mean we can just stop anywhere within a verse. We can only stop in between ideas within a verse. For example, we can't stop after saying "place these things on your hearts" (*Devarim* 11:18) without also saying the next words "and in your souls". This position is cited by *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim*, 66:3) and the implication of the *Mishnah Berurah* (66:10) is that barring exceptional cases, this is the halachah. Rabenu Manoach's position seems to clearly support our theory that the Shema should be looked at as a series of units of meaning.

Between paragraphs vs. in a paragraph

As we noted above, the halachah distinguishes between interrupting the Shema in between paragraphs and in the middle of a paragraph. Stopping in the middle of a paragraph seems to be more serious. This is why you can only do it for people who command fear or respect. Stopping in between paragraphs is a level down which is why, in that case, you can respond to anyone's greeting. Why is there this distinction? The Mishnah (*Berachot* 2:1) and the Gemara (*Berachot* 14b) explain that the different paragraphs of the Shema have different overall themes. For example, the first paragraph deals with accepting Hashem's rule, the second with the mitzvot, and the third with the exodus from Egypt. Apparently, Chazal attached a degree of importance to completing the meditations on each theme as a unit. The continuity between the paragraphs, however, is less important. This may be why the threshold for interrupting within a paragraph is higher.

Today's common practice

The Mishnah Berurah (66:2) notes that today, the common practice is not to extend greetings during *davening* at shul. Because everyone knows this, he rules that today it's forbidden to interrupt the Shema at all. However, this may not apply to a greeting received from someone who doesn't know about the common practice. It also seems to reflect a radical shift in the way that we read and experience the Shema today as opposed to the days of Chazal. We hope to consider that shift in the weeks to come.

Mishnah: A Philosophy of Life

By: Dovid Campbell

Berachot 6:8 — The Universal Coffeehouse

This week's mishnah includes one of our most commonly recited *berachot* — “*boreh nefashot rabot*,” the blessing we recite after consuming most food products. Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura highlights that the blessing actually includes two distinct concepts. We begin by praising Hashem for supplying our most fundamental needs; things like bread and water. But we then add a second and somewhat ambiguous clause — “for everything He made to enliven the spirit of all the living.” What is the meaning of this addition?

Bartenura offers a beautiful explanation. In this clause, the *berachah* goes beyond the bare necessities and praises Hashem for “everything in the world which we could have survived without but was created simply for delight and increased goodness.” In other words, we bless our Creator not only for making life livable but also profoundly enjoyable.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the mussar movement, once recounted his experience ordering a cup of coffee in a coffeehouse. When the bill arrived, Rav Salanter was surprised by the price. A cup of coffee, a few beans and some hot water, certainly shouldn't cost so much! When he brought this to the waiter's attention, he received a fascinating reply.

Rav Salanter was certainly correct, said the waiter, the price was much too high for a cup of coffee. But Rav Salanter had failed to appreciate that the price included much more than the coffee itself. The comfortable chair, the fine china, the service of the waiter, the pleasant ambiance of the coffeehouse — all of these were also reflected in the price. Rav Salanter smiled broadly.

“You have just taught me the meaning of the blessing, *boreh nefashot*,” he said to the waiter. When Hashem provides our sustenance, it is always accompanied by numerous additions that make it more pleasurable. The aroma, the sunshine, the birdsong — all of these accompany our basic necessities and add a dimension of pleasure that would be otherwise lacking. We must thank Hashem for these, just as for the food itself.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how the Torah's laws of *berachot* direct our attention to the complexity and interconnectedness of our world. In every instance of pleasure and enjoyment, these blessings encourage us to appreciate the countless components that together make up our most basic experiences. In this final *berachah*, we are reminded that these experiences are ultimately contextualized by the entire world, coming together like the rich ambiance of a coffeehouse.

Eilu v'Eilu
By: Dovid Campbell

Writing the Torah in Stone — A Summary, a Miracle, or a Military Record?

“And you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, when you have crossed over, so that you may come to the land which Hashem your God gives you — a land flowing with milk and honey, as Hashem, the God of your fathers, has told you” (*Devarim* 27:3).

This week's *parashah* includes the commandment to erect large stones containing “all the words of this Torah.” Our verse implies that these stones were even a prerequisite for the Jewish people's entrance into the Land of Israel. But what exactly was written on them, and why was the culmination of the entire Exodus dependent on this commandment?

R' Avraham ibn Ezra cites the position of Rav Saadia Gaon: The stones did not contain the entire written text of the Torah, but rather a list of the 613 commandments. Ibn Ezra approves of this approach and highlights that this was the first mitzvah that the Jewish people were commanded to perform upon their entrance into Israel. This helps to explain the connection between this commandment and the inheritance of the Land. Hashem would help the Jews if they demonstrated their willingness to keep His commandments.

R' Yosef ibn Kaspi agrees that the stones did not contain the entire text of the Torah but proposes an even shorter text than Ibn Ezra: the Ten Commandments. Since all of the 613 are included within the broad categories of these ten, the stones could still be said to contain the entire Torah.

Ramban insists that the stones contained the entire text of the Torah and proposes that either the stones were massive or the event occurred through a miracle. It was not the merit of this one particular mitzvah that would enable their entry into Israel but rather the Torah as a whole.

Abarbanel takes a different approach. In his view, “all the words of this Torah” refers to the general story of the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt, their wandering in the desert, their wars with Og and Sichon, and their eventual arrival in Israel. The later clause of our verse (“so that you may come to the land...”) is read by Abarbanel as, “*because* you have come to the land.” Understood this way, it provides not a reward but a reason for the erection of the stones. Abarbanel explains that it is normal for a conquering army to leave a record of their names and exploits.

The various opinions regarding the contents of these stones suggest different understandings of what a basic summary of the Torah should look like. How do these summaries differ, and what do they suggest about the Jewish people's mindset as they entered the Promised Land?