

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek II

1 Iyar, 5783 – April 22, 2023

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos
Chapter II

Likkutei Sichos Volume 17, Pages 356-364

Chapter II, Mishnah 13

פרק ב', משנה י"ג: רבי שמעון אומר, "הוי זהיר בקריאת שמע. וכשאתה מתפלל, אל תעש תפילתך קבע, אלא רחמים ותחנונים לפני המקום..."

Chapter 2, Mishnah 13: Rabbi Shimon would say, "Be careful with the reading of the Shema and with prayer¹. When you pray, do not make your prayers routine, but (rather, a request for) mercy and a supplication before the Almighty"

The Simple Explanation

The Bartenura explains this Mishnah as follows. The Torah obligates us² to recite Shema twice every day and pray³ (a minimum of) thrice daily. These commandments have time constraints, i.e., they must be recited at specific times. Sometimes, it is difficult to meet these requirements; praying at the correct time may be an inconvenience. Nevertheless, the Mishnah tells us that we must exert ourselves to both pray and recite the Shema at the proper time. We only fulfill our obligation by doing so.

The meaning of "not making our prayers routine" is that we must not consider them a fixed part of our daily schedule. We must not consider prayer as just one more thing to get out of the way to proceed with the tasks at hand.

The Bartenura offers a second explanation of "not making our prayers routine." We must not consider either prayer or Shema as a text which we must read by rote. Instead, we must recite them from our hearts as one asking Hashem for His mercy.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

As we have discussed many times, the teachings of Avos help one become Chossid⁴; they help one go above and beyond what the law requires. This being the case, it is undoubtedly difficult to understand

1. Prayer refers to the Shmoneh Esrei, the Amidah prayer which forms the basis of our obligation to pray. It is recited three times each weekday, and more on Shabbos and special days.

2. There is not a unanimous consensus among the Halachic codifiers that prayer is a Torah requirement. There are those (for example the Ramban and the Mogen Avrohom) who are of the opinion the fixed time and text of prayer is a Rabbinic enactment. Be that as it may, we are obligated to pray each day at a fixed time.

3. See footnote 1.

4. See Talmud Bava Kamma 30, a.

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why a warning to recite Shema and Shmoneh Esrei is included here. Both are among the most fundamental precepts of the Torah! Reading the Shema is considered accepting the yoke of heaven⁵; with Shema, one accepts Hashem's kingship upon himself. Prayer is regarded as the "service of the heart⁶." How can one possibly say that reciting Shema and praying every day is considered an extra degree of piety?

The Explanation

To answer this question, we must first consider the Sage who taught this Mishnah, Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel. Our Mishnah refers to him as "Rabbi Shimon" without mentioning his father's name. There is a rule in the Talmud study that whenever a Sage is mentioned as "Rabbi Shimon," without any further description, it refers to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai⁷, also referred to as the Rashbi.

Every aspect of the Torah is precise. Rabbi Yehudah Hanossi edited and arranged the Mishnah. He placed this teaching of Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel alone, in our Mishnah, by itself. If one begins studying from Mishnah nine, it is apparent from the context that Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel is meant. However, by only writing Rabbi Shimon without a description, Rabbi Yehudah left open the possibility that the Rashbi is intended. This could have been done intentionally to point out a certain commonality between both Rabbi Shimon's⁸.

One respect in which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was unique was that he was in the category of "Toraso Umnaso," meaning that the Torah was his (sole) trade⁹. Most of us are dedicated to our trade or profession, whatever it may be, and it occupies most of our waking hours. It seems customary for one to spend most of his time working at "making a living." He must also set aside time to go to shul, pray, and study Torah.

The reverse is true when one's profession is Torah study, and being occupied in worldly matters is beyond his purview. Moreover, even prayer and Shema take a "back seat" to his constant Torah study. The established law is that one who is "Toraso Umnaso" has no requirement to stop studying to pray¹⁰. Moreover, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that one who is in the "Toraso Umnaso" category is not even

5. See the Talmud Berochos 20, b.

6. See the Talmud Taanis 2, a.

7. See Rashi's comments under the heading "in his name" on Shavuos 2, b. See also the Raman's introduction to his Commentary of the Mishnah, the section beginning "Chapter 6."

8. To see the Rebbe's detailed explanation how Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel had actually attained the level of the Rashbi, see the original Sichah, Likkutei Sichos Volume 17, Pages 359-360.

9. See Talmud Shabbos 11, a.

10. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Chapter 106, and Talmud *ibid*.

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required to interrupt his studies to recite Shema¹¹.

There are different levels of making Torah study one's primary occupation. Just as everyone is not equally immersed in his secular occupation, so does Toraso Umnaso, vary from one person to another. Only one who is totally *immersed* in Torah would merit the same exemptions as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (and ben Nesanel). This same dispensation did not apply to his students. Therefore, he needed to tell his students that the same does not apply to them. Based on their stature, they also needed to devote themselves to Shema and prayer.

(Adapted from the Sichah of Shabbos Beha'aloscho, Shelach, and Balak, 5728)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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11. See Talmud Yerushalmi, Berochos Chapter 1, at the end of Paragraph 20.

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Passed away on 28 Nissan, 5776

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in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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*** * ***

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חיילי "צבאות השם"

חיים, ועדן עודד, וזכרי' מתן שיחיו

מאריס

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו

מאריס

*** * ***

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נפטר ביום כ"ח ניסן ה'תשע"ו

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

נדפס ע"י

ר' יונתן איציק הכהן וזוגתו מרת שיינדל מרים שיחיו מנקס

*** * ***

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