

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek II

19 Sivan, 5782 – June 18, 2022

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 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 to pray³ (a minimum of) three times every day. Both 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 is telling 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 and proceed with the tasks.

The Bartenura offers a second explanation for "not making our prayers routine." We must not consider either prayer or Shema as a text that we must read by rote. Instead, we must recite them from our hearts as one who is 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 why a

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.

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

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 heart"⁶. How can one possibly say that reciting Shema and praying daily is considered an extra degree of holiness?

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 study of Talmud 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 Rabbi Shimon⁸.

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, occupying most of our waking hours. It seems customary for one to spend the majority 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 undoubtedly 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 in the category of "Toraso Umnaso" is not even required to interrupt his studies to recite Shema¹¹.

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*.

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

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

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 person to person. 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 found it necessary to tell his students that the same does not apply to them. Based on their stature, it was essential for them to devote themselves to Shema and prayer as well.

(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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**Dr. Mindel Rivka (Muriel) bas Reb Menachem Mendel Shlomo ע"ה
Stitt**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha, 10 Mar-Cheshvan, 5782
May Her Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HER FAMILY שיהיו

* * *

IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"
**Chaim and Aiden Oded שיהיו
Morris**

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

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DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיהיו
Morris**

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther' שתחי Sharabani

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

Mr. Gershon (Geri) שי' Bentov

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