

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 12:

1. **Why don't we read the *aseret hadibrot* (the Ten Commandments) as part of the Shema anymore?** Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: They wanted to establish that the people in the synagogues should read the *aseret hadibrot* along with the recitation of the Shema outside the land of Israel. However, that was disbanded because of the heretics. According to Rashi, the rabbis didn't want to leave an opening for the heretics to say that the *aseret hadibrot* are the only important part of the Torah. These heretics might have been Christians or a group of Jews who did not believe in most of the Torah. They claimed that the *aseret hadibrot* were the only true part of the Torah, because they were given directly to the Jews by G-d while the rest of the Torah was given through Moses, and not from G-d. Reading the *aseret hadibrot* with the Shema could reinforce this dangerous assumption. Interestingly, the Ashkenazi community has the custom to stand when the *aseret hadibrot* are read in shul, but other communities do not because it risks the same misunderstanding.
2. **Misintention is worse than no intention.** You're holding a cup of wine but you think it's a different drink. So you start to make the *shehakol* bracha, and after the first few words you realize it's wine in your cup. You immediately switch the end of the bracha and make a *hagefen*. Does that count? Yes. In fact, even if you didn't realize in time and you made the complete *shehakol* bracha, that would still count, because *shehakol* can really be used for all liquids. A *hagefen* is better for wine, but if you made a *shehakol* that's good enough. But what if it goes the other way? You think you're holding a cup of wine and you begin to make a *hagefen*, but partway through - before you get to the word *boreh* - you realize it's not wine and you switch to *shehakol*. Every bracha begins the same way, so you've said all the right words. But during the first part of the bracha, you had in mind that you were making a bracha on wine. The first part of the bracha is actually the most important part, when we acknowledge G-d as the Source of the food we are eating. If you have the wrong intention when you say that part of the bracha, it's as if you said the whole bracha wrong. There is a debate in the gemara about whether intention is necessary at all when making a bracha. Intention might not be necessary, but according to some of the Rishonim misintention invalidates the bracha.
3. **Comparing bread to dates, and other mixups.** If you're davening Shacharit and you begin the *yotzer or* blessing correctly but then mess up and end it like the corresponding evening blessing, you don't fulfill your obligation. If you begin saying the evening blessing but then end *yotzer hame'orot* correctly, you do fulfill your obligation. In the evening, if you start *hamaariv aravim* and finish with *yotzer hame'orot*, it doesn't count. But if you start *yotzer or* and finish *hamaariv aravim*, it does count. In this case, it is the end of the blessing that's important. That's because in prayer, what is important is mentioning the distinct times of day. In the morning prayer we mention morning and evening, and in the evening prayer we mention evening and morning. As long as you do that, you've fulfilled your obligation. What if you mix up bread and dates? If you ate bread but somehow thought it was dates, and you begin making an *al ha'etz* but realize your mistake and switch to *bircat hamazon*, it is questionable if you've fulfilled your obligation. If you ate dates but thought you'd eaten bread, so you start *bircat hamazon* but then realize your mistake and switch to *al ha'etz*, that counts. In fact, even if you didn't realize your mistake in time, it would still count because saying a complete *bircat hamazon* on dates is actually acceptable.
4. **Kindness in the morning and faithfulness at night.** Whoever does not say *emet veyatziv* in the morning or *emet ve'emunah* in the evening does not fulfill his obligation. These blessings are an important element of the Shema mitzvah, based on the verse, "to talk about Your kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness in the evening" (Psalms 92:3). *Emet veyatziv* is about the

kindness G-d showed our ancestors when He took us out of Egypt. *Emet ve'emunah* is about our faith that G-d will fulfill His promises and redeem us in the future. This distinction is about more than just day and night. Day represents times where things are good. During these times, we have to acknowledge that it is G-d's kindness to us that has given us the good that we have. Night represents times that are not as good. During these times, we have to have faith that G-d will save us just as He has before.

5. **Bowing: the body in service of the Divine intention.** People think that davening is something we do just with our mouths, but the truth is that real prayer involves the whole body. The Baal Shem Tov says swaying while davening is a form of Divine intimacy. You do it because you're driven to be closer to G-d. At certain points during the tefillah, we bend our knees and our waists and then stand up again. We bow quickly and then stand up slowly. In most cases, we bend the knees at the word *baruch*, bow at the word *atah*, and straighten at the word Hashem, because G-d straightens all who are bent.
6. **References to kingship during the Ten Days of Repentance.** For the ten days beginning on Rosh Hashana and ending on Yom Kippur, we change the conclusions of the third and twelfth blessings of the Shemonah Esrei. We change the ending of the third blessing to "*hamelech hakadosh*" and the ending of the twelfth blessing to "*hamelech hamishpat*." These changes reflect the nature of the Days of Awe, which focus on G-d's kingship. It's hard for us today to relate to the idea of kingship, but think of the publicly elected officials in whom we place our trust to administer important decisions relating to the state. In fact, kingship in ancient Israel may have been aiming at something similar to an early form of democracy, in that it had to reflect the will of the people. When we crown G-d as our King, we are rededicating ourselves to Him. The King and His crown represent what we're striving for; the aim of our highest ideals. The Rishonim and the author of the Shulchan Aruch discuss what should be done in the event someone forgets to change the ending of these two blessings. Based on the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama, the consensus is that if you forgot *hamelech hakadosh*, you should repeat the Shemonah Esrei. If you forgot *hamelech hamishpat*, the Shulchan Aruch says you must repeat the Shemonah Esrei but the Rama says you do not need to. Ashkenazic practice is to follow the ruling of the Rama here.
7. **Three statements by Rabba bar Chinena in the name of Rav.** 1) Whoever has the opportunity to request compassion for their friend but does not do so is called a sinner. 2) If it is a Torah scholar who is ill, you should be sick over them. You should feel their pain on a physiological level. 3) If somebody sins but feels shame for their sin, we forgive them. How are these three statements connected? Prayer is not just about our own concerns. It is an opportunity to ask G-d both for things that we need and for things that others need, whether it's the whole community or just a few individuals. There is a teaching in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that whoever prays for somebody else's needs will be answered first. How can that be? Imagine a tree. The tree has roots, a trunk, big branches, and smaller twigs and leaves coming off the big branches. When we pray for ourselves, we're like a little twig or leaf, and the response needs to go through the whole body of the tree before it gets to us. But when we pray for others, it is like we are connecting more deeply to the roots of the tree. In a way, this allows us to transcend the system and get what we need more quickly. Torah scholars, especially, get us closer to the roots of the tree because they connect us to G-d through their own understanding of Torah. That's why we must feel it when they're in pain, and we must pray for them. As for shame, the author of the Tanya explains that it has two levels. On a lower level, we might feel embarrassed when someone catches us doing something wrong. Sometimes the fear of that embarrassment is enough to prevent us from sinning. But there's a higher level of shame: when you really respect somebody, you don't want to let them down. When you realize that you're standing before G-d,

you feel a sense of humility and awe, and you don't want to betray your ultimate purpose. This spiritual sensitivity is connected to the inner life of prayer and is one of the things that powers teshuva (repentance). Many later authorities discuss the essence of teshuva. Is it enough to make a strong decision never to repeat the sin, or is a sense of shame and regret necessary? On a minimal level, the simple decision to do better is enough. But the best teshuva has an added dimension of spiritual sensitivity, because that feeling is more likely to prevent you from ever committing the sin again. However, while shame is important for teshuva and spiritual growth, we must understand the difference between healthy shame and unhealthy shame. Too much anxiety will not help you become a better person; it will just add a dangerous negativity to your life. That's why a big part of Chassidut is serving G-d with simcha (joy). It's important to do the right thing, but it's also important to avoid crippling fear and constant anxiety.

8. **Six themes in the last section of the Shema.** The last paragraph of the Shema mentions 1) the mitzvah of tzitzit, 2) the Exodus from Egypt, 3) accepting the yoke of the commandments, 4) being aware of false beliefs, 5) thoughts or desires to go astray, 6) and thoughts of idolatry. Some of these ideas are clear in the verses while others have to be interpreted. For example, when the Shema says not to follow your heart, this is understood to be referring to heresy. When it says not to follow your eyes, this is understood to be referring to desire for sin. And when it says "what you're desiring to go astray after," this is understood to be referring to the desire for idolatry. It says "after your heart and after your eyes," but shouldn't it be the other way around? First the eye sees, then the heart wants. But maybe the eye sees what the heart wants and that is what leads someone to go astray. There is an idea that a person doesn't sin unless a spirit of folly overcomes him. The spirit of folly is a desire that isn't necessarily rational. A person might think they're drawn to false beliefs because those beliefs are more logical, but often the truth is that they were drawn by other desires. First you decide what you want to do, then you find a belief system that will let you do it. The Yerushalmi brings down a Tosfot that says the Ten Commandments are actually embedded in the three parshiot of the Shema. A few are obvious but most are only hinted at.
9. **The Mishna that's in the Haggadah.** The Mishna at the bottom of daf 12 amud 2 is well known because it's quoted in the Pesach Haggadah. The Mishna begins by saying that we mention the Exodus from Egypt at night, and continues with the story we know so well. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, "I'm like a 70-year-old man, but I never merited to find a proof that one is required to mention the Exodus at night, until I heard Ben Zoma give this drash: the verse says 'in order that you may remember the day when you came out of Egypt all the days of your life.' 'The days of your life' means during the day'; 'all the days of your life' includes the nights." The Sages dispute this interpretation, suggesting that "the days of your life" means in this world and "all the days of your life" includes the time of Mashiach. It's somewhat strange that this Mishna is included in the Haggadah, because it's not talking about the requirement to have a seder or the mitzvah to tell your children the story of the Exodus. But in addition to discussing the particulars of the seder night, the Haggadah also focuses on how the mitzvah to remember the Exodus applies in every generation. Keeping that memory alive is actually a daily, and perhaps also a nightly, requirement.
10. **Why doesn't Maimonides count this as a mitzvah?** We just learned that, at least according to Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, we are required to mention the Exodus every day and every night. But when Maimonides lists the 613 mitzvot, he does not count this requirement as one of them. He does include it in his laws of the Shema, so it's not that he doesn't agree that the requirement exists. So why does he not count it as one of the 613 mitzvot? Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that the daily mention of the Exodus is really just an extension of another mitzvah - acknowledging the unity of G-d and accepting His Oneness. It's not a mitzvah by itself, but rather a detail

included in that mitzvah. But there is perhaps a more obvious answer. We have another mitzvah that is almost identical to the mitzvah of mentioning the Exodus every morning and evening: the yearly mitzvah to recount the Exodus at great length on the night of the seder. That yearly mitzvah is one of the 613 according to Maimonides. I would argue that mentioning the Exodus every day is essentially an extension of that mitzvah. It is similar to the requirement to declare G-d as our King. This obviously extends to every day, because He is always our King, but we have a specific set of requirements to make the declaration on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Similarly, the essential element of the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus is fully embodied on the seder night, and this extends to a twice daily mention of the Exodus. It is really all one mitzvah with different details.