

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 13:

1. **Why did Jacob go by two names?** After Jacob wrestled with the angel, the angel told him that from then on his name would be Israel, not Jacob. But even after G-d confirmed the name change, he was sometimes called Jacob and sometimes called Israel. Why? Other people who had their names changed by G-d were almost exclusively called by their new names from then on. But Jacob/Israel was different, because both names represent something that continues to flourish. According to Rav Hirsch, the name Jacob represents the state of struggle and the name Israel represents his superiority. Even after he bested the angel and earned his new name, he still continued to struggle at times, such as when he thought his son Joseph was dead. The Meshoch Chochma says that the name Jacob refers to him as an individual while the name Israel represents the people as a whole. That's why we are called Bnei Yisrael, the sons of Israel. Every time he is called by the name Israel, it is because there is some national element to what is being said.
2. **Earlier hardships make us forget the earlier ones.** Rabbi Yosef says this means the war of Gog U'Magog will make us forget all of our earlier troubles. Why? An analogy is given. A traveler encounters a wolf and is saved. Naturally, this person will share the story of how he was saved from a wolf. But then he travels again and encounters a lion, and again he is saved. After that, he tells the story of being saved from the lion but no longer talks about the wolf. Later, this same traveler encounters a snake and is again saved. From then on, he tells only the story of being saved from the snake. He completely forgets about the wolf and the lion, because the incident with the snake drove those earlier events from his mind. The same thing happens to us, the people of Israel. The war of Gog U'Magog and the salvation that results will drive our past hardships from our memories. Therefore, most of our holidays will be forgotten in the time of Mashiach. That is why on daf 12b, Ben Zoma and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said the Exodus will no longer need to be mentioned in the time of Mashiach. However, according to the sages it will still be remembered, though it will be less relevant in comparison to later miracles. In contrast, the Talmud Yerushalmi tells us that Purim will never be forgotten. Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev explains that Purim is connected to Gog U'Magog, because of the connection to Amalek. Though Gog U'Magog will ultimately be the only salvation that we talk about, we will still talk about Purim because it is part of the same story. The Pachad Yitzchak explains further with a story. There was once a small village that couldn't afford any fancy security measures. All they had was one night watchman, and he had no lights or anything else to aid him. He relied only on his wits. He was able to detect danger just by listening and noting subtle sounds and distinctions. Eventually, this watchman was promoted and moved to a bigger city with more resources to head their security team, but he always credited his skills to his experience in that small town. That is what happened for us on Purim. From so little, we learned so much. Even when Mashiach comes and we have more resources than we did then, the things we learned on Purim will stay with us.
3. **The three Abrahamic religions.** Abram, the father of Aram, had his name changed to Abraham, father of the whole world. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all trace their roots back to Abraham and share the belief that he was the founder of monotheism. His wife Sarai, princess of her people, had her name changed to Sarah, queen to the whole world. In fact, it really should be the "Abrahamic and Sarah" religions, because of Sarah's important partnership in spreading awareness of the One G-d. While Christianity doesn't have the same view of the One G-d as Judaism, they still have some ideas that Maimonides posits will help usher in the Messianic time. Maimonides in Hilchot Avodah Zara speaks about Abraham's role in rediscovering G-d. Abraham was a philosopher who contemplated the true nature of the world, and this led him to

discover the One G-d. He and Sarah spread this idea throughout the world and reversed the course of polytheism. This teaches us that in addition to belief in G-d, one should strive for an intellectual understanding of G-d, so that the rational mind can relate to G-d's existence. Of course, that was one of Maimonides's contributions that was and still is somewhat controversial.

4. **Are interruptions acceptable in the middle of the Shema?** The Mishna tells us: Rabbi Meir says that in between the sections or the blessings, you can ask about somebody you honor (meaning you can greet a distinguished person) and you can respond to them. In the middle of the Shema or one of its blessings, you can offer greetings only to someone you're afraid of. According to Rashi, that means someone you're afraid will kill you. The Rashba disagrees, because it goes without saying that the Shema can be interrupted for *pikuach nefesh* (to save a life). Rather, the Rashba says this is referring to your *rebbe muvhak* (your main teacher). Rabbi Yehuda says in the middle of the Shema or one of its blessings you can ask about the welfare of someone you're afraid of and respond to someone you honor, and in between sections you can greet someone you honor and respond to anyone. Where exactly is "between sections"? It means between the first blessing and the second blessing, between the second blessing and the Shema, between the first paragraph of the Shema (*ve'ahavta*) and the second (*vehaya*), between the second paragraph and the third (*vayomer*), or between the third paragraph and *emet veyatziv*. However, Rabbi Yehuda says you cannot interrupt between the third paragraph and *emet veyatziv*. Most commentaries say you cannot interrupt between the end of the Shema and the word *emet*, but you can interrupt after the word *veyatziv*.
5. **Does the Shema require intention?** The Mishna says if somebody is reading Torah and the time comes to read the Shema, he can concentrate his heart and fulfill his obligation. The Gemara deduces that mitzvot require intention. Rashi points out that Rabba says elsewhere that if you're playing around with a shofar to make music and just happen to hit the right notes, you fulfill your obligation because intention is not necessary. So how can the Mishna say here that intention is necessary? In Rabba's defense, the Gemara explains that it could be talking about a scribe who is reading the Torah with the intention of correcting it. There are three levels: reading for the purpose of finding mistakes; reading for the purpose of reading; and reading for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah. According to Rabba, the third level is not necessary but the second level is. A scribe has only the first level of intention, and that is not enough to fulfill the mitzvah. Tosfot disagrees, saying that even a scribe who is reading the Torah in order to make corrections is still reading, and that counts. However, a scribe checking a Torah has a different way of reading. Because he is checking for mistakes and not reading for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah, he would pronounce the words differently. So if he does read the words properly, that is enough to fulfill his obligation. But if he doesn't, he does not fulfill his obligation. The debate about whether mitzvot need intention is wide-ranging. When it comes to Kriyat Shema, some say you must have in mind to accept the responsibility of G-d's unity, and anything less does not fulfill your obligation, while others say that as long as you know what you're saying it's enough.
6. **How Tosfot decides the halacha.** There is a debate between Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi and the rabbis. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi says you have to say the Shema as it is written, based on the word *vehayu* (it should be, as it is); the rabbis say you can read it in any language, based on the word *shema* (in any language you can hear it). Tosfot agrees with the rabbis. The Ri quotes a Gemara in Eruvin (46b) about the priority given to certain rabbis in debates. Whenever Rabbi Akiva disputes another individual sage, we rule according to him. When Rabbi Yose argues even with multiple sages, we rule according to him. And when Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi argues against an individual, we rule according to him. There might be a case when Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi argues

against a majority and we're still inclined to follow him, but that's an exception, not the rule. So in our Gemara, where Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi is arguing against a majority, Tosfot follows the majority. However, it's important to understand that we don't actually learn halachic rulings just from the Gemara. Even when it is specifically stated that we follow a certain opinion, that may not be accepted today as the halacha. The evolution of halacha is complex, and we cannot assume that the Gemara has the final say when even the Gemara itself often contradicts its own rulings and the many rabbis involved in the discussions don't always agree about what's quoted as being the halacha.

7. **Is good intention good enough?** Or do you need a correct action to go along with the feeling? If the mitzvah is to put on tefillin, even though there are certain thoughts that are supposed to go along with it, the act itself is paramount. Spending an hour meditating on those thoughts without actually putting on the tefillin does not fulfill your obligation. What if you think about the words of the Shema and the intentions that go with them but don't actually say the words? There are actually a number of mitzvot involved in saying the Shema and its blessings. There's the mitzvah to love G-d, the mitzvah to fear G-d, the mitzvah to unify G-d, the mitzvah of not having more than one G-d, and the mitzvah to remember the Exodus. These are mitzvot of the heart, and the more intention you have while saying the words, the more mitzvot you are fulfilling. So why is reading the words even necessary? Because reciting the Shema is a mitzvah in itself. Rabbi Eliezer says you might think the whole first paragraph requires intention, but actually it is only until the word *ha'eleh* that intention is necessary. For the first part, which is about loving G-d and dedicating yourself to Him, you have to pay attention to what you're saying, but after the word *ha'eleh*, intention is not necessary. Rabbi Akiva says the first portion of the Shema requires intention. Rabbi Yehuda says the first chapter requires intention. Later commentaries discuss if Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehuda are saying the same thing, or if they differ in the details. Rav Zutra says you need to have intention until the words *al levavecha*, and after that it's ok to just read the words. Rabbi Yoshiah says until the words *al levavecha* you need to read, and after those words it's enough to intend. Why would it be enough, according to Rav Zutra, to just read after those words? Because it says in the second section *ledabeir bam* - to speak in them. But it also says *vedibarta bam* in the first section. It must mean that the first chapter requires intention with reading, and after that it can be read without intention. But the second paragraph also says *al levavecha*, so why does that not require intention? Because the *al levavecha* there is talking about where the tefillin need to be worn, not about intention.
8. **Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi would only recite the first line.** One rabbi said to another, "When does Rabbi say the Shema?" The other rabbi responded that when he covers his eyes, he's saying the Shema. We learn from here that we must cover our eyes while saying the first line. Some hold that Rabbi also said *baruch shem kevod*, and they debate about whether he said the rest of it at some point later in the day. But why wouldn't he have said the whole Shema? Because he was always *osek b'mitzvah*. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi was one of the greatest scholars of all time, and he was always learning and teaching. He started so early in the morning that it was too early to say Shema, so at some point he would stop and just say the first line, then get back to his teaching. In order to fulfill the requirement to mention the Exodus at the proper time, he would always say something in his lecture about the Exodus.
9. **Clarifying the Mishna on responding during the Shema.** Tosfot points out that in a debate between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda, the law follows Rabbi Yehuda. That would mean that even in the middle of the Shema, one could respond to another person for the sake of their honor. But interestingly, we don't follow this ruling when it comes to well-wishers. Our practice is not to interrupt the Shema to respond even to people we respect. However, Tosfot says we do apply this ruling to certain communal responses in Kaddish and Kedusha.

10. **When to respond to Kaddish or Kedusha when you're saying Shema.** According to Tosfot, one can interrupt even in the middle of the Shema to answer "*amen yehai shemai rabba*" in Kaddish or to respond to Kedusha. However, the Amida cannot be interrupted for these responses. Many siddurim publish notes or charts detailing exactly what responses are permitted at which points, to help navigate our responses to *devarim shebikedusha* while we say the Shema and its brachot.