

## Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 14:

- 1. When and why we say Hallel.** Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Meir were debating about when it is acceptable to interrupt the Shema. The gemara then asks, what about Megillah and Hallel? Can they be interrupted? You might think that if the Shema can be interrupted then of course Megillah and Hallel can be interrupted, since they are only rabbinic requirements. Then again, perhaps it makes sense to be extra strict with Megillah and Hallel because their purpose is *pirsumei nissa* (publicizing the miracle), which is extremely important. The first opinion cited by the gemara is that Hallel can be interrupted. But Rabba says it depends. On the days when we complete the Hallel (ie. say the full Hallel), you can interrupt between chapters but not in the middle of a chapter. On days that we don't complete the Hallel (ie. we say half Hallel), you can interrupt even in the middle of a chapter. What days was Hallel instituted for? Usually, we say Hallel on holidays when *melacha* (work) is prohibited. However, if a holiday lasts several days and nothing is unique about the different days, we don't continue to say the full Hallel every day of the holiday. The first day of Pesach requires Hallel, but in the days of the Beit Hamikdash the service for the remaining days was exactly the same, so Hallel is not required on those days. On Sukkot, however, different offerings were brought every day of the holiday. Since the service of each day was unique, each day requires Hallel. Based on this formula, Hallel was originally instituted on 18 days: the first day of Pesach, Shavuot, eight days of Sukkot, and eight days of Chanukah. In galut that turned into 21 days, with the addition of a second day to Pesach, Shavuot, and Shemini Atzeret. Though Chanukah is not a holiday when *melacha* is prohibited, we say Hallel nonetheless because a miracle occurred. Why do we say Hallel all eight days? A one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, which means that each day a miraculously small amount of oil was used up. Each day that the oil was not used up was a new miracle.
- 2. What about the custom to say Hallel on Rosh Chodesh?** Tosfot tells a story from gemara in Taanis: Rav, who lived in Israel, went to Bavel and saw people saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. He thought they were making a mistake, thinking it was a holiday, and he wanted to stop them. Tosfot explains that Rav assumed they were going to say the whole Hallel. When he saw that they were skipping sections, he understood they must have been following the custom of their ancestors. This means that the days we say only half Hallel are the days when Hallel is not actually required. It's a minhag (custom) to say Hallel on those days. The Machzor Vitry suggests that when Hallel is only a minhag, we should not make a bracha on it. There is a gemara in Sukkah (44b) that says you don't make a bracha on a minhag. However, that gemara is talking specifically about hoshanos, and Rabbeinu Tam says that rule doesn't apply to Hallel because Hallel itself actually is a mitzvah. Even on a day when it's not required, a bracha can still be made, just like if a woman does a mitzvah she's not actually obligated in she can make a bracha. We know we can make a bracha on a minhag, because even having a second day of a holiday is a minhag outside of Israel, and we make brachot on those days just like the "real" holidays. In fact, the gemara here must be talking about Hallel with a bracha, because without a bracha there would be no question about the permissibility of interruptions. Also, if Rav had heard the people in Bavel saying Hallel without a bracha he would have realized immediately that it was a minhag. This elevation of minhag is more pronounced in the Ashkenazic community than the Sephardic community.
- 3. Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, in Chassidus.** Usually, we say Hallel because it's a holiday. On these days, G-d made something extraordinary. On these days, His light is manifest. We don't work, we brought special offerings in the Beit Hamikdash, and we celebrate some miraculous event that occurred in Israel. But Rosh Chodesh is not a holiday. Why do we say Hallel? Rab Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin says that in the future, when Mashiach comes, time itself will be a miracle.

Today, every moment is miraculous but we don't see it in our everyday lives. G-d is One, but His Oneness is not obvious to the world. In the time of Mashiach that will change. G-d and His Name will be One for all to see at all times. In Bavel, where the people truly felt the pain of exile, they anticipated Mashiach all the time, and so they were more able to feel a connection to the future revelation of the miracle of time itself. If we can say Hallel on a miracle, and time is a miracle, then we can say Hallel on time. And what is Rosh Chodesh, if not a celebration of time? However, time is not yet an open miracle, as it will be when Mashiach comes. So for now, Rosh Chodesh is just a taste of the future, and Hallel is just a minhag.

4. **A minhag is a neder.** When you make a neder, a vow, to do or not to do something, you are obligated by your vow. The gemara in Nedarim and the Shulchan Aruch say that when you do a good practice, even if you don't make a specific vow, it takes on the status of a vow rabbinically. To remove the obligation, you need *hatarat nedarim*. The Ishbitzer Rebbe says the development of Rabbinic law is like a neder. Imagine an alcoholic. If he drinks even a little bit of wine he will fall off the wagon, so he needs to swear never to have any wine. The rabbis understood that some things are so dangerous that fences are needed to prevent people from failing. So they established fences to protect Torah law, and these fences took on the status of vows. The time may come when one of these vows is no longer necessary, but we can't simply undo it ourselves. The rabbis created the obligation, and the only way to undo it is with a *beit din* that is greater in wisdom and in numbers than the *beit din* that originally made the decree. This ability to undo a decree is similar to the concept of *hatarat nedarim*.
5. **What not to do before davening, and why Chassidim are not as careful.** Rav says that if someone greets his friend (saying Shalom) before davening, it's as if he built an altar. How can that be? The rabbis had just been discussing when it's permitted to interrupt the Shema to greet people. How could the halacha be stricter before beginning davening than during the Shema? Rav Abba explains that this does not refer to casual greetings, but to going to a friend's house. What it really means is that you should not take care of your personal business before davening. In other words, davening time is important and it should not be delayed. However, Chassidim often have chosen to de-emphasize davening times. They worried that people were too focused on davening at the proper time and not focused enough on the davening itself. Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev explained the issue with a parable: There was once a group of musicians who played every day before the king. After many years of doing the same thing every day, they got lazy. They never practiced, they never bothered tuning their instruments. The music they played was not fit for a king. Then one day, they decided to put in the effort. They tuned their instruments and rehearsed, and they got so involved in preparing that they showed up late to the performance. Even so, the king was pleased, because they were finally playing real music. We are like these musicians. We let our davening become routine, not fit for the King. So the Chassidim decided it would be better to be late and to do it right than to continue showing up on time and davening by rote. Followers of the Vilna Gaon objected, because once you start ignoring one rule it can become easier to ignore others. But that hasn't happened. Chassidim have not gone further and violated other halachot; it is only davening times that they have relaxed.
6. **Emes at the end of Shema.** When you conclude the last paragraph of the shema, you should not interrupt before saying the word emes. The word emes is actually not part of the Shema, but the beginning of the next paragraph. But there is a verse in Yeshayahu, "and G-d is the G-d of truth (emes)." Therefore, when we say G-d's name we want to connect it to truth. Does that mean you should say the word emes twice? Rav Avahu says in the name of Rav Yochanan that you should repeat it, while Rabba says not to repeat it.

7. **The danger of repeating words in davening.** Rabba heard someone in his synagogue saying “emes” twice, and he objected. Why, when we know there is a legitimate reason to repeat the word? Perhaps Rabba felt that saying a word once is enough, and repeating it indicates a problem. Often people repeat words in davening because they have OCD - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. They’re afraid they didn’t say the words right or that they didn’t have the right intention while saying them, so they repeat them over and over trying to get it right. But that’s not what G-d wants from us. The Steipler Gaon says that G-d doesn’t want us to be anxious about our prayers. That anxiety is the yetzer hara talking. We should trust that even if what we’re doing is not perfect, G-d is pleased with it. He does not expect us to be perfect; He just wants us to try. OCD is a real problem in the religious community, and it hurts people’s relationships with G-d. But therapy is available to treat this disorder, and anyone suffering should seek professional help.
8. **The customs in Israel and Bavel regarding the third paragraph.** In Israel, people would not say the whole Shema during Maariv. They would say the first few words of the third paragraph, until “*ve’amarta aleihem*,” and then they would skip to “*ani Hashem Elokeichem emes*.” Rav Kahana says in the name of Rav that in the evening, the third paragraph of the Shema is not really necessary, because it’s mostly about tzitzit, which is a daytime mitzvah. In fact, you shouldn’t say the paragraph at all at night, but if you start it you must say the whole thing without skipping. However, just saying the first few words doesn’t really count as starting. Only if you’ve already said “*ve’amarta aleihem*” do you have to continue. In Israel, they felt that you haven’t really started the paragraph until you’ve mentioned the tzitzit. Abaya says that in Bavel, they would say the first few words of the paragraph out of kavod for Israel, but since they considered that beginning the paragraph, they would have to say the whole thing.
9. **Two reasons for the order of the parshiot of Shema.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha in the Mishna on daf 13a offered an explanation for the order of the paragraphs: The first paragraph, *ve’ahavta*, is about accepting G-d as our King. The second paragraph, *vehaya im shamoa*, is about accepting the mitzvot. We must accept G-d before we can accept His mitzvot. *Vehaya im shamoa* is about mitzvot that apply day and night, while the third paragraph, *vayomer*, is specifically about tzitzit, which is only applicable during the day. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai gives a different reason for the order: The first paragraph is about learning, the second paragraph is about teaching, and the third paragraph is about acting. But the first paragraph isn’t only about learning; it also mentions teaching children and wearing tefillin. The second paragraph also mentions the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzot. What Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai means is that the first paragraph is about learning, teaching, and acting; the second paragraph is about teaching and acting; and the third paragraph is only about acting. He is not actually arguing with the Mishna. He is just adding an extra reason. When a rabbi brings a new teaching, it’s not always because he disagrees with the first one. Sometimes he is agreeing and just adding an extra element.
10. **Which comes first, Shema or tefillin?** The gemara says you should have your tefillin on already when you say the Shema. Otherwise it’s like you’re giving false testimony, because the Shema talks about wearing tefillin. The essence of emes is having what we do match what we say. Without actually wearing the tefillin to show that you are a servant of G-d, the Shema is just empty words. The halachic authorities point out that if the time of Shema is passing it is ok to say Shema without tefillin, as long as you put on tefillin later and repeat the Shema with its blessings as part of the davening.