

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 21:

1. **Shema and bircat hamazon are Biblical requirements; tefillah is rabbinic.** The Rambam says there is a requirement to daven every day, while the Ramban says the requirement is only to daven in times of great need. How can the Rambam say there is a requirement to daven every day when the gemara says it's only rabbinic? To understand the Rambam's position, we must look at the Sefer Hamitzvot. In mitzvah 10, the Rambam says that it is a positive mitzvah to say the Shema every evening and every morning. He links this daily mitzvah to prayer, quoting a tosefta that says that just as the Torah requires us to say the Shema twice a day, the rabbis instituted that prayer should be said three times a day. Why does the Rambam include this discussion of prayer in his explanation of the mitzvah of Shema? He believes that there is a positive mitzvah to pray every day, based on the verse, "Serve G-d with your heart." But he explains that the institution of the specific times for prayer, as well as the liturgical structure, was created by the rabbis, and therefore we usually refer to prayer as a rabbinic mitzvah. On daf 26 we will discuss more about the establishment of prayer, and we will see that some suggest prayer was instituted to replace the daily offerings of the Temple. In the Rambam's conception, it's not so much about replacing the offerings as using their time frame to establish a structure. Although the essence of prayer is, according to the Rambam, Biblical, the times for prayer and the words that we use are not.
2. **The bracha before learning Torah.** How do we know you have to make a bracha before learning Torah? From the verse in Haazinu: "When I proclaim the name of Hashem, give glory to G-d." Rashi explains that Moshe was telling the people he was going to say a bracha and they should respond amen. Interestingly, the Rambam does not count this as one of the 613 mitzvot, but the Ramban says that it is a mitzvah and the Rambam just missed it.
3. **Why do we make a bracha before we learn, but only after we eat?** Food is physical. When you're hungry, you are eager to eat, and when you finish eating you are satisfied. Maharsha says that when it comes to physical things, it's not about what you want but about what you had. But learning is different. You may not have the same hunger for learning as you do for food, and you may not feel the same satisfaction after learning. In fact, since there is always more to learn we can never truly be satisfied with our learning. Therefore, the bracha on learning comes before we start.
4. **What if you're not sure you said Shema?** If you're not sure whether or not you said Shema, according to Rabbi Yehuda you don't have to say it again. But if you're not sure you said *emes veyatziv* (the attached blessings), you do have to say that again. Why would this be the case? Because the Shema is a rabbinic requirement while the blessing after the Shema is Biblical. How? They fulfill the requirement to mention *yetziat mitzrayim*. Isn't Shema also a Biblical requirement, because the verse says, "when you lie down and when you get up"? That verse doesn't have to refer to the Shema itself. The Biblical requirement could be fulfilled by learning Torah in general. This opinion is disputed by Rabbi Elazar and others, who feel that the Shema is Biblically required. The majority of poskim say that the Shema is *de'orayta*. Even Rabbi Yehuda agrees that the Shema is important because it contains the acceptance of Heaven. So why would you repeat the blessing of *emes veyatziv* but not the Shema itself when you're unsure what you said? Tosfot explains that it's more likely that you forgot the blessing than that you forgot everything. Since it's likely you did actually say the Shema, you should only repeat the blessing.
5. **Rambam on repeating the Shema.** The Rambam says that if you're not sure whether or not you said the Shema, you should say it again along with the brachot before and after. But why would you repeat the brachot, which are rabbinic? Generally, when there is a doubt relating to a bracha it should not be repeated. One of the most interesting answers is the idea that the

brachot and the Shema are one unit. We can also answer this question by asking another question: Why does the Rambam say that you can daven and say the Shema and its blessings all day, even if you missed the proper time? Because the Shema and tefillah are an essential realization of certain truths and an essential step in raising ourselves up to have an intense awareness of G-d's Oneness. The very first mitzvah listed by the Rambam is to have knowledge of G-d, and that is the purpose of the Shema and its blessings. Therefore, though the blessings are rabbinic, they are also a fulfillment of tefillah and the mitzvot of loving, fearing, and unifying G-d. And like tefillah, while these blessings are supposed to be said at a certain time of day, they are not limited to that time.

6. **Why doesn't the Rambam count remembering the Exodus every day as a mitzvah?** We know that we are supposed to mention the Exodus every day and night, with the third paragraph of the Shema and the surrounding blessings. In Hilchot Kriyat Shema, the Rambam says that this is a mitzvah. But he does not count it as one of the 613 mitzvot. Why? Rav Soloveitchik answers that remembering the Exodus in the Shema is part of a larger mitzvah. The Shema is about our relationship with G-d, with accepting Him as the One G-d and giving ourselves over to Him. Remembering the Exodus is included in this greater theme. How do we accept G-d and give ourselves to Him? By remembering the Exodus and all the miracles that He did for us. Remembering the Exodus is therefore not a separate mitzvah but a part of the greater mitzvah of accepting the yoke of Heaven. Another answer is that we have many different mitzvot connected to remembering the Exodus, such as tzitzit, tefillin, and the Pesach seder. Mentioning the Exodus in the Shema is connected to all of those other mitzvot, particularly the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus the night of the Seder. The daily requirement to remember the Exodus is really just a part of the yearly mitzvah of telling the story on Seder night. Since the daily recitation of the Shema is not a unique mitzvah, the Rambam does not count it in the 613.
7. **What to do if you're not sure you davened.** Rabbi Elazar says if you're not sure whether or not you said the Shema, you should say it again. But if you're not sure whether or not you said tefillah (Shemonah Esrei), you don't need to say it again. Rabbi Yochanan says it would be ideal for someone to daven all day. What does that mean? Some explain that it means you should repeat the tefillah if you're not sure, because it would even be ok to say tefillah all day long. However, if you do repeat the tefillah it should be a *tefillat nedavah*. While regular tefillah is in place of the korban tamid that used to be brought in the Beit Hamikdash, an extra "just in case" tefillah would be in place of a voluntary extra korban. It was permitted to bring an extra optional offering in the Beit Hamikdash, so it is permitted to say an extra tefillah. However, some rabbis say that once you've done the Amidah once you should not repeat it, because if you feel that you didn't have the proper *kavanah* the first time, it's likely you won't do it any better the second time. Some authorities absolutely forbid the repetition of the Amidah, considering it a blessing made in vain. The Rambam says that you can repeat the tefillah as long as you intend it as a *nedavah*. You should say something a little bit different, like adding extra prayers during the *shema koleinu* bracha. That way you're not simply doing it by rote, and you have a reason for repeating the tefillah if in fact you have already said it. Note that this does not work on Shabbos, when voluntary korbanot were not permitted.
8. **The relationship between korbanot and tefillah.** The word korban comes from the root karev, which means to bring close. What are you bringing close? The Ramban says that when you bring a korban you should make a statement that the animal is being given in your place. It's more than just a substitute; what you're doing is taking the physicality of the animal and fusing it with the fire of the *mizbeach* to create something that is pleasing to G-d. In this way you bring your body to G-d's service. Tefillah is a time of struggle, when we try to overcome the yetzer hara and channel our passions into holiness.

9. **What to do in shul when the chazzan is davening.** If you walk into shul and the minyan is in the middle of Shemonah Esrei, what should you do? If you have time to say the whole Shemonah Esrei before the chazzan gets to modim, you should. If not, you should wait for the congregation so that you can bow with everyone else at the chazzan's repetition of modim. You should not be standing straight when everyone else is bowing for modim. Alternatively, you can begin the Shemonah Esrei but make sure that when the chazzan gets to modim you're at a place where you're allowed to bow. R' Yehoshua ben Levi says you should not start Shemonah Esrei if you won't be able to finish before the chazzan gets to kedusha. Some people just pause in their silent Shemonah Esrei when the chazzan gets to kedusha, relying on the concept of *shomeah ke'oneh* (hearing counts like answering) to fulfill their obligation in kedusha. However, there is a disagreement about whether or not *shomeah ke'oneh* applies when you can't say amen. It is absolutely not permitted to interrupt your silent Shemonah Esrei to say kedusha. Can you interrupt the silent Shemonah Esrei to say *yehei shemei rabbah* in kaddish? There is one opinion that you can interrupt anything, including the Shemonah Esrei, for that response, but the halacha does not follow this opinion.
10. **How do we know an individual can't say kedusha?** From the verse "I will sanctify myself among b'nei yisrael." Anything that is meant to proclaim G-d's holiness can only be said by 10 men.