

Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 25:

- 1. Davening Shemonah Esrei is like standing before the King.** A *beraita* teaches that if a person is wrapped up in a cloth that covers them from the waist down but leaves their chest bare, they can say the Shema but not Shemonah Esrei. For Shemonah Esrei, the chest must be covered. Rashi says that for Shemonah Esrei, you must show yourself as if you're standing in front of the King, but Shema is not like speaking before the King. This seems odd, because the Shema is a biblical requirement while Shemonah Esrei is only rabbinic. There is a parallel idea in Chassidut, that the recitation of the Shema is a lower spiritual state than the recitation of Shemonah Esrei. But why? The Chassidic/Kabbalistic answer is that it's in a lower world but a higher, more intimate element of the lower world, as opposed to a more exterior form of a higher world. Shema is a pledge of allegiance; a series of declarations starting with G-d's Oneness and continuing with the acceptance of mitzvot. It has an element of learning Torah and ahavat Hashem (loving G-d). In a sense, it's not about standing before G-d but about studying the principles of the Torah. It is not like a formal meeting with the king where one must stand in awe and be perfectly presentable, but a much deeper connection. When we say the Shema we are like the king's children, who have greater access and who don't need to be formal all the time. Saying the Shema is finding G-d everywhere, while saying Shemonah Esrei is talking to G-d in the Holy of Holies. Why does Rashi say you must "show yourself" as if you're standing before the King? Outward appearance is important. If you don't present yourself like you're in front of the King, you will have a difficult time getting to that state internally. Similarly, a mourner must show outwardly that he is mourning. He doesn't have to feel constant distress, but he is required to appear like a mourner.
- 2. Is prayer in the mouth or the body?** The gemara says that if a person has a little bit of excrement on his body, which isn't really visible and doesn't smell, or if his hand is in the bathroom and the rest of his body isn't, according to Rav Huna he can say the Shema and according to Rav Chisda he can't. There are two ways of looking at prayer: 1) primarily coming from the soul, spirit, mind, and mouth, or 2) embodied practice; all of my limbs calling out. Rav Huna's ruling is based on the verse in Tehillim: "Every soul (*neshama*) shall praise G-d." The word *neshama* is related to the word *neshima*, which means breath. Every breath shall praise G-d. As long as your breath, meaning your mouth, is not in the bathroom, you can say Shema. Rav Chisda's ruling is based on the verse, "All my limbs say, 'G-d, who is like You?'" This suggests prayer is not just in the mouth but in the whole body, so if any part of your body is in the bathroom you cannot say Shema. Jewish prayer used to be Avodah - not just prayer, but service. The Temple service was embodied. We brought sacrifices, symbolizing giving up our animalistic will to the Divine fire. This type of service was not done only with the mind and the mouth. The goal was to take our bodies and refine them, to take our physical temptations and work on them, to create more positivity out of our negative character traits. In fact, the concept of the 613 mitzvot is that every single limb has a mitzvah involved with it. Prayer today is a replacement for the Avodah of old. It is a rectification of the soul and the body.
- 3. Comparing the ritual impurity of tzara'at to the sanctity of the davening space.** Vayikra 13:15 says that a person with tzara'at must segregate himself and sit alone. Devarim Chapter 23 discusses rules for a war encampment. One rule is that if a man becomes impure because of something that happens at night, he should leave the camp. In the evening he immerses in a mikvah, and when the sun sets he can return to camp. Another rule is that there must be a designated place outside the camp for bodily needs. After relieving themselves, the men should take a shovel and cover it up. All of this is because G-d is in the camp, and so it should be holy. Our places of prayer, like the war encampments, need to be clean and pure. There should not be

any excrement in the prayer space. What if a child with a dirty diaper is running around, in and out of the space? Do you have to pause in your davening? Abaye says it's not a problem, and we learn this from the laws of tzara'at. If a metzora (a person with tzara'at) is sitting under a tree and a ritually pure person walks under the tree, that person becomes ritually impure. But if a ritually pure person is sitting under a tree and a metzora walks under it, the pure person does not become impure, unless the metzora stops and stays under the tree. The temporary invasion of impurity into the space does not make the person using the space impure. But can the two situations really be compared? It's a machloket. Rava says no, because the verse in Vayikra specifically says that a metzora must sit alone. That is because tzara'at is primarily a punishment for social sins, for creating disunity among people, and so the spiritual solution is to sit alone and separate. That requirement is what defines the method in which a metzora can pass along impurity. But excrement is a different thing. It's about keeping the camp holy. Tefillah requires being present, not being distracted or disturbed. If there is a bad smell nearby you won't be in the right mindset.

4. **Accepting Rabbi Elazar's opinion.** If a person is in the mikvah at sunrise and doesn't have enough time to get dressed to say the Shema before the sun rises, he should cover himself with water and say the Shema that way. This Mishna seems to follow the opinion of Rabbi Elazar from the debate on daf 9B, that you only have until sunrise to say the Shema. Our gemara therefore first assumes that the law follows Rabbi Elazar, because of the concept of Stam Mishna: If there is a debate in one Mishna, and then in a later Mishna only one of the earlier opinions is cited and is not attributed, we assume that opinion is the law. Otherwise, the author of the Mishna would not have included the opinion in the later Mishna. Earlier, on daf 9b, we had a debate between Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yehoshua. Rabbi Elazar requires that the morning Shema be recited by sunrise, and Rabbi Yehoshua allows the first three hours of the day. Our Mishna here, which is unattributed, implies that the Shema must be said by sunrise, seemingly siding with Rabbi Elazar. This suggests, based on the concept of Stam Mishna, that we accept Rabbi Elazar's opinion.
5. **Concluding according to Rabbi Yehoshua.** The gemara concludes that the Mishna can be reconciled even according to Rabbi Yehoshua, and one is in fact allowed to say the morning Shema up until three hours of the day. Then why does the Mishna seem to accept Rabbi Elazar's opinion? Because it is referring specifically to *vasikin*, those who are particularly righteous and wanted to do the mitzvah in its most opportune time – at sunrise. These people would finish the Shema right as the sun was rising so that they could begin the Shemonah Esrei at sunrise and be *somech geulah l'tefillah* – connect the mention of redemption in the blessings after the Shema with the Shemonah Esrei prayer. Ordinary people, who do not have the custom to say the Shema right at sunrise, do not have to rush and have until three hours to say the Shema. But those who do have the custom of *vasikin* should do whatever they can to fulfill that custom, and that is what our Mishna is referring to. Tosfot on daf 9b points out that people who daven *vasikin* do in principle agree with Rabbi Yehoshua that one can say Shema for the first three hours of the day, but they accept upon themselves a more stringent custom. Tosfot there also brings in a gemara in Yuma that indicates that people in the time of the Temple would wait for the sun to shine before saying the Shema. That gemara is obviously referring to the average person, who would say the Shema after sunrise, and not to the *vasikin*.
6. **Understanding that the Torah wasn't given to angels.** If your heart and your private parts can "see" one another, do they need to be covered before you can say the Shema? Do you have to be wearing pants, or is it enough to have something by your neck? The rabbis debate. Rava says that if another part of you is touching your private parts, you cannot say the Shema, but if you're wearing something like a kilt, even if other parts of your body can "see", you can say the

Shema, because the Torah wasn't given to angels. The gemara elsewhere says that it's proper to be fully dressed when you daven. Of course, being fully dressed is the ideal. But we are not angels. We are human, and that means that sometimes the ideal is not an option. Also, the gemara here is referring to the Shema, for which we are more lenient than for the Amidah. So the gemara is talking about how to handle less-than-ideal situations. What is the minimum requirement? When we can't be fully dressed, how can we be as proper as possible? Chumras have their place in our lives, but sometimes we need to go in the other direction and realize that G-d does not expect us to be angels. When rabbis answer questions for people, this is also something they must consider. Sometimes allowances can and should be made, because people are only human.

7. **Separated vs. covered.** When it comes to excrement, it's ok if it's covered by glass but still visible, especially if the glass blocks the smell. You can say the Shema. But for nakedness, a glass partition is not enough - as long as you can see it you cannot say the Shema. There is a debate regarding the height of a *mechitza* (partition) in the synagogue. Some authorities hold that the *mechitza* has to be big enough so that the men can't see the women. Others, including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, hold that the *mechitza's* function is merely to separate the men from the women, not to make the women invisible. That being said, it is still possible that if a *mechitza* is not tall enough for the women not to be seen, a man has to be careful during prayer not to look at the women on the other side of the *mechitza*. This is in part based on this gemara, which suggests that simply seeing can be an issue.
8. **Resolving a contradiction between two *beraitot*.** We have two *beraitot* with statements by Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar and Rabban Shimon Gamliel which appear contradictory. The gemara suggests that if we simply switch around the rabbis in the second *beraita*, we can reconcile this. Why should we switch the second *beraita* and not the first? Because we see elsewhere that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar holds a similar opinion, that a whole house is like four amos. Rashi comments that he does not know where Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says that, but other commentaries suggest it is in Eruvin 22. The gemara there is discussing making an eruv around a large area, and there is a concern that even if it's enclosed it still won't feel like a private area. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says that it doesn't matter how big the space is; as long as it has regular human usage it is considered like a home, even if it doesn't have a roof. He's not actually saying anything about four amos, but the rabbis suggest that it means a private space is considered like four amos, and that matches up with the opinion in the second *beraita*. Interestingly, that might mean that when we learn you can't go more than four amos without washing your hands in the morning, it just means you can't leave your house.
9. **Halachic parameters that define space.** If a bed is less than three tefachim from the floor, anything underneath the bed is considered to be in its own separate room. So if there is excrement under the bed it's not really in your space and you can daven, as long as you don't smell it. There are certain principles in halacha that define what constitutes a separation and what is considered a sacred space.
10. **Avoiding conflict between spiritual and physical needs.** Rav Acha made a shidduch for his son with the daughter of another rabbi, but the marriage wasn't consummated. So Rav Acha went to check out the bridal room to see what was wrong, and he saw a Sefer Torah. Rav Acha said, "If I hadn't come now and seen the Sefer Torah, my son would have been in danger." Why? Rashi says it's inappropriate to have sex in front of a Sefer Torah, so the son could have been punished. But many commentaries disagree. Why would the son be punished if he didn't realize the Sefer Torah was there or if he didn't know it was inappropriate? One commentary gives a different explanation: the son wasn't able to consummate his marriage because something about the space made him uncomfortable, but he didn't know what it was. In time he might

have been able to look past the uncomfortable feeling and consummate the marriage, but he still would have felt guilty on some level. This type of conflict between the body and the soul, when not reconciled, can be dangerous. We need to have sacred spaces for our prayers, and we also need to have spaces for our physical needs. The two should not be in conflict.