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Mav the studing of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and mav their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

R’ Yehudah’s Position

We have learned in a *Mishna*: A *zav*¹ who had a seminal emission (*where normally, one who experienced a seminal emission immerses in a mikvah to become tahor, here, he would remain tamei anyway*), a *niddah* (*who is also tamei for seven days*) from whom semen has emitted (*where normally, a woman who emits semen is tamei to the same degree as a man who discharged an emission, she immerses in a mikvah to become tahor, here, she would remain tamei anyway*), and a woman who had intercourse (*and is treated automatically as a man who discharged an emission*) and then became a *niddah* – they all require immersion (*in a mikvah in order to recite words of Torah – the novelty is that this is true although they are still tamei even after their immersion*). Rabbi Yehudah, however, exempts them (*for since the immersion will not render them tahor, Ezra never decreed tumah for words of Torah in these instances*).

The *Gemora* asks (*on our previous assertion that R’ Yehudah rejected Ezra’s decree regarding a ba’al keris’s² requirement to immerse before reciting words of Torah*): Now, Rabbi Yehudah’s exemption extends only to a *zav* who had an emission, (*and the reason this is so is*) because initially (*when he first became a zav*), he was not subject to immersion (*in order to study Torah, for there was no decree regarding a zav; and therefore, when he became a ba’al keris, he still would not be required to immerse, for he will remain tamei anyway*); but an ordinary person who has an emission (*without first being*

a zav) requires immersion (*in order to recite words of Torah*). [*Evidently, R’ Yehudah holds by Ezra’s decree regarding an ordinary ba’al keris!?*]

And you cannot answer that Rabbi Yehudah exempts an ordinary *ba’al keris* (*from immersion*) as well, and the reason why he and the Sages disagreed over the case of *zav* who became a *ba’al keris* was in order to demonstrate the extent that the Sages are prepared to go (*that a ba’al keris requires immersion before reciting Torah – even if after the immersion, he will remain tamei on account of being a zav*), for (*if that would be correct*) then, let us consider the latter clause: A woman who had intercourse and then became a *niddah* requires immersion. For whose opinion was this case stated? It cannot be on account of the Sages, for that (*ruling – that she requires immersion*) would be obvious (*for the following reason*): Seeing that a *zav* who had a seminal emission, although initially (*when he first became a zav*), he was not subject to immersion, yet (*now that he became a ba’al keris*) the Sages required him to immerse (*before reciting words of Torah*), how much more so regarding a woman who had intercourse and then became a *niddah*, for whom initially (*after intercourse*) she was subject to immersion (*on account of Ezra’s decree*), she certainly would be subject to immersion (*even after becoming a niddah*)!

We must therefore say that the case was stated according to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, and he meant to teach this case in particular – that by a woman, who had intercourse

¹ A *zav* is a man who has an emission similar but not identical to a seminal discharge; he is tamei and he transmits tumah only through contact. He immerses in a mikvah on the same day and he is tahor by nightfall. If he experiences two emissions, he is classified as an *av*

hatumah; he transmits tumah through contact and by being carried. He must observe seven clean days and then he immerses in spring water.

² One who experienced a seminal discharge

and then became a *niddah*, here is where we say that she does not require immersion (*for the recital of Torah, for the tumah will not be removed*), but an ordinary *ba'al ker* would require immersion! [Accordingly, the question is: Why does R' Yehudah say in the Mishna that a *ba'al ker* recites the blessings before and after Shema, and the blessings before eating?]

The Gemora answers: The Mishna should not be read as saying that Rabbi Yehudah says that he (*the ba'al ker*) should recite them (*aloud*), but rather, it should say that he 'contemplates' them. [It emerges that the Sages and R' Yehudah both maintain that a *ba'al ker* is forbidden to recite words of Torah, and they both hold that thinking is not equivalent to speech, but one should do the best that he can; R' Yehudah merely argues and maintains that even by Rabbinical blessings, one should think them as well.]

The Gemora asks: But does Rabbi Yehudah prescribe to the concept of saying the words mentally (*and not actually saying them aloud*)? Has it not been taught in a *braisa*: A *ba'al ker*, who has no water for immersion, recites the Shema without saying a blessing either before or after, and he eats bread and recites a blessing after it. He does not, however, recite a blessing before it, but says it mentally without uttering it with his lips; these are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says: In either case, he utters it (*all the blessings*) with his lips. [If R' Yehudah prescribes to Ezra's decree, how is he permitted to utter these blessings?]

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak answers: Rabbi Yehudah put these blessings on the same footing as the laws of *derech erez* (*such as how a Torah scholar should conduct himself; these laws may be studied, even by a ba'al ker*), as it has been taught in a *braisa*: It is written [Devarim 4:9]: *Make them known to your children and your children's children* and the next verse states: *The day that you stood before Hashem, your God, in Chorev*. We derive from the juxtaposition of the two verses that just as when the Jews stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah, they did so in dread and awe, with trembling and fear, so too, when Torah is being studied in all future generations, it must be learned with dread and awe, with trembling and fear. They said: One who is a *zav*, *metzora*

or one who had relations with a *niddah* is permitted to read the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and he can study the Mishna, Talmud, Halachah and any Aggadic teachings. However, a *ba'al ker*, is prohibited from studying these things (*because the ba'al ker developed a tumah which occurred through levity, and this is in contrast to the feelings of awe which are required when studying Torah*). Rabbi Yosi said: He may study those (*Mishnayos*) with which he is familiar (*for he will say them quickly*), so long as he does not study the Mishna with great detail. Rabbi Yonasan ben Yosef said: He may study the Mishna with great detail, but he must not do so with the Talmud (*Medrash, according to Rashi and Bach, for then there are Scriptural verses*). Rabbi Nassan ben Avishalom says: He may study the Medrash with great detail, so long as he does not mention the Divine Names that occur in it. Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar, the disciple of Rabbi Akiva, said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: He should not enter into the study of Medrash at all. [He should not study it even if he is familiar with it; he may enter the study hall and listened to others studying, while he remains quiet.] Some say that Rabbi Akiva said that he should not enter the study hall at all. Rabbi Yehudah says: He may study the laws of *derech erez*.

The *braisa* cites an incident: Once Rabbi Yehudah, after having had a seminal discharge, was walking along a riverbank, and his students said to him: Our master, teach to us a section from the laws of *derech erez*. He descended and immersed and then taught them. They said to him: Hasn't the master taught us that one (*who is a ba'al ker*) may learn the laws of *derech erez*? He replied: Although I rule leniently with others, I am strict regarding myself. (21b – 22a)

Ba'al Ker's Immersion

It has been taught in a *braisa*: Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah used to say: Words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumah* (*and therefore, a ba'al ker need not immerse before studying Torah*). Once a certain disciple (*who was a ba'al ker*) was mumbling some teachings before Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah. He said to him: My son, open your mouth and let your words shine, for words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumah*, as it is written: *Behold, My words are like fire; so says*



God. Just as fire is not susceptible to *tumah*, so too words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumah*.

The master had said: He (*a ba'al kerí*) may study the *Mishna* with great detail, but he must not do so with the Talmud (*Medrash, according to Rashi and Bach, for then there are Scriptural verses*).

The *Gemora* notes that this supports Rabbi Ila'i's ruling, for Rabbi Ila'i said in the name of Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov, who said it in the name of our teacher (*Rav*): The *halachah* is that he may study the *Mishna* with great detail, but he must not do so with the *Medrash*.

The *Gemora* notes that the same argument is found among *Tannaim* in a different *braisa*: He may study the *Mishna* with great detail, but he must not do so with the *Medrash*; these are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah ben Gamliel said in the name of Rabbi Chanina ben Gamliel: Both of those are forbidden. Others report him as having said: Both are permitted. The one who reported that both instances are forbidden is in accordance with Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar; the one who reported that both are permitted is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: It has become the accepted practice to follow these three elders (*who ruled leniently*): Rabbi Ila'i regarding *reishis ha'geiz* (*the first shearings are given to a Kohen*); Rabbi Yoshiyah regarding *kilayim* (*the prohibition against planting together different species of vegetables, fruit or seed*), and Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah regarding the words of Torah.

The *Gemora* explains each one:

Rabbi Ila'i regarding *reishis ha'geiz*, as it has been taught in the following *braisa*: Rabbi Ila'i said: The rule of the first shearing applies only in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Rabbi Yoshiyah regarding *kilayim* as it is written: *You shall not plant your vineyard with diverse kinds*. Rabbi Yoshiyah said: The prohibition is not violated unless one plants wheat, barley and grapes (simultaneously) in one throw of the hand (*and not by planting wheat and barley next to existing vines*).

Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah regarding the words of Torah, as it has been taught in a *braisa*: Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah said: Words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumah* (*and therefore, a ba'al kerí need not immerse before studying Torah*).

When Ze'iri came (*from Eretz Yisroel to Bavel*), he said: They have abolished the immersion. Some report him to have said: They have abolished the washing of the hands.

The *Gemora* explains: The one who reported that they have abolished the immersion is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah. The one who reported that they have abolished the washing of the hands is in accordance with Rav Chisda, who cursed anyone who went looking for water at the time of prayer.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: A *ba'al kerí*, on whom nine *kabin* (*four lugin, which equals somewhere approximately between 3 and 6 gallons*) of water have been thrown is *tahor* (*even without immersion in a valid mikvah*). Nachum Ish Gimzu whispered this teaching to Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Akiva whispered it to Ben Azzai, and Ben Azzai went and taught it to the disciples in the marketplace.

The *Gemora* explains what Ben Azzai did: Two *Amoraim* in the West differed in regard to this: Rabbi Yosi bar Avin and Rabbi Yosi bar Zevida. One stated: He taught it (*aloud, as a public ruling*), and one taught that he whispered it. The one who taught that he taught it aloud held that the reason (*for the leniency*) was to prevent neglect of the Torah study and of the neglect of the *mitzvah* to be fruitful and multiply (*for the pouring of nine kabin of water is easier than immersion in a valid mikvah*). The one who taught that he whispered it thought that the reason (*Ben Azzai whispered it*) was in order that Torah scholars might not always be with their wives like roosters.

Rabbi Yannai said: I have heard of some who are lenient in this matter, and I have heard of some who are strict in it, and if anyone is strict with himself regarding this, his days and years will be prolonged.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the advantage of those (*who have experienced a seminal discharge*) who immerse in the morning?

The *Gemora* interjects: What is the advantage!? Why, it was he himself who said that a *ba'al ker* is forbidden to recite words of the Torah (*without immersion*)!

The *Gemora* explains: He meant as follows: What is the advantage of immersing in forty *se'ah*, when one can accomplish the same (*level of taharah*) with nine *kabin*? And what is the advantage of immersing when pouring the water over oneself is sufficient?

Rabbi Chanina said: They erected a very valuable fence by this (*immersion requirement*), as it has been taught in a *braisa*: Once a man enticed a woman to commit an immoral act with her, and she said to him: Fool! Do you have forty *se'ah* with you to immerse in (*afterwards*)? Immediately, he desisted.

Rav Huna said to the Rabbis: My teachers, why do you cheapen this (*Rabbinic ordinance of*) immersion? If it because of the cold, you can use the hot baths!

Rav Chisda said to him: Can immersion be performed in hot baths? [*A mikvah is valid only in naturally collected water, and if the mikvah contained hot water, it obviously was drawn with a vessel!*]

Rav Huna replied: Rav Adda bar Ahavah is of the same opinion as you (*that a ba'al ker* must immerse in a valid mikvah).

The *Gemora* relates an incident: Rabbi Zeira was sitting in a tub of water in the bathhouse. He said to his servant, "Go and fetch nine *kabin* of water and throw it over me." Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said to him: Why, master, do you go through all this trouble, seeing that you are sitting in (*that amount of*) water? He replied: The nine *kabin* must be like the forty *se'ah*: Just as the forty *se'ah* is (*only valid*) through immersion and not with pouring, so too the nine *kabin* are with pouring and not through immersion.

Rav Nachman prepared a utensil containing nine *kabin* (*for his students to use*). When Rav Dimi came (*from Eretz Yisroel to Bavel*), he reported that Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehudah Gelustera both said: The rule (*of nine kabin*) was taught only for a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily, but for a sick person who has a willful emission (*such as through intercourse*), forty *se'ah* is required. Rav Yosef said: Rav Nachman's utensil was broken (*for the students, who engaged in marital relations, required forty se'ah*).

When Ravin came (*from Eretz Yisroel to Bavel*), he said: There was an incident in Usha in the anteroom of Rabbi Oshaya, where the students came and asked Rav Assi, and he said to them: The rule (*of nine kabin*) was taught only for a sick person who has a willful emission, but a sick person, who has experienced an emission involuntarily, requires nothing at all. Rav Yosef said: Rav Nachman's utensil has been repaired again (*for his students were regarded as 'a sick people who have willful emissions'*).

The *Gemora* asks: Let us see! The dispute between all these *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* is as to the decree of Ezra. Let us see then how Ezra established his ordinance!?!

Abaye said: Ezra ordained that a healthy person who has a willful emission must immerse in forty *se'ah*, and a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily must use nine *kabin*, and the *Amoraim* came and differed over a sick person (*for Ezra did not decree anything specifically for them*): One maintained that a sick person who has a willful emission is on the same level as a healthy person who has a willful emission (*and forty se'ah is required*), and a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily is on the same level as a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily (*and it would be sufficient with nine kabin*). The other held that a sick person who has a willful emission is on the same level as a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily (*and nine kabin are required*), and a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily requires nothing at all.

Rava said: Granted that Ezra established immersion, but did he establish pouring? For a master has stated: Ezra established immersion (*but seemingly, not pouring*) for people who experienced a seminal emission?

Rather, said Rava, Ezra ordained for a healthy person who has a willful emission forty *se'ah*, and the Sages (*after Ezra*) came and ordained for a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily nine *kabin*, and the *Amoraim* came and disagreed with regard to a sick person: One maintained that a sick person who has a willful emission is on the same level as a healthy person who has a willful emission (*and forty se'ah is required*), and a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily is on the same level as a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily (*and it would be sufficient with nine kabin*). The other held that a healthy person who has a willful emission requires forty *se'ah*, and a sick person who has a willful emission is on the same level as a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily and he would require nine *kabin*, while a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily requires nothing at all.

Rava said: The law is that a healthy person who has a willful emission and a sick person who has a willful emission require forty *se'ah*, a healthy person who has experienced an emission involuntarily requires nine *kabin*, and a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily requires nothing at all.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: A *ba'al keri*, over whom nine *kabin* of water have been poured, is *tahor*. These words are true regarding himself (*for his own Torah study*), but regarding (*teaching*) others, he would require forty *se'ah*. Rabbi Yehudah said: Forty *se'ah* in any way (*is required*).

Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben *Levi*, and Rabbi Elozar and Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Chanina (*argued regarding this braisa*). One of the first pair and one of the second pair discussed the first part of this *braisa*: One said: That which the *Tanna* said that 'these words are true regarding himself (*for his own Torah study*), but regarding (*teaching*) others, he would require forty *se'ah*' was taught

only in reference to a sick person who has a willful emission, but for a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily, nine *kabin* are sufficient. The other said: Whenever it is for others, even if he is a sick person who has experienced an emission involuntarily, forty *se'ah* is required.

One of the first pair and one of the second pair discussed the second part of this *braisa*: One said: When Rabbi Yehudah said that 'forty *se'ah* is required in any way,' he was speaking only of water in the ground (*like a valid mikvah*), but not (*when the water was contained*) in vessels. The other said: Even in vessels, it is valid.

The *Gemora* asks: According to the view of the one who says 'even in vessels,' there is no difficulty, for that is why Rabbi Yehudah taught that forty *se'ah* in any way (*for he meant even in vessels*). But according to the one who says that in the ground - yes, in vessels - no, what is added by the words 'in any way'?

The *Gemora* answers: Those words include drawn water.

Rav Pappa, Rav Huna the son of Rabbi Yehoshua and Rava bar Shmuel were breaking bread together. Rav Pappa said to them: Allow me to say the *Birchas Hamazon* on your behalf, because nine *kabin* of water have been poured on me. Rava bar Shmuel said to them: We have learned (*differently in a braisa*): These words are true regarding himself (*for his own Torah study*), but regarding (*teaching*) others, he would require forty *se'ah* (*and since the blessing was for others, forty se'ah would be required*)! Rather, allow me to say the *Birchas Hamazon* on your behalf, because forty *se'ah* of water has been poured on me (*for I immersed in a mikvah*). Rav Huna said to them: Allow me to say the *Birchas Hamazon* on your behalf, because neither one amount nor the other was poured on me (*for I did not experience any discharge whatsoever*)!

Rav Chama immersed on *Erev Pesach* in order that he would be eligible to discharge the obligation of the public (*in their blessings*), but the law does not follow him (*for it is not necessary to immerse*). (22a – 22b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Hybrids

The *Gemora* cites Rabbi Yoshia's opinion, that one is only liable for *kil'ai hakerem* – a hybrid vineyard if he sows a grape seed and two grain seeds simultaneously.

Although we rule like Rabbi Yoshia, the Rishonim differ on the parameters of his position.

Rashi implies that Rabbi Yoshia says that any prohibition of hybrid only applies when one plants three species together.

Tosfos (54a dagan) says that Rabbi Yoshia indeed says there is no Torah prohibition of a hybrid vineyard except in the case of simultaneously sowing the three species. However, he does agree that sowing the two non-grape species together is a prohibition of *kil'ai zra'im* – hybrid sowing. If one planted these two seeds together with a grape seed, he actually simultaneously violates two prohibitions – *kil'ai zra'im* and *kil'ai hakerem*.

The Rambam rules that although only violates the prohibition of *kil'ai hakerem* by sowing three seeds simultaneously, if one planted a grain or vegetation in an existing vineyard, the resulting crop is prohibited from eating and benefit.

The Ra'avad says that Rabbi Yoshia's statement is limited to one being liable for lashes, but Rabbi Yoshia agrees that one may not plant even one seed together with a grapeseed.

Some say (see Lechem Mishneh Ma'achalos Asuros 10:6) that the Rambam says that it is prohibited from the Torah to plant one seed with a grapeseed.

Based on these different positions, the Rishonim would read the *Gemora's* question slightly differently. The *Gemora* had said that the logical argument to require *terumah* for each species was due to the fact that the different species were prohibited to be planted together. The *Gemora* challenged this argument according to Rabbi Yoshia's position, as mixing grains or a grain with a grape would be permitted. According

to Rashi, the *Gemora's* question is to be read exactly as stated, as Rabbi Yoshia would permit both types of mixtures on their own. According to Tosfos, the *Gemora's* question is actually only from the case of mixing a grain with a grape, but not from the case of mixing grains, as Rabbi Yoshia agrees that mixing grains is prohibited as *kil'ai zera'im*. According to Ra'avad (and perhaps the Rambam), the *Gemora's* question is actually only from the case of mixing grains, which Rabbi Yoshia would permit, but not from the case of mixing a grain with grape, as he agrees that that is prohibited, albeit not punished with lashes.

HALACHOS FROM THE DAF

Immersion of a Ba'al Keri

The *Gemora* cites a braisa: It is written [Devarim 4:9]: *Make them known to your children and your children's children* and the next verse states: *The day that you stood before Hashem, your G-d in Choreb*. We derive from the juxtaposition of the two verses that just as when the Jews stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah, they did so in dread and awe, with trembling and fear, so too, when Torah is being studied in all future generations, it must be learned with dread and awe, with trembling and fear. They said: One who is a zav, metzora or one who had relations with a niddah is permitted to read the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and he can study the Medrash, Talmud, Halacha and any Aggadic teachings. It is learned from here that a *baal keri*, one who experienced a seminal emission, is prohibited from reading the Torah, Prophets and Writings, nor can he study the Medrash, Talmud, Halacha and any Aggadic teachings. This is because the *baal keri* developed a tumah which occurred through levity and this is in contrast to the feelings of awe which are required when studying Torah.

The *Gemora* in Brochos (22a) states that one who is a *baal keri* should immerse himself in a ritual bath before studying Torah or praying. This is known as *Tevilas Ezra*.

The *Gemora* (*ibid*) states that nowadays *Tevilas Ezra* has been nullified. The Rif explains: Some say that it was nullified completely and a *baal keri* is not required to immerse himself



in a mikvah prior to studying Torah or praying and others say that it was limited to studying Torah, but one would still be required to immerse himself in a mikvah prior to praying. He concludes: It is not required to immerse in a mikvah; nine kavim of water poured on his body will be sufficient.

Rabbeinu Hai Gaon states: Since it is not explicit in the Gemora, a *baal keri* must follow the custom of all the Jewish people and he should not commence to pray until he washes himself.

The Raavad in Sefer Haeshkol asked Rabbeinu Hai Gaon as to what should be done if one becomes a *baal keri* on Shabbos or on a festival when he cannot immerse himself in a mikvah. He responded that he remembers many Shabbosos being by Rav Aharon Gaon when they prayed in his house and Rav Aharon Gaon would not pray at all.

The Rambam (Hilchos Krias Shema) writes that Ezra's enactment did not spread throughout Klal Yisroel and a majority of the community was not able to maintain it, therefore it became nullified. It has become the custom throughout Klal Yisroel to study Torah and recite Kerias Shema even while they are a *baal keri* since Torah is not susceptible to becoming tamei.

The Rambam in Hilchos Tefillah (4:4) writes that Ezra instituted that a *baal keri* should not study Torah until he immerses himself in a mikvah and a later Beis Din extended this decree to include tefillah. This was not on the account of tumah, but rather because they did not want the Talmudic scholars to be constantly with their wives like roosters. The decree regarding tefillah became nullified because the original enactment did not catch on throughout Klal Yisroel and a majority of the community was not able to maintain it. It has become the custom in certain areas for a *baal keri* not to pray until he washes his entire body with water based on the verse: One should prepare himself before greeting Hashem, the G-d of Israel.

The sefer Brocha Mishuleshes writes that it only became nullified in instances where one cannot locate a water source, however where water is accessible, a *baal keri* should not

study Torah or pray until he washes himself. He concludes that one Beis Din does not have the power to nullify the decrees of a previous Beis Din.

It is written in Shailos V'teshuvos min Hashamayim (5): It is this fact (the people who are a *baal keri* and pray without immersing themselves) that has caused the exile to be so long. If Klal Yisroel's tefillah would be in the proper way, our prayers would have been accepted years before.

He concludes: Perhaps we cannot accomplish that every *baal keri* should immerse himself in a mikvah prior to his tefillah, but at least the chazzan (leader of the services) should immerse himself and it will be in this merit that will hasten the Redemption.

Shulchan Aruch (O"C 88) rules that Ezra's decree has been nullified and a *baal keri* can pray and study Torah without immersing himself. The Magen Avraham writes: Even though that one Beis Din does not have the power to nullify the decrees of a previous Beis Din unless they are greater in wisdom or numbers, since this enactment never caught on throughout Klal Yisroel, it can become nullified.

The Mishnah Berurah writes that one who has the custom to purify himself through immersion should only do so if he will not neglect the correct time to recite kerias shema and tefillah. He adds that possibly, if immersing in the mikvah will result that he will not be able to pray along with a minyan, it is preferable not to go to the mikvah.

It is written in the sefer Meor V'shemesh: It is impossible to comprehend the true meaning of fearing Hashem if one is not careful in regards to this immersion. If one studies Kabbalah without purifying himself, the learning will result in heresy. He cites from the Baal Shem Tov and the Rebbe Reb Elimelech that one who wishes to comprehend Torah and mitzvos must be careful in this immersion, otherwise they will not be capable of reaching the heights they wish to attain.

Birchas Hamazon and Birchas HaTorah



The *Gemora* teaches us of the Torah's commandment to bless Hashem after we eat a meal - *Birchas Hamazon*. "[After] you have eaten and become satisfied bless Hashem your G-d on the good land that He gave you."

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk opens our eyes to a new dimension of this fundamental *mitzvah*. Our *Gemora* attempts to prove that in addition to the grace after the meal we should also be obligated by Torah law to make a blessing before partaking of the meal. The sages apply a familiar form of logic to prove this position. It is called a *kal v'chomer* - a fortiori, i.e. it is logical to infer that if we have two situations, case A and case B, and we see that the Torah requires the application of a law in case A then in the event that case B is a more compelling situation, certainly the same law should also apply. In our discussion, the Talmud applies this method to the law of blessing Hashem for our food. Here is the argument: Since we know from the above mentioned verse that the Torah requires a blessing after our hunger has been satisfied it follows all the more so that we should bless Hashem before we eat, while our burning urge for food is at its peak and we are about to obtain something from Hashem's creation in order to satisfy our acute need of food and sustenance. Simply put; the greater the need the more compelling it is to bless Hashem. Common decency would certainly dictate to ask permission before taking something, even more so than giving thanks for it after the fact. However this position is rejected by an earlier discussion. The halachic conclusion of the *Gemora* is that the Torah law requires only a blessing after eating whereas the blessing before eating is only of rabbinic origin.

Rav Meir Simcha explains why ultimately the *Gemora* does not accept this apparently logical argument. It all depends on the reason for requiring the blessing in the first place. If the purpose of the blessing is to acknowledge Hashem as the provider of our physical needs, then there is even a more compelling reason to bless Hashem before we eat since we are in a state of great need and if not for Hashem providing the food that sits in the plate in front of us we would continue to feel the distress of hunger. Before we award ourselves as recipients of His great kindness we should acknowledge it with a blessing. Rav Meir Simcha explains that if

acknowledgment and gratitude were the only reason for the *mitzvah* of grace after the meal then it would indeed be logical to deduce from it an additional Torah binding requirement to make a blessing before we eat. But there is a more fundamental reason for the *mitzvah* of grace after the meal. After enjoying the physical pleasures of eating one is likely to forget Hashem and even come to rebel against His kindness. This we can see from the verses that follow the *mitzvah* of grace after the meal. In chapter 8 verses 11-20 Moshe warns of the character flaws that can develop as a result of indulgence in the pleasure of eating. "Be cautious that you do not forget Hashem your G-d and disobey His commandments, laws and statutes that I command you today. You will become arrogant and forget Hashem. And you will come to say that it is through my own strength and power that I produced all of this wealth" It appears that indulgence in the physical brings with it the potential to bring out the worst within us that in turn could cause great damage to our character.

The *Gemora* (Brachos 32) tells us that the lion does not roar on an empty stomach, only on a full one. Similarly, the evil inclination *yetzer harah* has a tendency to erupt after a good meal. Unlike on a fast day when we are less likely to be enticed by our primal instincts; after a good meal the *yetzer harah* will raise its ugly head. The pleasure of eating can lead to feelings of levity, haughtiness, arrogance, laziness and smugness. The danger of falling into this harmful mindset increases greatly after we have eaten and become satisfied, whereas an empty churning stomach will assist us in acknowledging that Hashem is the source of all that is good. It is only after our stomach is filled with His goodness that we tend to forget it. This is why the *Gemora* concludes that one cannot deduce the obligation to bless Hashem before we eat from the *mitzvah* of *Birchas Hamazon* after we eat. The two blessings are totally different in their core reasons. The *mitzvah* to bless Hashem after the meal is to remind us not to allow a false and haughty sense of satisfaction to corrupt our character. The blessing before we eat is common decency; to acknowledge the benefactor before becoming the beneficiary.

In order to help us avoid the character hazards of eating, the Torah requires us to recall that the good sensation after a hearty meal is a gift from our Creator; as it is with all of our physical pleasures and possessions; all are gifts from Hashem. To the extent that we internalize this truth we will be able to avoid haughtiness and arrogance and numerous other character flaws with which the *yetzer harah* attempts to blind us.

Our *Gemora* draws some interesting comparisons between the *mitzvah* of *Birchas Hamazon* grace after the meal and the blessing we recite over the study of Torah. The Torah requires us to make a blessing before we begin Torah study each day, whereas no blessing is required after we finish our study. This is just the opposite of the food blessings where the Torah requires us to make a blessing only after we have finished our meal, whereas the blessing before we eat is only a rabbinic requisite. Rav Meir Simcha reveals to us a unique parallelism between the two. Often, when we begin Torah study our initial intention is to gain knowledge for personal benefit or gratification. The wisdom of the Torah is so deep and intriguing that anyone who possesses it, in addition to feeling a high degree of self-satisfaction, will likely receive a lot of recognition and credit for his outstanding wisdom. If we were to continue our study of Torah for anything other than altruistic reasons we could easily fall into the trap of arrogance and make use of Torah knowledge for personal gain. This would render our Torah study to nothing more than a "spade for digging". To use the Torah as a "spade", as a means to manipulate others or attain admiration is a gross defilement of the Torah, to which the destruction of the land of Israel is attributed. Our sages stated this in tractate Nedarim 81 "Why was the land destroyed because they did not make a blessing before beginning their Torah study!" They did not acknowledge that Torah is a gift from Hashem in order to purify and elevate our character. Instead they used the Torah as a means of personal advancement while corrupting their character.

Before we begin the study of Torah each day it is imperative to remind ourselves that Hashem gave us the Torah to elevate and purify our souls, to become holy servants of Hashem, not to use it for egocentric gain. On the other hand

after we have indulged ourselves in Torah study we need not remind ourselves of anything because through immersing ourselves in Torah study, the Torah itself will elevate us from selfish self-centeredness to sanctity and purity of deed and heart. The Torah is the dwelling place of the Shechinah and one who clings to Torah clings to Hashem. Even though before we begin our Torah study we may be tempted to approach it with selfish motivations; after we have immersed ourselves in its study it has the spiritual force to transform us and elevate us above the petty nature of man. This thought is expressed in the Midrash Rabbah Vayikra 10: "When Moshe spoke to the people he stood them all between the two staves of the Holy Ark to teach us that the souls of all of the Jewish people are rooted and united in Torah. When they stand together within the confines of the staves of Torah, Hashem rests His presence upon them." After indulging in Torah study we are in an intimate state of closeness to Hashem and it is not necessary to remind ourselves by means of a blessing of Hashem's presence in our life. May we all experience the advantages and pleasures of clinging to Hashem in all situations even after a great meal!