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An Introduction to Tractate Brachos

Tractate Brachos is the first tractate of Seder Zera'im and of the entire *Shas*. The Rambam, in his introduction to his commentary on the *Mishnah* writes that Seder Zera'im, which addresses the *mitzvos* of the Land (*Eretz Yisrael*), was placed at the beginning of the six Orders (*Sedarim*) because it deals with the *halachos* of food from the vegetable kingdom, which is the foundation for all living existence. Brachos was included in Seder Zera'im as it deals with *birchos hanehenin*¹, without which, it is forbidden to benefit from food.

The Rambam explains why Rebbe began the Tractate with the *mitzvah* of *kerias shema*: Since it deals with *birchos hanehenin*, Rebbe also arranged the other blessings and prayers, including the *brachos* of *kerias shema*. It is only fitting to learn about the *brachos* of *kerias shema* after learning the laws of *kerias shema* itself.

Shiltei Giborim cites the Ri'az, who suggests the following explanation: Rebbe began with the *mitzvah* of *kerias shema*, which is the unification of His Name, as the verse says: *The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem*.

Mishna

The *Mishna* states: When is the proper time for reciting *kerias shema* in the evening? It begins from the time that the *Kohanim* (*who were tamei*) enter to eat the *terumah*² until the end of “the first watch” of the night. These are the words

of Rabbi Eliezer. The Sages say that it is until *chatzos* (*midnight*). Rabban Gamliel said: Until dawn.

The *Mishna* continues with the following incident: The sons of Rabban Gamliel once came back from a feast and they told him that they hadn't yet recited the evening *shema*. He replied that if it is not yet dawn, they may still recite it. And not only that did they say, but anytime the Sages said that a *mitzvah* is until *chatzos*, the *mitzvah* is until dawn. Regarding the burning of the fats and limbs of the sacrificial offerings, the *mitzvah* is until dawn. All *korbanos* that are eaten for one day, the *mitzvah* is until dawn. Why did the Sages say that the *mitzvah* is only until *chatzos*? It is only to distance a person from committing a transgression. [*It is for this reason that the Sages decreed that one should recite the evening shema before midnight; otherwise, one might procrastinate and not recite it until after it is already dawn.*] (2a)

Order

The *Gemora* asks on the *Mishna*: The *Mishna* states: When is the proper time for reciting *kerias shema* in the evening? Where was the *Tanna* holding that he asks: “When”? [*Where was the obligation to recite the shema mentioned that our Tanna asks regarding the precise time that one may fulfill this obligation?*] And secondly, wouldn't it be more logical to start the *Mishna* with the *halachos* of the morning *shema* and not the evening one?

¹ The blessings one recites before benefitting from G-d's world

² the separation of a certain amount of produce which is then given to a Kohen



The *Gemora* offers two answers: The *Tanna* of the *Mishna* is discussing the verse that states that you read the *shema b'shachbacha uv'kumecha*, when you lie down and when you arise. The *Mishna* asks: When is the proper time for *kerias shema* when you lie down? This begins when the *Kohanim* enter to eat the *terumah*. Alternatively, the *Tanna* of the *Mishna* learned out from the Creation of the world that evening precedes morning. As it written in Bereishis: *Va'Yehi Erev Va'Yehi Boker - and it was evening and it was morning.*

The *Gemora* challenges this from a *Mishna* above, which states: In the morning, one recites two blessings before the *shema* and one blessing afterwards. In the evening, there are two blessings before and two afterwards. Why doesn't it list the evening before the morning?

The *Gemora* answers: The *Tanna* of the *Mishna* began with the evening *shema*, and then, he discussed the morning *shema*. Once the *Tanna* had mentioned the morning *shema*, he decided to discuss some of its particulars (*the blessings*), and then, he returned to the evening *shema*. (2a)

To Teach a Novelty

The *Mishna* said that the beginning time for *kerias shema* in the evening is at the same time that the *Kohanim* (*who were tamei*) are permitted to eat *terumah*. The *Gemora* states that this time is *tzeis hakochavim* (*the moment in time where three medium-size stars appear in the sky*). The *Gemora* asks: Why didn't the *Mishna* just say that the beginning time for *kerias shema* in the evening is *tzeis hakochavim*?

The *Gemora* answers: It is to teach us a novelty regarding the time that the *Kohanim* could eat *terumah*. One might have thought that they could not eat *terumah* until the next day. We would have thought like that because they do not receive atonement until they bring the sacrificial offerings the next day.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa* proving that the *Kohanim* do not have to wait until they bring their *korbanos* the next day.

They are permitted to eat *terumah* immediately after *tzeis hakochavim*. The *braisa* cites the verse: *U'va hashemesh v'toher*. The *Gemora* proves that the word "*v'toher*" means that the day has passed. (2a – 2b)

Time to Recite Kerias Shema in the Evening

The *Mishna* stated that the beginning time for *kerias shema* in the evening is at the same time that the *Kohanim* are permitted to eat *terumah*.

The *Gemora* asks from a *braisa* which states that the time is actually "from the time that a poor man (*who doesn't have a candle with which to eat his meal*) enters to eat his bread with salt until the time that he gets up from the meal." Now, the end of the statement (*that the latest time is until the time that he gets up from the meal*) is certainly inconsistent with our *Mishna*. What about the beginning of the statement?

The *Gemora* answers that it could be that the "time that the *Kohanim* begin to eat *terumah*" and the "time that a poor man sits down to eat his bread" is the same time. Thus, it is possible that there is no contradiction.

The *Gemora* now attempts to prove from another *braisa* that it cannot, in fact, be the case that "*Kohen*" and "*ani*" are at the same time, for we learned in the following *braisa*: When can one begin to recite the *kerias shema* in the evening? Rabbi Meir says: It is when people begin to eat their bread on *Erev Shabbos*. The Sages say that it is from the time that the *Kohanim* merit eating their *terumah*. This time is *tzeis hakochavim*³. The Sages conclude: Even though there is no clear proof for the fact that the day ends with *tzeis hakochavim*, there is a hint of it from the following verse (Nechemia 4:15): *And we were doing work, and half of them were holding spears from the rise of dawn until the emergence of the stars*. Another verse states (ibid. v.16): *And the night will be for our watch and the day for work*.

³ the moment in time where three medium-size stars appear in the sky

The *Gemora* digresses and asks: What is the necessity for the two verses? The *Gemora* explains that if we only had the first verse, we might have thought that the day concludes at sunset, but those men were working longer hours. This is why the second verse is necessary.

The *Gemora* assumes for the basis of its question that “*ani*” and “people” (*eating their bread on Friday Evening*) are actually the same time. And if you will say that “*ani*” and “*Kohen*” are the same time, the Sages have the identical time as Rabbi Meir (*what is their argument*)? It is a proof from here that “*ani*” and “*Kohen*” are two different times.

The *Gemora* answers that, indeed “*ani*” and “*Kohen*” are at the same time, and “*ani*” and “people” are two different times.

The *Gemora* challenges the idea that “*ani*” and *Kohen*” are at the same time from the following *braisa*: When is the beginning time for *kerias shema* in the evening? Rabbi Eliezer says: It is from the time the sanctity of *Shabbos* begins (*bein hashemoshos; the time when it is questionable if it day or night and all manual labor must cease*). Rabbi Yehoshua says: It is from the time that the *Kohanim* are purified to eat *terumah*. Rabbi Meir says: It is from the time that the *Kohanim* immerse themselves in the *mikvah* in order to eat *terumah* in the evening. Rabbi Yehudah challenges Rabbi Meir: But behold, they immerse themselves during the day? Rabbi Chanina says: It is from the time that a poor man (*who doesn't have a candle with which to eat his meal*) enters to eat his bread with salt. Rabbi Achai says, and others say, Rabbi Acha said: It is from the time that most people enter to lean. (*Rashi – either during the week, or on Shabbos; either way, it is the latest time from all of the Tannaim.*)

And if you will say that “*ani*” and “*Kohen*” are the same time, Rabbi Chanina has the identical time as Rabbi Yehoshua (*what is their argument*)? It is a proof from here that “*ani*” and “*Kohen*” are two different times.

The *Gemora* asks: Which one of them is a later time?

The *Gemora* answers: It is logical that “*ani*” is a later time. For if “*ani*” would be the earlier time, Rabbi Chanina would be the identical opinion as Rabbi Eliezer (*who said: It is from the time the sanctity of Shabbos begins*). (2b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Decree of Chatzos

Rashi says: The Sages said until *chatzos* by *kerias shema* and by the *mitzvah* of eating *korbanos*; however the burning of the sacrificial fats could be done all night.

Why didn't Rashi say “the burning of the fats and the limbs”?

The Beis HaLevi explains: It was only the burning of the fats that could be done all night, and there was no need for the Sages to make a decree as a preventive measure that they can only be brought on the Altar until *chatzos*. This was because there already was a Biblical decree in place that the fats from all the sacrificial offerings brought during the day should be brought onto the Altar before the evening *tamid* was brought. If there wasn't time, they could be brought up afterwards. Once there was an initial time set up, the Sages didn't feel that there was a necessity to issue an additional decree that they should be burned before *chatzos*. However, regarding “the limbs” of the evening *tamid*, there was no Biblical time set up, and therefore, the Sages decreed that they should be brought up before *chatzos*, for otherwise; the *Kohanim* might forget and not bring up them up at all.

Ve'toher

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa* proving that the *Kohanim* do not have to wait until they bring their *korbanos* the next day. They are permitted to eat *terumah* immediately after *tzeis hakochavim*. The *braisa* cites the verse: *U'va hashemesh v'toher*. The *Gemora* proves that the word “*v'toher*” means that the day has passed.

Rashi learns: We would have thought that the *Kohanim* would be required to wait until morning when he brings his



korbanos in order to eat *terumah*. Tosfos challenges Rashi's explanation and disagrees. Tosfos understands the *Gemora* to mean the following: We might have thought that the *Kohanim* would be permitted to eat *terumah* at the beginning of sunset; the verse teaches us that they must wait until after *tzeis hakochavim*.

There is seemingly a contradiction in the Rambam regarding the meaning of the word "*vetahar*." He writes in *Hilchos Bias Mikdash* (4:4) that a *Kohen tamei* who immerses himself in the *mikvah* and serves in the *Beis Hamikdash* before sunset, the service is disqualified, and he is liable to be put to death because of it. He cites the verse: *U'va hashemesh v'toher*, and he explains: The sun will set, and only then will the *Kohen* become *tahor*. From here we see that the word "*vetahor*" is referring to the *Kohen*. Contrast this with the Rambam's ruling in *Hilchos Terumos* (7:2) where he writes the following: A *Kohen tamei* is not permitted to eat *terumah* until after sunset and the appearance of three medium stars in the sky. He cites the verse: *U'va hashemesh v'toher*, and he explains: Until the sky is clear from the light; and only then, may he eat *terumah*. It is evident from here that the word "*vetahor*" is referring to the day, and not to the *Kohen*. (*We have not found an answer yet.*)

Halachah Regarding the Time to Recite Kerias Shema in the Evening

Rashi cites a Yerushalmi that the reason why we recite *kerias shema* in Shul before the proper time is because one should always stand up to recite *Shemoneh Esrei* immediately after words of Torah. This is similar to saying *ashrei* before *davening minchah*. The *mitzvah* of reciting *kerias shema* at night is fulfilled when we recite *kerias shema* prior to going to sleep.

It is noteworthy that the Rosh cites different Rishonim who hold that according to Rashi, one should recite a blessing prior to saying *shema* by his bed similar to any other *mitzvah*.

Tosfos asks four questions on Rashi's ruling. 1) The custom is to recite only the first *parshah* (*paragraph*) of *kerias shema* when we go to sleep; isn't the *mitzvah* to recite all three? 2)

According to Rashi, what happened to the *mitzvah* of reciting the *brachos* before and after reciting *kerias shema*? 3) Isn't the only reason that we recite *kerias shema* by our beds to chase away the demons? This is why the *Gemora* states that a Torah scholar is exempt from reciting that *kerias shema*. 4) It emerges according to Rashi that we are ruling according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi who states that the *Shemoneh Esrei's* of *Shacharis* and *Maariv* are supposed to be in between the *kerias shema* of the morning and the evening (*i.e., in the morning, we recite kerias shema and then Shemoneh Esrei, and in the evening, we say Shemoneh Esrei and only then recite kerias shema*). This is problematic because the *halachah* seems to follow Rabbi Yochanan who maintains that one is regarded as a *ben Olam Habah* if he recites *kerias shema* with the redemption, and immediately says *Shemoneh Esrei* afterwards?

Tosfos cites the opinion of the R"i, who holds that we fulfill our *mitzvah* by reciting the *shema* in Shul. He asks: How can we recite it so early? He answers: It is because we hold in accordance with the other *Tannaim* mentioned later (2b) that the time for the recital of *shema* is even before nighttime, and at that time, one can *daven maariv* as well. Tosfos concludes: Accordingly, one who recites *kerias shema* by his bed should not recite a blessing beforehand, and he is only obligated to recite the first *parshah*.

The Rosh concludes like Tosfos, but he cautions that this is only in order to justify the custom of *Klal Yisroel*. However, the *halachah* is that one should not recite *kerias shema* until *tzeis hakochavim* (*when three medium stars appear in the sky*).

Rav Hai Gaon was asked the following: If one finds himself in a Shul that will be *davening maariv* before nighttime, what should he do? He rules: He should *daven Shemoneh Esrei* together with them and recite *shema* afterwards in its proper time. The Rashba writes that one should recite *shema* with the blessings, but he should have in mind that he does not want to fulfill his *mitzvah* of *shema* at that time. Afterwards, he should recite *shema* in its proper time.

The *Mishnah Berurah* rules that it is preferable to recite *shema* and *daven maariv* in the proper time. However, if one does *daven* early, he should make sure that he recites *shema* again afterwards in its proper time, and he should have in mind that he is fulfilling the *mitzvah* with that recital.

DAILY MASHAL

Comparing Shema to Terumah

Why does the *Mishna* compare the *mitzvah* of *shema* with the *mitzvah* of eating *terumah*? [The *Gemora* below will say that we learn a *halachah* regarding *terumah* from here.]

The *Iglei Tal* cites an explanation from his father. A *Kohen* who is *tamei* immerses himself in a *mikvah* and must wait until nightfall to be considered *tahor*, and only then, is he permitted to eat *terumah*. We see from here that the stain of the *tumah* remains with him the entire day.

This is true in respect to *kedushah* (*holiness*) as well. One who recites *kerias shema* in the morning is accepting the yoke of Heaven upon himself. This impression remains with a person the entire day even though he is preoccupied with other matters. At nightfall, he loses this inspiration, and he must accept the yoke of Heaven again.

It is because of this that the *Ari*’zal says that one does not recite *kerias shema* by *minchah* time. It is not necessary, because we are still inspired from the morning’s *shema*.

Kerias Shema: The First Mitzvah in the Mishna

Many wanted to explain why *Rebbe* chose to open the Oral Torah especially with the *mitzvah* of *kerias shema*. *HaGaon Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin zt”l* explains (*Meromei Sadeh*, 2a) that *Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi*, author of the *Mishna*, observed in his work the *mitzvah* of teaching Torah, learnt from the verse “...and you shall teach them to your sons and you shall speak in them when you sit in your home and when you go on the way and when you go to sleep and when you

rise” (Devarim 6:7; Kiddushin 30a; Yoma 19b) as he taught the Torah to future generations. As soon as he started to write the *Mishna*, he mentioned the second *mitzvah* learned from this verse, the *mitzvah* of *kerias shema*, detailed at length in the first two chapters of *Brachos*.

On the other hand, the author of *Chidushei HaRim zt”l* explained simply: The *mitzvah* of *kerias shema* is the first *mitzvah* incumbent on a boy when he becomes an adult on the evening of his *bar-mitzvah*. It is therefore clear why *Rebbe* opened tractate *Brachos* with this *mitzvah*.

Brachos is a Short Tractate which is Actually Long

Tractate *Brachos* amounts to 63 *dafim*, but is actually longer than other tractates with twice or three times the amount of *dafim*, as the number of *dafim* in those tractates is influenced by the long commentaries of the *Rishonim* which spread over both sides of the *daf*, but the *Gemora* text of tractate *Brachos* is longer than that of those tractates.