

Samuel Field Y Adult Center
Prayer During The Period Of The Talmud

Introduction To The Talmud-1

The World of the Talmud By Morris Adler, Schocken Books, 1963- pages 50-55

The Mishna was complementary to the Bible. Now an extension of the Mishna was developed. It is called the "Gemara," from an Aramaic root meaning "study" or "instruction." The Gemara is sometimes also called Talmud, although the term Talmud is more generally applied to the entire Oral Law embracing both Mishna and Gemara. The Mishna is several times more voluminous than the Scripture on which it is based. The Gemara which represents the extension of the meaning and application of the Mishna is in turn many times larger than the text from which it takes its departure.

Before we examine the Gemara more closely, it will be helpful to recapitulate the concept of Oral Law which underlies it. The Rabbis did not conceive of the Written and the Oral Law as two disparate and independent systems. They were basically one, the Oral Law being the source for the authentic understanding of the intent and the provisions of Scripture. The interpretations of the Oral Law are imbedded and implied in the Written. Maimonides, in the introduction to his "Mishneh Torah" states, "All the Sinaitic ordinances were transmitted to Moses with their interpretations." The Oral Law was believed to have been included in the original covenant. A Biblical verse (Exodus 34.27) declares, "Write thou these words, for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." The phrase "the tenor of these words" alludes to the spoken interpretations which accompanied the Written Law. One of the sages, with this verse as his authority, does not hesitate to conclude that "The Holy One Blessed be He established His covenant with Israel for the sake of the Oral Law alone." Indeed it may be said that "the words that were transmitted orally are the more valuable" (Hagiga, chapter I). The Rabbis did not feel that they were introducing anything extraneous into the text. Their activity was designed to elicit from it the meanings that were implicit, though not always explicit in it. There were general statements or concepts in the Torah that had to be analyzed and translated into detailed instruction before they could be implemented. One of the eminent jurists of our time, Judge Learned Hand, pointed out an exact parallel when he discussed the perennial responsibility of the law to define "broad clauses on which the conduct of a free society must in the end depend," which the Constitution itself does not pause to define. He cites such examples as "freedom of the press," "establishment of religion and the free exercise thereof," "unreasonable searches," "due process of law," and "equal protection of the law" -- as requiring constant interpretation and redefinition. The code must be explored anew in the light of a generation's new needs.

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Introduction To The Talmud-2

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The Rabbis were governed, as we have already pointed out, by yet another consideration. As men of affairs and judges, they found themselves confronted by new situations with which the basic law had not dealt. As men of faith they were convinced that the Torah was divine in origin and that, therefore, there could not arise a circumstance which it had not anticipated. The only way to reconcile that apparent conflict was to follow the counsel of one of their colleagues, "Search in it (the Torah) and search in it yet again, for everything is included in it." Out of this intensive "search" in the Torah, the Mishna had emerged; out of this intensive "search" in the Mishna, the Gemara emerged. To be sure, the Mishna was not divine in the same direct and literal sense as was the Torah. But it might be said of it that it was divine at a remove, since it was the authentic and, in a figurative sense, the foreordained interpretation of a divine text.

The Mishna is concise and not given to lengthy discursive argumentation, though it does record the controversies between various schools and between individual teachers. The Mishna, however, is definitely intent upon brevity. The Gemara, on the other hand, may be described as a full-scale transcript of the give and take of the discussions in the academies. It is alive with debate and the clash of differing opinions. It bristles with challenge and argument. It is prolix and allusive. It reflects the freedom and latitude which oral discussion encourages. It does not hesitate to digress and wander afield when a term, a law, an incident or reference to a particular teacher lights up an association with or stimulates the recollection of something not related to the main line of the argument. The citation of a verse suggests another and not necessarily relevant interpretation or comment. As in all good conversation, much of the charm and interest derive from the admixture of the incidental, anecdotal and even fanciful with the solid core of a consistent and informed exposition of a view. A large part of the Gemara is non-legal in character. The broadest definition of the term "law" could not possibly include the range and variety of material found in the Gemara. A wise teacher would interrupt a lengthy and difficult legal argument with a digression of a less taxing and more edifying nature.

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Introduction To The Talmud-3

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The sages declare that one should not disdain the parable, though unimportant in itself, since it can be a valuable aid in acquiring understanding of the words of the Torah. They characteristically offer a parable in defense of the parable. They say that it may be likened to a king who has lost a precious pearl and finds it by the light of a candle costing a trifle. Thus we find legend and history, contemporary science and folklore, Biblical exegesis and biography, homily and theology woven together into what, to one unfamiliar with the ways of the academies, would seem to be a curious medley of unorganized data drawn from a baffling number of unrelated categories. The Gemara does, however, return to the original subject though the digression may spread over several pages. What the argument, by reason of this apparent looseness of method, may seem to lose in directness and cogency, the Talmud gains in breadth and vitality. To pursue the Talmudic treatment of a specific subject, you cannot turn to an index, look up the particular volume in which the subject is discussed and relax in the assurance that you have exhausted your study. The same subject is dealt with in many places and in several of the sixty-three volumes of the Talmud. One particular tractate may contain the locus classicus of the particular law or decision. Yet for thoroughness one would have to examine the other volumes where, though this subject may be introduced only casually or as an excursus in an argument in another theme, the treatment may have serious import for the analysis of the concept and cannot be ignored.

The free and wide-ranging manner of the Talmud does not detract from the legal and intellectual acumen and profundity of its treatment and analysis. It remains to this day one of the most incisive and penetrating legal systems ever to be formulated. Its apparent discursiveness and its hospitality to the extraneous and incidental enable it to mirror the life of the centuries during which it grew, in an infinitely more comprehensive way than it could have possibly done if it had hewn strictly to a rigid line of legal discussion and interpretation. It is the life of its times and not only the law that we find in its pages. It is thus not simply a fundamental text for the study of the development of Jewish law, nor only an indispensable source of material for the historian nor exclusively an invaluable guide in tracing the evolution of Jewish religious concepts and practices. It is all these and more. It is a profoundly significant human document revealing the variety of universal aspirations, needs and responses of men as suggested by this literature created by a specific society during approximately a half-millennium. The Talmud presents us with no still-life portrait, but with a stream of life, active, restless vital within its banks.

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MISHNAH. From what time may one recite the Shema in the evening? From the time that the priests enter their houses in order to eat their Terumah until the end of the first watch. These are the words of R. Eliezer. The Sages say: until midnight. R. Gamliel says: until the dawn comes up.

GEMARA. On what basis did the Tanna believe that there was an obligation to read the Shema at night that he asks from what time? Furthermore, why does he deal first with the evening Shema? Let him begin with the morning Shema! The Tanna bases himself on the Scripture, where it is written: And you shall recite them . . . when you lie down and when you rise up, and he states the oral law thus: When does the time of the recital of the Shema' of lying down begin? When the priests enter to eat their terumah. And if you like, I can answer: He learns the precedence of the evening from the account of the creation of the world, where it is written: And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

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MISHNAH. From what time may one recite the Shema in the morning? From the time that one can distinguish between the colors blue and white. R. Eliezer says: between the colors blue and green. And he has time to finish until sunrise. R. Joshua says: until the third hour of the day, for such is the custom of kings, to rise at the third hour. If one recites the Shema later he loses nothing, because he is like one who is reading in the Torah.

GEMARA. What is the meant by the term “distinguishing between blue and white”? Does he mean: between a lump of white wool and a lump of blue wool? The colors of those two lumps can also be distinguished in the night! He means rather: between the blue threads in it and the white ones in it. It has been taught: R. Meir says: ‘The morning Shema’ is read from the time that one can distinguish between a wolf and a dog; R. Akiba says: Between an donkey and a wild donkey. Others say: From the time that one can distinguish his friend at a distance of four cubits. R. Huna says: ‘The Halachah follows the opinion of the ‘Others’. Abaye says: In regard to donning Tefillin, the Halachah is as stated by the ‘Others’; in regard to the recital of the Shema’, it is as practised by the zealous. For R. Johanan said: The zealous used to complete the recital of the Shema with sunrise, in order to link the Bracha of redemption with the prayer of 18 Benedictions, and say the prayer of 18 Benedictions in the daytime. R. Zera says: What text can be cited in support of this practice? They shall express their fear of You with the rise of the sun, and pray again to You with the first appearance of the moon, throughout all generations. R. Jose b. Eliakim testified in the name of the holy community of Jerusalem: If one links the Bracha of redemption with the prayer of 18 Benedictions, he will not meet with any mishap for the whole of the day.

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MISHNAH. Rabban Gamliel says: every day a man should say the Eighteen Benedictions. R. Joshua says: an abbreviated form of the Eighteen Benedictions. R. Akiva says: if he knows it fluently, he says the original Eighteen, and if not, an abbreviated Eighteen. R. Eliezer says: if a man makes his prayers a fixed task, it is not a genuine supplication. R. Joshua says: if one is travelling in a dangerous place, he says a short prayer, saying, save, O Lord, Your People the remnant of Israel; in every time of crisis; may their requirements not be lost sight of by You. Blessed Are You, O Lord, who hearkens to prayer. If he is riding on a donkey, he dismounts and prays. If he is unable to dismount, he should turn his face towards Jerusalem; and if he cannot turn his face, he should concentrate his thoughts on the Holy of Holies. If he is travelling in a ship or on a raft, he should concentrate his thoughts on the Holy of Holies.

GEMARA. To what do these eighteen benedictions correspond? R. Hillel the son of Samuel b. Nahmani said: To the eighteen times that David mentioned the Divine Name in the Psalm (No. 29): Ascribe unto the Lord, O you sons of might. R. Joseph said: To the eighteen times the Divine Name is mentioned in the Shema. R. Tanhum said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: To the eighteen vertebrae in the spinal column.

Inserting Personal Requests Into The Prayer Of 18 Benedictions

Maseches Brachos 34b: Rabbi Yehuda said: a person should not make a request for his personal needs while reciting the first three blessings of the prayer of Eighteen benedictions and not while reciting the last three blessings but he can make personal requests while saying the middle blessings. This is in accordance with what Rav Chanina said: The first blessings are similar to a servant who is preparing the praise he plans to say to his master; the middle blessings are similar to a servant who is asking for a reward from his master; the last blessings are similar to a servant who received his reward from his master and is taking leave from him.

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Why Pray Three Times A Day?

Maseches Brachos 26b:

We learned that Rabbi Yosi said: Our forefathers established the three daily prayers. Rabbi Yehoshua said: The three daily prayers were established to correspond with the daily sacrifices. We found a source that supports Rabbi Yossi and we found a source that supports Rabbi Yehoshua. This is what the source that supports Rabbi Yossi states: Abraham established the morning prayer as it is written: Abraham arose in the morning to the place upon which he stood. The word “standing” in that verse means pray as it is written in another source: And Pinchas stood and prayed. Isaac established the afternoon prayer as it is written: And Isaac went out to speak in the field before dark. The word “speak” in that verse means pray as we learned elsewhere: A prayer for a poor person when he enwraps himself and in front of G-d he spills out his words. Jacob established the night prayer as it is written: And he encountered a place and slept there. Encountering a place is a synonym for prayer, as it is written: and you shall not pray for that nation and you shall not lift up cry nor prayer and do not encounter me. This is what the source that supports Rabbi Yehoshua says: Why did they say that you can pray the morning prayer until one-half the day? Because you can bring the morning sacrifice until one-half the day. Rabbi Yehudah stated: until the end of the fourth hour, because that was the deadline for bringing the morning sacrifice. And why did they say that the *Mincha* service could be recited until the end of the evening? Because the afternoon sacrifice was brought up to the end of the evening. Rabbi Yehudah said: until *plug mincha*, because the afternoon sacrifice was brought until *plug mincha*. And why did they say that the night prayer had no time limit (the whole night)? Because the limbs and fat that had not been consumed by nightfall continued to burn all night. And why did they say that *mussaf* could be recited anytime during the day? Because the *mussaf* sacrifice could be brought all day. Rabbi Yehudah said: until the end of the seventh hour because the *mussaf* sacrifice was brought until the seventh hour.

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Rules Governing Prayer

Maseches Brachos 31a:

R. Hiyya b. Abba said: A man should always pray in a house with windows, as it says, Now his windows were open. I might say that a man should pray the whole day? It has already been expressly stated by the hand of Daniel: And three times. etc. But perhaps this practice began only when he went into captivity? It is already said, As he did aforetime. I might say that a man may pray turning in any direction he wishes? Therefore the text states, Toward Jerusalem. I might say that he may combine all three daily prayer services in one? It has already been clearly stated by David, as is written, Evening and morning and at noonday. I might say that he should let his voice be heard in praying? It has already been clearly stated by Hannah, as is said, But her voice could not be heard. I might say that a man should first ask for his own requirements and then say the Prayer of 18 Benedictions? It has been clearly stated by Solomon, as is said, To hearken unto the cry and to the prayer: ‘cry’ here means the Prayer of 18 Benedictions; ‘Prayer’ means private request. A private request is not made after the prayer: ‘True and firm’, but after the the Prayer of 18 Benedictions, even the order of confession of the Day of Atonement may be said. It has also been stated: R. Hiyya b. Ashi said in the name of Rab: Although it was laid down that a man asks for his requirements in the Bracha that ends “He who hearkens unto prayer”, if he wants to say something after the Prayer of 18 Benedictions even something like the order of confession on the Day of Atonement, he may do so.

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The Benedictions To Be Recited Upon Awakening

Maseches Brachos 60b: When he awakes he says: My God, the soul which You have placed in me is pure. You have created it in me; You infused it within me; You preserved it within me and You will one day take it from me and restore it to me in the time to come. So long as the soul is within me, I give thanks to You, G-d, my God, and the God of my fathers, King of all worlds, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, G-d, who restores souls to dead corpses. When he hears the rooster calling he should say: Blessed is He who has given the rooster the ability to distinguish between day and night. When he opens his eyes he should say: Blessed is He who opens the eyes of the blind. When he stretches himself and sits up he should say: Blessed is He who frees those who are bound. When he dresses he should say: Blessed is He who clothes those who are naked. When he stands himself up he should say: Blessed is He who raises the bowed. When he steps on to the ground he should say: Blessed is He who spread the earth on the waters. When he commences to walk he should say: Blessed is He who prepares the steps of man. When he ties his shoes he should say: Blessed is He who supplied all my needs. When he fastens his belt, he should say: Blessed is He who girds Israel with might. When he places a hat on his head he should say: Blessed is He who crowns Israel with glory. When he wraps himself with tzitzit, he should say: Blessed is He who made us holy through his commandments and commanded us to wear tzitzit. When he puts the tefillin on his arm he should say: Blessed is He who made us holy through His commandments and commanded us to put on tefillin. When he puts tefillin on his head he should say: Blessed is He who made us holy through His commandments and commanded us concerning the commandment of tefillin. When he washes his hands he should say: Blessed is He who has made us holy through His commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of hands. When he washes his face he should say: Blessed is He who has removed the bands of sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyes. May it be Your will G-d, my God, to have me regularly study the Torah and make me cleave to Your commandments ...and let me obtain this day and every day grace, favour, and mercy in Your eyes, and in the eyes of all that see me and show loving kindness to me. Blessed are You, G-d, who bestows loving kindness upon Your people Israel.

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Additional Benedictions To Be Recited Upon Awakening

Maseches Menachos 43b:

It was taught: Rabbi Meir said: A man is required to recite one hundred blessings each day, as it is written: And now, Israel, what does G-d, your G-d require of you? On Sabbaths and on Festivals, Rabbi Hiyya the son of R. Avia would try to complete his 100 blessings by smelling spices and other delicacies. It was taught: R. Judah said: A man is required to say the following three blessings daily: Blessed are You, G-d who did not make me a non-Jew. . . who did not made me a woman and . . . who did not made me a boor. Rabbi Aha the son of Jacob once overhead his son saying Blessed are You who did not make me a boor, whereupon Rabbi Aha said to him, And this too? Said the son to him: Then what blessing should I say instead? Rabbi Aha replied. . . who did not make me a slave. And is that not the same as a woman? A slave has a lower status than a woman.

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The Key Words Of Kaddish And Their Impact

Maseches Berachos 3a-

It has been taught: Rabbi Jose says: I was once travelling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Eliyahu Ha'Navi, of blessed memory, appeared and waited for me at the door until I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me: Peace be with you, my master! and I replied: Peace be with you, my master and teacher! And he said to me: My son, why did you go into this ruin? I replied: To pray. He said to me: You ought to have prayed on the road. I replied: I feared that passers-by might interrupt me. He said to me: If that was the case, you should have said an abbreviated prayer. I therefore learned three things from Eliyahu Ha'Navi: One must not go into a ruin; one may say the prayer on the road; and if one does say his prayer on the road, he may recite an abbreviated form of the prayer. The Prophet Eliyahu further said to me: My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied: I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world! And the Prophet Eliyahu further said to me: By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does G-d so exclaim, but three times each day does G-d exclaim like that! And more than that, whenever Jews go into the synagogues and schoolhouses and respond: May His great name be blessed! the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says:

Happy is the King who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the Father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their Father!

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Circumstances Under Which Kaddish Is Recited

Maseches Sotah 49a

Rabba said: And the curse of each day is severer than that of the preceding day, as it is stated: In the morning you shall say: If only it were possible that G-d advance the time so that it be evening! And at evening you shall say: If only it were possible that G-d advance the time so that it be morning. Which morning are they longing for? If you say it is the morning of tomorrow, does anyone know that it will not present an even more difficult circumstance? Therefore it must be that they were longing for the morning of the day before. In that case, why does G-d allow the world to endure? Because of the recital of the words of Kedushah and their Aramaic translation at the end of the prayer service and the Kaddish that is recited after the Scriptural reading, and the response of “May His great Name be blessed” which is uttered in the Kaddish after studying Midrash; as it is stated: A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself, a land of the shadow of death, without any order. Hence if there are Scriptural readings, the readings bring light to the thick darkness.

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