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Judaism

Mishnah — Berakhot

(Blessings)

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Sages of the Mishnah (compiled by Rabbi Judah HaNasi)

Mishnah Yomit (Joshua Kulp)

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About:

The first tractate of the Mishnah, the Jewish oral law compiled by Rabbi Judah HaNasi around the year 200. Its nine chapters deal with the recitation of the Shema, the Eighteen Benedictions (Amidah), blessings over food, grace after meals and blessings for special occasions.

It is also the first tractate of the Babylonian Talmud. In Hebrew: מִשְׁנָה בְּרָכוֹת.

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CHAPTER 1

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1 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, the words of Rabbi Eliezer. The sages say: until midnight. Rabban Gamaliel says: until dawn. Once it happened that his sons came home [late] from a wedding feast and they said to him: we have not yet recited the [evening] Shema. He said to them: if it is not yet dawn you are still obligated to recite. And not in respect to this alone did they so decide, but wherever the sages say "until midnight," the mitzvah may be performed until dawn. The burning of the fat and the pieces may be performed till dawn. Similarly, all [the offerings] that are to be eaten within one day may be eaten till dawn. Why then did the sages say "until midnight"? In order to keep a man far from transgression.

2 From what time may one recite the Shema in the morning? From the time that one can distinguish between blue and white. Rabbi Eliezer says: between blue and green. And he must finish it by sunrise. Rabbi Joshua says: until the third hour of the day, for such is the custom of the children of kings, to rise at the third hour. If one recites the Shema later he loses nothing, like one who reads in the Torah.

3 Bet Shammai say: in the evening every man should recline and recite [the Shema], and in the morning he should stand, as it says, "And when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Bet Hillel say that every man should recite in his own way, as it says, "And when you walk by the way" (ibid). Why then is it said, "And when you lies down and

when you get up?" At the time when people lie down and at the time when people rise up. Rabbi Tarfon said: I was once walking by the way and I reclined to recite the Shema according to the words of Bet Shammai, and I incurred danger from robbers. They said to him: you deserved to come to harm, because you acted against the words of Bet Hillel.

4 In the morning he recites two blessings before it and one after it; in the evening two before it and two after it, one long and one short. Where they [the sages] said that a long one should be said, he may not say a short one; where they said a short one he may not say a long one [Where they said] to conclude [with a blessing] he is not permitted to not conclude; where they said to not conclude [with a blessing], he may not conclude.

5 They mention the Exodus from Egypt at night. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: "Behold, I am almost a seventy-year old man and I have not succeeded in [understanding why] the Exodus from Egypt should be mentioned at night, until Ben Zoma explained it from a verse (Deuteronomy 16:3): 'In order that you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life.' 'The days of your life' refers to the days. 'All the days of your life' refers to the nights. And the sages say: 'the days of your life' refers to this world. 'All the days of your life' includes the days of the Messiah.

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CHAPTER 2

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1 If one was reading in the Torah [the section of the Shema] and the time for its recital arrived, if he directed his heart [to fulfill the mitzvah] he has fulfilled his obligation, but if not he has not fulfilled his obligation. In the breaks [between sections] one may give greeting out of respect and return greeting; in the middle [of a section] one may give greeting out of fear and return it, the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Judah says: in the middle one may give greeting out of fear and return it out of respect, in the breaks one may give greeting out of respect and return greeting to anyone.

2 These are the breaks between the sections: between the first blessing and the second, between the second and "Shema," between "Shema" and "And it shall come to pass if you listen" between "And it shall come to pass if you listen" and "And the Lord said" and between "And the Lord said" and "Emet veYatziv" (true and firm). Rabbi Judah says: between "And the Lord said" and "Emet veYatziv" one should not interrupt. Rabbi Joshua ben Korhah said: Why was the section of "Shema" placed before that of "And it shall come to pass if you listen"? So that one should first accept upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and then take upon himself the yoke of the commandments. Why does the section of "And it shall come to pass if you listen" come before that of "And the Lord said"? Because "And it shall come to pass if you listen" is customary during both day and night, whereas [the section] "And the Lord said" is customary only during the day.

3 One who recites the Shema without causing it to be heard by his own ear, he has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Yose says: he has not fulfilled his obligation. If he recited it without pronouncing the letters succinctly, Rabbi Yose says he has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Judah says: he has not fulfilled his obligation. If he recites it out of order, he has not fulfilled his obligation. If he recites it and makes a mistake he goes back to the place where he made the mistake.

4 Workers may recite [the Shema] on the top of a tree or the top of a scaffolding, that which they are not allowed to do in the case of the Tefillah.

5 A bridegroom is exempt from reciting the Shema on the first night until the end of the Shabbat, if he has not performed the act. It happened with Rabban Gamaliel who recited the Shema on the first night after he had married. His students said to him: Our master, have you not taught us that a bridegroom is exempt from reciting the Shema. He replied to them: I will not listen to you to remove from myself the Kingship of Heaven even for a moment.

6 [Rabban Gamaliel] bathed on the first night after the death of his wife. His disciples said to him: Master, have you not taught us, that a mourner is forbidden to bathe. He replied to them: I am not like other men, I am very delicate.

7 When Tabi his [Rabban Gamaliel's] slave died he accepted condolences for him. His disciples said to him: Master, have you not taught us that one does not accept condolences for slaves? He replied to them: My slave Tabi was not like other slaves: he was a fit man.

[8] If a bridegroom wants to recite the Shema on the first night [of his marriage], he may do so. Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel says: not everyone who desires to take up the name of God may do so.

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CHAPTER 3

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1 One whose dead [relative] lies before him is exempt from the recital of the Shema and from the tefillah and from tefillin. The bearers of the bier and their replacements, and their replacements' replacement, both those in front of the bier and those behind the bier those needed to carry the bier, are exempt; but those not needed to carry the bier are obligated. Both, however, are exempt from [saying] the tefillah.

2 When they have buried the dead and returned [from the grave], if they have time to begin and finish [the Shema] before they get to the row, they should begin, but if not they should not begin. Those who stand in the row, those on the inside are exempt, but those on the outside are obligated.

3 Women, slaves and minors are exempt from reciting the Shema and putting on tefillin, but are obligated for tefillah, mezuzah, and Birkat Hamazon (the blessing after meals).

4 One who has had a seminal emission utters the words [of the Shema] in his heart and he doesn't say a blessing, neither before nor after. Over food he says a blessing afterwards, but not the blessing before. Rabbi Judah says: he blesses both before them and after them.

5 If a man was standing saying the tefillah and he remembers that he is one who has had a seminal emission, he should not stop but he should abbreviate [the blessings]. If he went down to immerse, if he is able to come up and cover himself and recite the Shema before the rising of the sun, he should go up and cover himself and recite, but if not he should cover him-

self with the water and recite. He should not cover himself either with foul water or with steeping water until he pours fresh water into it. How far should he remove himself from it and from excrement? Four cubits.

6 A zav who has had a seminal emission and a niddah from whom semen escapes and a woman who becomes niddah during intercourse require a mikveh. Rabbi Judah exempts them.

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CHAPTER 4

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1 The morning Tefillah (Shacharit) is until midday. Rabbi Judah says until the fourth hour. The afternoon Tefillah (Minhah) until evening. Rabbi Judah says: until the middle of the afternoon. The evening prayer has no fixed time. The time for the additional prayers (musaf) is the whole day. Rabbi Judah says: until the seventh hour.

2 Rabbi Nehunia ben Hakaneh used to pray as he entered the Bet Hamidrash and as he left it a short prayer. They said to him: what is the reason for this prayer? He replied: When I enter I pray that that no mishap should occur through me, and when I leave I express thanks for my portion.

3 Rabban Gamaliel says: every day a man should pray the eighteen [blessings]. Rabbi Joshua says: an abstract of the eighteen. Rabbi Akiva says: if he knows it fluently he prays the eighteen, and if not an abstract of the eighteen.

4 Rabbi Eliezer says: if a man makes his prayers fixed, it is not [true] supplication. Rabbi Joshua says: if one is traveling 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 needs be before You. Blessed are You, O Lord, who hears prayer.

5 If he is riding on a donkey, he gets down [and prays.] If he is unable to get down he should turn his face [towards Jerusalem], and if he cannot turn his face, he should direct his heart to the Holy of Holies.

6 If he is traveling in a ship, on a wagon or on a raft, he should direct his heart toward the Holy of Holies.

7 Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah says: The musaf prayer is said only with the local congregation. The sages say: whether with or with out the congregation. Rabbi Judah said in his name: wherever there is a congregation, an individual is exempt from saying the musaf prayer.

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CHAPTER 5

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1 One should not stand up to say Tefillah except in a reverent state of mind. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might direct their thoughts to God. Even if a king greets him [while praying] he should not answer him: even if a snake is wound round his heel he should not stop.

2 They mention [God's] power to bring rain in the blessing for the resurrection of the dead. And they ask for rain in the blessing for [fruitful] years. And havdalah in "Who grant knowledge." Rabbi Akiva says: he says it as a fourth blessing by itself. Rabbi Eliezer says: in the thanksgiving blessing.

3 The one who says, "On a bird's nest may Your mercy be extended," [or] "For good may Your name be blessed" or "We give thanks, we give thanks," they silence him. One who was passing before the ark and made a mistake, another should pass in his place, and he should not be as one who refuses at that moment. Where does he begin? At the beginning of the blessing in which the other made a mistake.

4 The one who passes before the ark should not respond Amen after [the blessings of] the priests because this might confuse him. If there is no priest there except himself, he should not raise his hands [to recite the priestly blessing], but if he is confident that he can raise his hands and go back to his place in his prayer, he is permitted to do so.

5 One who is praying and makes a mistake, it is a bad sign for him. And if he is the messenger of the congregation (the prayer leader) it is a bad sign for those who have sent him, because one's messenger is equivalent to one's self. They said about Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa that he used to pray for the sick and say, "This one will die, this one will live." They said to him: "How do you know?" He replied: "If my prayer comes out fluently, I know that he is accepted, but if not, then I know that he is rejected."

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CHAPTER 6

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1 How do they bless over produce? Over fruit of the tree one says, "Who creates the fruit of the tree," except for wine, over which one says, "Who creates the fruit of the vine." Over produce from the ground one says: "Who creates the fruit of the ground," except over bread, over which one says, "Who brings forth bread from the earth." Over vegetables one says, "Who creates the fruit of the ground." Rabbi Judah says: "Who creates diverse species of herbs."

2 If one blessed over fruit of the tree the blessing, "Who creates the fruit of the ground," he has fulfilled his obligation. But if he said over produce from the ground, "Who creates the fruit of the tree," he has not fulfilled his obligation. If over anything he says "By Whose word all things exist", he has fulfilled his obligation.

3 Over anything which does not grow from the earth one says: "By Whose word all things exist." Over vinegar, fallen unripe fruit and locusts one says, "By Whose word all things exist." Over milk and cheese and eggs one says, "By Whose word all things exist." R. Judah says: over anything which is cursed they do not bless at all.

4 There were several kinds of food before him: Rabbi Judah says that if there is among them one of the seven species, he blesses over that. But the sages say: he may bless over which ever one he wants.

5 If he blessed over the wine before the meal he has exempted the wine after the meal. If he blessed over the appetizer (parperet) before the meal, he has exempted the dessert (parperet) after the meal. If he blessed over the bread he has exempted the appetizer/dessert (parperet), but if he blessed over the appetizer/dessert (parperet) he has not exempted the bread. Bet Shammai say: [he has not even exempted] a cooked [grain] dish.

6 If [those at the table] are sitting upright, each one blesses for himself. If they are reclining, one blesses for them all. If wine came during the meal, each one says a blessing for himself. If after the meal, one blesses for them all. The same one says [the blessing] over the incense, even though the incense is not brought until after the meal.

7 If they brought in front of him salted food at the beginning of the meal and bread with it, he blesses over the salted food and thereby exempts the bread, since the bread is ancillary to it. This is the general principle: whenever there is one kind of food that is the main [food] and another that is ancillary, he blesses over the main food and thereby exempts the ancillary.

8 If one has eaten grapes, figs or pomegranates he blesses after them three blessings, the words of Rabban Gamaliel. The sages say: one blessing which includes three. Rabbi Akiva says: even if one ate only boiled vegetables and that is his meal, he says after it the three blessings. If one drinks water to quench his thirst, he says "By Whose word all things exist." Rabbi Tarfon says: "Who creates many living things and their requirements."

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CHAPTER 7

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1 Three that have eaten together, it is their duty to invite [one another to say Birkat Hamazon]. One who ate demai, or first tithe whose terumah has been separated, or second tithe or sanctified property which have been redeemed, or an attendant who has eaten as much as an olive's worth of food, or a Samaritan may be included [in the three]. But one who ate untithed produce, or first tithe whose terumah has not been separated, or second tithe or sanctified property which have not been redeemed, or an attendant who has eaten less than the quantity of an olive or a Gentile may not be counted.

2 Women, children and slaves they do not recite an invitation over them. How much [must one have eaten] in order for them to recite an invitation? As much as an olive. Rabbi Judah says: as much as an egg.

3 How do they invite [one another to recite the Birkat Hamazon]? If there are three, he [the one saying Birkat Hamazon] says, "Let us bless [Him of whose food we have eaten]." If there are three and him he says, "Bless [Him of whose food we have eaten]" If there are ten, he says, "Let us bless our God [of whose food we have eaten]." If there are ten and he says, "Bless." It is the same whether there are ten or ten myriads (ten ten thousands). If there are a hundred he says, "Let us bless the Lord our God [of whose food we have eaten]. If there are a hundred and him he says, "Bless." If there are a thousand he says "Let us bless the Lord our God, the God of Israel [of whose food we have eaten]." If there are a thousand and him he says "Bless." If there are ten thousand he says, "Let us bless the Lord our

God, the God of Israel, the God of hosts, who dwells among the cherubim, for the food which we have eaten." If there are ten thousand and him he says, "Bless." Corresponding to his blessing the others answer after him, "Blessed be the Lord our God the God of Israel, the God of hosts, who dwells among the cherubim, for the food which we have eaten." Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: According to the number of the congregation, they bless, as it says, "In assemblies bless God, the Lord, O you who are from the fountain of Israel." Rabbi Akiba said: What do we find in the synagogue? Whether there are many or few the he says, "Bless the Lord your God." Rabbi Ishmael says: "Bless the Lord your God who is blessed."

4 Three persons who have eaten together may not separate [to recite Birkat Hamazon]. Similarly four and similarly five. Six may separate, up until ten. And ten may not separate until there are twenty.

5 Two eating companies that were eating in the same room: When some of them can see some of the other they combine [for a zimun], but if not each group makes a zimun for itself. They do not bless over the wine until they put water into it, the words of Rabbi Eliezer. The sages say they bless.

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CHAPTER 8

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1 These are the points [of difference] between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel in regard to a meal. Bet Shammai says: first he blesses over the day and then over the wine. Bet Hillel says: first he blesses over the wine and then over the day.

2 Bet Shammai says: they wash their hands and then they pour the cup [of wine]. Bet Hillel says: they pour the cup [of wine] and then they wash their hands.

3 Bet Shammai says: he wipes his hand with a towel and then places it on the table. Bet Hillel says: on the cushion.

4 Bet Shammai says: [after the meal] they sweep the floor and then they wash their hands. But Bet Hillel says: they wash their hands and then they sweep the floor.

5 Bet Shammai says: [the proper order is] candle, [Birkat Ha]Mazon, spices, and Havdalah. But Bet Hillel says: candle, spices, [Birkat Ha]Mazon, and Havdalah. Bet Shammai says [the blessing over the candle concludes with the words], "Who created the light of the fire." But Bet Hillel says: "Who creates the lights of the fire."

6 They do not bless over the candles or the spices of non-Jews; Or over the candles or the spices of the dead; Or over the candles or the spices of idolatry; And a blessing is not said over the light until they benefit from its light.

7 One who has eaten and forgotten to bless [Birkat Hamazon]: Bet Shammai says: he must return to the place where he ate and bless. But Bet Hillel says: he should say it in the place where he remembered. Until when can he bless? Until sufficient time has passed for the food in his stomach to be digested.

8 If wine comes to them after the food, and there is only that cup: Bet Shammai says: he blesses over the wine and then he blesses over the food; But Bet Hillel says: he blesses over the food and then he blesses over the wine. They answer amen after a blessing said by an Israelite but they do not answer amen after a blessing said by a Samaritan, until he hears the whole blessing.

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CHAPTER 9

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1 If one sees a place where miracles have been done for Israel, he says, "Blessed be the One who made miracles for our ancestors in this place." [If one sees] a place from which idolatry has been uprooted, he should say, "Blessed be the One who removed idolatry from our land."

2 [On witnessing] comets, earthquakes, thunder, or windy storms one says, "Blessed be He whose strength and might fill the world." [On seeing] mountains, hills, seas, rivers or deserts one says, "Blessed be He who made creation." Rabbi Judah says: one who sees the Great Sea should say, "Blessed be He who made the Great Sea," if he sees it at intervals. For rain and for good news one says, "Blessed be He that is good and grants good." For bad news one says, "Blessed be the true judge."

3 One who has built a new house or bought new vessels says, "Blessed be He who has kept us alive [and preserved us and brought us to this season.]" One who blesses over the evil as he blesses over the good or over the good as he blesses over evil; one who cries over the past, behold this is a vain prayer. How so? If his wife was pregnant and he says, "May it be his will that my wife bear a male child," this is a vain prayer. If he is coming home from a journey and he hears a cry of distress in the town and says, "May it be his will that this is not be those of my house," this is a vain prayer.

4 One who enters into a large city should say two prayers, one on entering and one on leaving. Ben Azzai says: four two on entering and two on leaving, he gives thanks for the past and cries out for the future.

5 One must bless [God] for the evil in the same way as one blesses for the good, as it says, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). "With all your heart," with your two impulses, the evil impulse as well as the good impulse. "With all your soul" even though he takes your soul [life] away from you. "With all your might" with all your money. Another explanation, "With all your might" whatever treatment he metes out to you. One should not show disrespect to the Eastern Gate, because it is in a direct line with the Holy of Holies. One should not enter the Temple Mount with a staff, or with shoes on, or with a wallet, or with dusty feet; nor should one make it a short cut, all the more spitting [is forbidden]. All the conclusions of blessings that were in the Temple they would say, "forever [lit. as long as the world is]." When the sectarians perverted their ways and said that there was only one world, they decreed that they should say, "for ever and ever [lit. from the end of the world to the end of the world]. They also decreed that a person should greet his fellow in God's name, as it says, "And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, 'May the Lord be with you.' And they answered him, "May the Lord bless you'" (Ruth 2:. And it also says, "The Lord is with you, you valiant warrior" (Judges 6:12). And it also says, "And do not despise your mother when she grows old" (Proverbs 23:22). And it also says, "It is time to act on behalf of

the Lord, for they have violated Your teaching" (Psalms 119:126). Rabbi Natan says: [this means] "They have violated your teaching It is time to act on behalf of the Lord."

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