

# Studying Berachot (The Talmudic Tractate “Blessings”)

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ורבי מאיר הכי קאמר ליה: מי סברת דאנא אבין השמשות דידך קא אמינא? אנא אבין השמשות דרבי יוסי קא אמינא, דאמר רבי יוסי בין השמשות כהרף עין, זה – נכנס, וזה – יוצא, ואי אפשר לעמוד עליהו

1. How quickly things change from light to darkness and back again. The Gemara answers that Rabbi Meir said to Rabbi Yehuda as follows: Do you maintain that I am speaking of your definition of twilight? I am speaking of Rabbi Yosei's definition of twilight, as **Rabbi Yosei said: Twilight is like the blink of an eye; night begins and day ends and the time between them is so brief, it is impossible to quantify.**

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אמר רבי אבין הלוי: כל הדוחק את השעה, שעה דוחקתו. וכל הנדחה מפני השעה, שעה נדחת מפניו

2. Humility is an indispensable quality in scholarship and leadership. **Rabbi Avin HaLevi said: If one forces the moment and attempts to take advantage of an undeserved opportunity, the moment forces him and he is pushed aside. If one yields to the moment and relinquishes an opportunity that presents itself, the moment yields to him.**

This may be derived from an incident involving Rabba and Rav Yosef, as Rav Yosef was Sinai, extremely erudite, and Rabba was one who uproots mountains, extremely sharp. The moment arrived when they were needed; one of them was to be chosen as head of the yeshiva. They sent the following question there, to the Sages of Eretz Yisrael: Which takes precedence, Sinai or one who uproots mountains? They sent to them in response: Sinai takes precedence, for everyone needs the owner of the wheat, one who is expert in the sources. Nevertheless, Rav Yosef did not accept the appointment, as the Chaldean astrologers told him: You will preside as head of the yeshiva for two years. Rabba presided as head of the yeshiva for twenty-two years. After he died, Rav Yosef presided for two and a half years. Though he did not take advantage of the opportunity that presented itself, he ultimately fulfilled that for which he was destined. The Gemara relates that all those years that Rabba presided, Rav Yosef did not even call a bloodletter to his home. Rav Yosef did not assume even the slightest air of authority, and would go to seek out the bloodletter rather than call upon the bloodletter to accommodate him.

ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: מאי דכתיב "יענך ה' ביום צרה ישגבך שם אלהי יעקב", אלהי יעקב ולא אלהי אברהם ויצחק? מכאן לבעל הקורה שיכנס בעביה של קורה

3. Who owns the problem, and who owns the solution? **And Rabbi Avin HaLevi said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “The Lord will answer you on the day of distress; the name of the God of Jacob set you upon high” (Psalms 20:2)? Is God specifically the God of Jacob and not the God of Abraham and Isaac? Rather, from here the general principle is derived: One who owns a beam should approach carrying the thick portion of the beam. A builder, carrying a beam in order to affix it in a building, must calibrate it and measure carefully so that the thick part of the beam fits in its place; so too must Jacob, who fathered and raised the children who would become the people of Israel, continue to pray for them and complete the task of nation-building.**

ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: כל הנהנה מסעודה שתלמיד חכם שרוי בתוכה, כאילו נהנה מזיו שכינה, שנאמר: "ויבא אהרן וכל זקני ישראל לאכל לחם עם חתן משה לפני האלהים", וכי לפני אלהים אכלו? והלא לפני משה אכלו. אלא לומר לך כל הנהנה מסעודה שתלמיד חכם שרוי בתוכה — כאילו נהנה מזיו שכינה

4. What is the value of a Torah scholar? What is Divine about humans? And Rabbi Avin HaLevi said: One who partakes of a meal at which a Torah scholar is present, it is as if he enjoyed the radiant splendor of the Divine Presence, as it is stated: "And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God" (Exodus 18:12). Did they actually eat before God? Didn't they eat before Moses?

Rather, this verse comes to tell you that one who partakes in a meal at which a Torah scholar is present, it is as if he enjoyed the radiant splendor of the Divine Presence.

ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: הנפטר מחברו אל יאמר לו "לך בשלום", אלא "לך לשלום", שהרי יתרו שאמר לו למשה "לך לשלום", עלה והצליח. דוד שאמר לו לאבשלום "לך בשלום", הלך ונתלה. ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: הנפטר מן המת אל יאמר לו "לך לשלום", אלא "לך בשלום", שנאמר: "ואתה תבוא אל אבתיך בשלום"

5. "Where do we go from here?" And Rabbi Avin HaLevi said: **One who takes leave from another should not say to him: Go in peace, but rather, he should say: Go to peace. As we see that, on the one hand, Jethro said to Moses: "Go to peace" (Exodus 4:18), and Moses ascended and was successful.** On the other hand, David said to his son, Absalom: "Go in peace" (II Samuel 15:9), and Absalom went and was ultimately hanged.

**Rabbi Avin HaLevi also said: One who takes leave from a dead person should not say to him: Go to peace, but rather, one should say: Go in peace, as it is stated: "But you shall go to your fathers in peace" (Genesis 15:15).**

אמר רבי לוי בר חייא: היוצא מבית הכנסת ונכנס לבית המדרש ועוסק בתורה — זוכה ומקבל פני שכינה, שנאמר "ילכו מחיל אל חיל יראה אל אלהים בציון"

6. Diligence and alacrity for the holy are themselves holy. Rabbi Levi bar Hiyya said: One who leaves the synagogue and immediately enters the study hall and engages in Torah study, is privileged to receive the Divine Presence, as it is stated: "**They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion**" (Psalms 84:8); those who go from a place of prayer to a place of Torah study are privileged to receive a divine revelation in Zion

אמר רבי חייא בר אשי אמר רב: תלמידי חכמים אין להם מנוחה לא בעולם הזה ולא בעולם הבא, שנאמר: "ילכו מחיל אל חיל יראה אל אלהים בציון"

7. Progress is better than "perfection"; contribution is better than relaxation. **With regard to that same verse, Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi said that Rav said: Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds they are constantly progressing, as it is stated: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion."**

אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רבי חנינא: תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם, שנאמר: "וכל בניך למודי ה' ורב שלום בניך"

8. Torah/religion is only true Torah/religion if it leads to peace. Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Hanina said: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: "**And all your children [banayikh] shall be taught of Adonai, and great shall be the peace of your children**" (Isaiah 54:13). If all the children of Israel are taught of the Lord, there will be peace for all.

אל תקרי "בניך" אלא "בוניך". "שלום רב לאהבי תורתך ואין למו מכשול". "יהי שלום בחילך שלוח בארמנותיך". "למען אחי ורעי אדברה גא שלום בך. למען בית ה' אלהינו אבקשה טוב לך". "ה' עז לעמו יתו ה' יברך את עמו בשלום"

9. Pursuing peace means looking out for others, including future generations, not just guaranteeing your own "piece" of the pie. **The Sages interpreted this verse**

homiletically: Do not read your children [banayikh], but your builders [bonayikh]. Torah scholars are those who build peace for their generation. As it is stated: “Those who love Your Torah have great peace; there is no stumbling block for them” (Psalms 119:165); and “May there be peace within your walls, prosperity within your palaces” (Psalms 122:7), because: “For the sake of my brothers and friends, I shall say: Peace be within you. For the sake of the House of the Lord, our God, I will seek your good” (Psalms 122:8–9), and “May Adonai give strength to the Divine’s people; [then] Adonai will bless the Divine’s own people with peace” (Psalms 29:11).

ח למען אחי ורעי-- אֲדַבְרָה-נָא שְׁלוֹם בְּךָ	8 Because of my brothers and friends, because of my sisters and friends, please let me ask, please let me say, “Peace to you!”
ט למען בית-יהוה אלהינו-- אֲבַקֶּשׂה טוֹב לְךָ	9 This is the House, the House of the Lord. I wish the best for you.

הדרן עלך הרוואה וסליקא לה מסכת ברכות

May we return to You, the One who beholds!  
And finished is the Tractate Berakot.

הדרן

הדרן עלך מסכת ברכות  
והדרך עלן  
דעתן עלך מסכת ברכות  
ודעתך עלן

לא נתנשי מינך מסכת ברכות ולא תתנשי מינן  
לא בעלמא הדין ולא בעלמא דאתי

Hadran alakh Masekhet Berachot ve-hadrakh alan  
da'atan alakh Masekhet Berachot ve-da'atekh alan  
lo nitnashi minekh Masekhet Berachot, ve-lo titnashi minan  
lo be-alma ha-din ve-lo be-alma deati

We will return to you, Tractate Berachot and you will return to us;  
our mind is on you, Tractate Berachot and your mind is on us;  
we will not forget you, Tractate Berachot and you will not forget us,  
not in this world and not in the world to come.