

KRIAT SHEMA 2:15-17

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

15. If he was reading [K'riat Sh'ma] and he encountered someone - or someone encountered him:

If he was between Parashiot, he should stop [reading] and initiate and inquire after the Shalom (welfare) of anyone who he is obligated to honor. For instance, if he encountered his father or his teacher or anyone who is wiser than he. And he responds to a greeting from anyone who gives him "Shalom".

16. If he was reading in the middle of a Parashah, he does not stop to inquire except for the Shalom of someone of whom he is afraid, like a king or a violent man or the like. However, regarding someone who he is obligated to honor, like his father or his teacher, if [the other] greets him first, he stops [reading] and responds with "Shalom."

17. The following are "between the Perakim [=Parashiot]":

- (a) between the first and second B'rakhot ;
- (b) between the second B'rakha and "Sh'ma";
- (c) between "Sh'ma" and "v'Hayah Im Shamo" and
- (d) between "v'Hayah Im Shamo" and "Vayomer".

Between these Perakim, he inquires on account of honor and responds to every person. However, between "Vayomer" and "Emet veYatziv" is considered like the middle of a Perek and he should not interrupt except to inquire on account of fear and responds on account of honor.

INTERPERSONAL INTERRUPTIONS DURING K'RIAT SH'MA
Yitzchak Etshalom

I.

SOURCES

The Law - Berakhot Ch. 2

The Mishna in Berakhot (2:1) states: "...At the Perakim (breaks between Parashiot), a person greets someone due to honor and responds; in the middle [of a Parasha] he greets someone due to fear and responds. These are the words of R. Me'ir. R. Yehuda says: In the middle, he greets someone

due to fear and responds due to honor; at the breaks, he greets someone due to honor and responds to anyone."

A Baraita quoted in the Gemara (Berakhot 14a) states: "If someone was reading Sh'ma and he was encountered by his teacher or someone greater than him; at the Perakim, he greets due to honor and it goes without saying that he responds; in the middle, he greets due to fear and it goes without saying that he responds - these are the words of R. Me'ir. R. Yehuda says: In the middle, he greets due to fear and responds due to honor; at the Perakim, he greets due to honor and responds to anyone."

Although this Baraita seems to be a parallel to our Mishna (besides the clarification in R. Me'ir's words - that "responding" in each case is obvious), understanding it properly will hinge on a dispute among the Rishonim, as we will see later on.

II. THE [POSSIBLE] EXEGESIS - *VEDIBARTA BAM*

The Gemara in Yoma (19b), in presenting various interpretations for the verse in the first Parasha of Sh'ma - *Veshinantam levanekha vedibarta bam* - and you shall teach them [these words] to your children and you shall speak them - states: *Bam velo biTefillah* - (lit. "[speak] them, but not in Tefillah").

Rashi explains that the *Dibbur* (speaking) difference between K'riat Sh'ma (or Talmud Torah) and Tefillah is that Tefillah is said silently. He cites the verse from Hannah's prayer (Shmuel (Samuel) I 1:13) "And her voice was not heard" from which the Gemara (Berakhot 31a) infers that Tefillah must be said silently. Rashi goes on to credit this interpretation to the She'iltot of R. Ahai Ga'on. Indeed, in the She'iltot (#143), the language seems to point to that explanation: "*Bam velo biTefillah* - rather, Tefillah is said silently." The Halakhot Gedolot (Hilkhhot K'riat Sh'ma) a seminal Geonic work makes a similar statement. (However, see the Netziv's commentary on the She'iltot for an alternative explanation). So far - this interpretation - *Bam velo biTefillah* seems to be oriented towards the fact that K'riat Sh'ma (and/or Talmud Torah) are done aloud in contradistinction to Tefillah - and it seems to have nothing to do with the issue of interruption.

However, Tosafot (Berakhot 13a s.v. uva'Emtza', Yoma 19b s.v. Bam) and Tosafot R. Yehuda haChasid (Berakhot 13a s.v. uva'Emtza') explain the Gemara differently: *Bam velo biTefillah* - meaning, during K'riat Sh'ma you interrupt due to honor etc. but not during Tefillah.

The Yerushalmi (Berakhot 2:1 at the end) makes this exegetical connection explicitly: (commenting on the Halakhah of interruption due to honor/fear during K'riat Sh'ma): "*veDibarta Bam* - from here we know that you have permission to speak during (the reading of) them (the words of Sh'ma)."

We might want to argue that according to Rashi, the Bavli and Yerushalmi differ here; that according to the Bavli, the interruption during K'riat Sh'ma is not "built in" to K'riat Sh'ma but is rather a

necessary concession to the nature of interpersonal relations and the way that people take offense at being "ignored". The Yerushalmi, on the other hand, maintains that these types of greetings are in no way a "concession"; rather, they are appropriate and within the general "spirit" of K'riat Sh'ma. This would also fit a general orientation, found within the Yerushalmi, to emphasize the "study" aspect of K'riat Sh'ma over the "worship" aspect - but that is a whole other shiur.

According to Tosafot, then, the Bavli and Yerushalmi are in accordance on this point - that it is entirely proper within the context of K'riat Sh'ma to interrupt to greet (and respond to) those who are due honor and fear.

Understanding this dispute may hinge on an associated problem within our Halakhah - who are those who are due honor and fear?

III.

KAVOD AND YIR'AH

Rashi/Raaviah's Formula (and Rambam's?)

Rashi (Berakhot 13a s.v. Sho'el) explain that "honor" refers to "an honored person who it is appropriate to greet" and (s.v. Mipnei) that "fear" refers to "a person of whom is afriad lest he kill him."

In other words, Rashi understands the terms in a non-Halakhic sense: "Honor" is someone who is worthy of honor (a great person), such that it would be a social slight to fail to greet him. "Fear" is simply that - a situation where you are afraid for your life if you do not greet (or respond) as expected.

Raaviah's approach (#46) is similar to Rashi's.

This also seems to be Rambam's approach in Halakhah 16; however, see Kessef Mishneh who argues (in order to defend Rambam against the arguments below) that Rambam's intent is that the Halakhah is referring to someone who engenders general fear - that he might make your life more difficult - but not a life-threatening situation.

The Challenge to Rashi

Many Rishonim (e.g. Rosh, Rashba, Ritba -all at the beginning of the second chapter of Berakhot) challenge Rashi's approach as follows: The Mishna seems to distinguish between interruption during K'riat Sh'ma (specific delineations - fear/honor; breaks/middle) and during Tefillah (Mishnah Berakhot 5:1) - where we don't even interrupt for a king or if a snake is wrapped around your leg. The Gemara (Berakhot 32b) qualifies that this is only if the situation is not life-threatening (such as a Jewish king who will understand, or a non-poisonous snake). In other words, (as should be obvious) we interrupt during Tefillah for a life-threatening situation. However, according to Rashi's explanation - that is the only circumstance where we interrupt in the middle of a Perek of K'riat Sh'ma - so how is K'riat Sh'ma different from Tefillah?

These Rishonim prefer an explanation of "honor" and "fear" which is first found among the Geonim (quoted in Otzar HaGe'onim - Berakhot - Perushim 13a, also found in Orhot Hayyim; Hilkhos K'riat Sh'ma #26). "Honor" refers to someone who is greater than you (in Torah/wisdom) and "Fear" refers to your father or teacher, whom you are obligated to revere and fear. (The Torah obligates us to fear parents, Vayyikra [Leviticus] 19:3); and the Rabbis say: (Avot 4:12) that your fear of your teacher should be like your fear of God.)

It may be the case that Rashi actually sees no permit whatsoever for interruption during K'riat Sh'ma (except between Parshiot) and it is the same as Tefillah. This would jibe well with Rashi's interpretation of the exegesis in Yoma (*Bam velo biTefillah*); he understands that the Bavli and Yerushalmi are in dispute over this point and he accepts the Bavli's approach.

IV.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE DISPUTE

Refer back to the Baraita quoted at the beginning of the shiur:

"If someone was reading Sh'ma and he was encountered by his teacher or someone GREATER than him; at the Perakim, he greets due to honor and it goes without saying that he responds; in the middle, he greets due to fear and it goes without saying that he responds - these are the words of R. Me'ir. R. Yehuda says: In the middle, he greets due to fear and responds due to honor; at the Perakim, he greets due to honor and responds to anyone." The word "greater" may hold the key to this sugya -as we will see.

In analyzing this Baraita, we see that both situations of "honor" and "fear" are addressed; yet the circumstances which preface it are "encountering his teacher or someone greater"; which should both be situations of "honor" - where is the "fear" - case?

We could defend Rashi's approach by interpreting *gadol* (greater) in the physical sense - someone who induces fear. In that case, both fear (greater) and honor (father) are mentioned in the case.

The Rif has a slightly different reading here which makes that defense impossible: "...if he encountered his father or someone who was greater than him IN WISDOM..." - negating any possible "fear" interpretation. It may be that those Rishonim who rejected Rashi also favored the reading of the Rif (also, see Rashba's reading which strengthens this point) - thus "fear" must refer to teacher (whom there is an Halakhic obligation to revere) and "honor" refers to the one who is greater in wisdom.

This means that according to the other Rishonim, there is a specific permit to interrupt during the middle of K'riat Sh'ma and its Berakhot. What is the reason for this permit - and why the distinction between interruption at the Perakim and in the middle of a Perek?

V.

K'RIAT SH'MA AND K'VOD HATORAH

As we have pointed out many times, K'riat Sh'ma is not a "prayer"; rather it is a combination of Talmud Torah (study), a declaration of God's Unity and Kabbalat 'Ol Malkhut Shamayim (the acceptance of God's authority over us). Since it is a declaration of our commitment to Torah (study and practice), it stands to reason that declaring these principles while simultaneously violating them is, at the very least, self-defeating. For instance, the Rabbis say (Berakhot 14b) that "anyone who reads K'riat Sh'ma without wearing Tefillin (at a time of obligation and for those who are obligated) it is as if he is perjuring himself" (he is declaring "You shall bind them..." and he is not fulfilling it.)

In much the same way, the honor of Torah is not only expressed in our study - but also in our reverence for those who are deserving of our honor by Torah mandate (parents, teachers) and for those who are themselves scholars, "animate Torah". "Rava said: Some people are so foolish, standing up for a Sefer Torah but not standing for a great scholar." (Makkot 22b).

Therefore, although we never want to disrupt the flow of any sort of study, it is clearly a greater disruption to interrupt in the middle of an autonomous section (a Parasha or a B'rakhah) than in between sections - even though that also disturbs the integrity of the whole unit of K'riat Sh'ma and its B'rakhot. In such a case where we encounter someone whom the Torah obligates us to fear (equating it, as it were, with the fear of God), it would be a self-defeating act to continue reading K'riat Sh'ma while ignoring this person and not greeting him. Similarly, it is inappropriate to be reaffirming our commitment to Torah while not responding to the greeting of a person of great Torah erudition - as if we are declaring the principle but refusing to act upon it - at the same time!

This is, of course, only true with regards to those sections of K'riat Sh'ma which are purely "study" - which is why R. Hai Ga'on distinguishes between the rest of K'riat Sh'ma and the first verse, as follows:

"Even though in the middle we greet due to fear and respond due to honor, in the first verse of K'riat Sh'ma we don't interrupt due to honor, since he is accepting God's authority over himself."

now, to the questions:

Q1: Why would he "encounter" or "be encountered by" anyone during K'riat Sh'ma?

A: Although not addressed in the Rishonim, it seems that since a person could be saying K'riat Sh'ma while walking (after the first verse) - or he could be participating in a different Minyan than his father, teacher etc. - who just walked in at that point.

Q2: Why the specific examples of "father and teacher"; and then "anyone who is wiser"? Doesn't the last category automatically include his teacher?

A: Although the wording is a paraphrase from the Baraita (quoted at the beginning of the shiur),

perhaps Rambam is also teaching us the reason for the propriety of these interruptions during K'riat Sh'ma. That we have to stop during K'riat Sh'ma for the honor of father and teacher might be understood as a "values conflict" - since the honor of both is an explicit obligation towards that person - but the obligation to honor a scholar who is not your own teacher seems to be more an issue of honor for Torah (see MT Talmud Torah 6:1 and our discussions there). Perhaps, unlike Rashi, Rambam maintains that the interruption here is not a "leniency" to prevent offended feelings, rather it is an appropriate response to encountering someone who is honored "by the Torah". See the shiur above.

Q3: Why do we (allow/obligate) an interruption during K'riat Sh'ma for honor and even for any person?

A: See the shiur.

Q4: Why the distinction between "between the Perakim" and "in the middle of a Perek"?

A: According to Rashi, there may ONLY be a "rule" of interruption between the Perakim (see shiur above) - and the reason for the allowance of interruption at that point is a "values conflict" between maintaining the integrity of the Sh'ma unit versus offending someone who is deserving of honor. According to those Rishonim (and, perhaps, Ge'onim) who understand this Halakha differently than Rashi (see the shiur), the difference is simply the level of dissonance introduced into the reading. Clearly, between Perakim is less "disturbing" to the flow of K'riat Sh'ma, since each unit does stand independently, either as a B'rakha or as a Parashah.

Q5: Why does Rambam rule that between Vayomer and Emet is considered like the middle of a Perek?

A: The Gemara provides a source for R. Yehuda's opinion (which is the Halakhah), as the verse (Yirmiya [Jeremiah] 10:10) states: *vYHVH Elokim Emet* - "And YHVH is the God of Truth" - the juxtaposition of God's Name and "God" with "Truth" necessitates a fusion of these concepts. Therefore, even though the last Parashah ends with *Ani YHVH Elokeikhem* ("I am YHVH your God") and "Emet" is the beginning of the following B'rakhah - we join them together to strengthen the association of God with truth. Side note: The Tosafot haRosh (Berakhot 13a) raises the possibility that this "fusion" should be considered more serious than the middle of a Perek and that, under no circumstances should it be broken; he also considers the possibility that it should be treated like any other part of K'riat Sh'ma, just not like a point between Perakim.

Q6: What is the rule in the middle of a verse? Same as the middle of a Parasha? or less lenient?

A: The Yerushalmi (quoted by Rashba, Raaviah, Meiri among others) at the end of Berakhot 2:1, states that "in the middle of a Parashah" includes "in the middle of a verse." See Rabbenu Manoach (Sefer haMenuchah on our Halakhah) who cites some opinions that this only holds between phrases, such that if you interrupted during a phrase, you would have to go back to the beginning of that phrase

when resuming the reading. Of course, according to Rashi's approach (see the shiur) that interruption in the middle of a Perek is only acceptable in life-threatening situations, the distinction is irrelevant.

POSTSCRIPT

Several related discussions of interest:

- (1) Do we interrupt during the middle of K'riat Sh'ma to respond to Kaddish, Kedusha etc.? (the argument being that "should God's honor be less considered than a person's"?). This question is widely discussed in the Rishonim at the beginning of the 2nd chapter of Berakhot.
- (2) Do the rules of interruption in the middle of a verse apply to the first verse (and Barukh Shem)? - See R. Hai Gaon (Otzar HaGeonim - Berakhot - Perushim 13a). Again, according to Rashi, it is an irrelevant distinction, as the only permit is for a life-threatening situation.
- (3) Does this entire Halakha apply practically anymore? See the Hinukh (#420) who claims that since no one seems to mind if his friend doesn't interrupt to greet him or return his greeting, we don't interrupt anymore. This approach is accepted by the Acharonim (see Magen Avraham O.C. 66). How does this application fit into the different approaches presented by the Rishonim?
- (4) Why are the B'rakhot of K'riat Sh'ma defined by the same "Perek/middle of Perek" parameters as Sh'ma itself? This is an especially intriguing question according to Tosafot's understanding of *Bam velo biTefillah*.

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