

WLCJ

Listen, Pray, Think: A Journey through Mishnah Brachot

Mishnah Brachot Chapter 5: Some Questions for Thought...

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1. Brachot 5:1 speaks of intense concentration during the *Amida* prayer, ignoring our surroundings. Is that something you feel you can do? Are the examples given realistic?
What do you do when your child/grandchild/friend asks for your attention during the *Amidah*, or asks you to move a little to let them by?
2. Brachot 5:2 quotes a dispute over where belongs the addition of *Havdalah* during the *Ma'ariv Amida* of *Motzei Shabbat*. Which different perception of the nature and essence of *Havdalah* does each of the options convey?
3. Why is Brachot 5:3 opposed to us adding to our prayer these expressions of appreciation? And how does the first part of this *Mishnah* relate to the second part, concerning mistakes made by the prayer leader? The focus of the chapter shifts in this *Mishnah* from the individual to the prayer leader. Why in this context?
4. Why does Brachot 5:4 prohibit the prayer leader from answering “*Amen*” to the Priestly Blessing? What could be so disruptive in saying “*Amen*?”
Wouldn't stopping altogether and reciting the Priestly Blessing (assuming the leader is a Priest), as the second part of the *Mishnah* describes, be more disruptive – and yet that is allowed under some circumstances?
5. The story of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa in Brachot 5:5 raises many questions: If he has this power, why doesn't he just pray well (“fluently”) for everyone, and let everyone live? Why does the *Mishnah* bring us such a statement in his name, when we know there are no guarantees for what he says? And finally - the *Mishnah* uses the same word to describe both the unacceptance of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's prayer and the disruption of the prayer leader's prayer in Brachot 5:4 should they answer *Amen*. In Hebrew the words are טרוף and מטורף – *teruf* and *meturaf*. What is the *Mishnah* saying by making that choice of words?

And now for the big picture:

What is the overall flow of this chapter? Why these topics, in this order? Is there an overall message here?