

Mishnah Berakhot Chapter 3 -- Guiding Questions

Rabbi Pamela Barmash, Washington University in St. Louis
pbarmash@wustl.edu

Overall questions:

1. Why is it important and significant to be required to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting the Shema?
2. Why does the Mishnah explain the requirement to fulfill a mitzvah by exploring who is exempt from a mitzvah?

Mishnah 1

1. Why is the person making funeral arrangements exempt from the mitzvah of reciting the Shema and the Amidah and wearing tefillin?
2. Why are those needed to transport the casket exempt from the Shema? Why are those accompanying the casket but not needed to transport it not exempted? Why are all of them exempted from saying the Shemoneh Esrei?

Mishnah 2

1. The custom is to form lines to comfort the mourners as they leave the graveside.
2. The principle that lies behind mishnah 1 and 2 is “one who is occupied with observing one mitzvah is exempt from performing any other”. Do you agree with this principle?

Mishnah 3

1. Why did the rabbis of the Mishnaic period put women, slaves and minors in the same category?
2. What are the consequences of being exempted from the mitzvah of reciting the Shema?
3. What are the consequences of being exempted from the mitzvah of wearing tefillin?
4. Why did the rabbis still require women, slaves, and minors to perform some mitzvot?
5. I wrote a teshuvah (rabbinic paper) on women and mitzvot that was approved by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 2014. You can read it:
<<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/womenandhiyyuvfinal.pdf>>

Mishnah 4 and 5

1. Why does the Mishnah address the situation of a man who had a seminal emission?
2. Why does the Mishnah deal with the question of standing at a distance from urine and excrement?

Mishnah 6

1. Why did the rabbis think that those mentioned in the mishnah should immerse themselves in a mikveh?