Mishna Minute

Brachos Chapter 3 — Study Sheet

The onen's exemption, the comforters' row, who is exempt from the Shema — and who is never cut off from prayer.

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BRACHOS 3:1

Grief Before Prayer

One whose dead lies before him — an onen — is exempt from the Shema, from prayer, and from tefillin. His whole heart is with the deceased; the mitzvah of burial comes first, and everything else waits.

The pallbearers — and their replacements, and the replacements' replacements — walk before and after the bier. Those still needed to carry are exempt from the Shema; those not needed are obligated. But from the Amidah, ALL are exempt — because prayer demands total kavanah, and a grieving heart cannot focus.

Quiz: An onen — one whose dead lies before him — is exempt from what?

Answer: The Shema, prayer, and tefillin.

BRACHOS 3:2

The Comforters' Row

After the burial, they head back. If they can start AND finish the Shema before reaching the shurah — the row of comforters lined up to console the mourners — they begin. If there's no time to finish before the row, they don't start at all; an unfinished Shema helps no one.

Those standing in the row: the inner row — facing the mourners — are exempt, because they're busy with the mitzvah of comforting. The outer row, just there to show respect, is obligated in the Shema. Inside the row: comfort. Outside: Shema. Everyone has their place.

Quiz: Who in the comforters' row is exempt from the Shema?

Answer: The inner row facing the mourners — they are busy comforting; the outer row is obligated.

BRACHOS 3:3

Exempt — But Not From Everything

Women, slaves, and minors are exempt from the Shema and from tefillin — because the Shema is time-bound, said morning and evening, and the rule is: from time-bound positive mitzvos, women are exempt.

But prayer? Obligated — everyone needs to ask; mercy has no schedule. Mezuzah? Obligated — it guards the home day and night. And grace after meals? Obligated — gratitude is for everyone. Exempt from some, bound to others: the door stays open to all.

Quiz: Women, slaves, and minors are exempt from the Shema and tefillin — but what are they obligated in?

Answer: Prayer, mezuzah, and grace after meals.

BRACHOS 3:4

Pure Heart, Impure Body

A baal keri — one who had a seminal emission — may think the Shema in his heart, but may not say it aloud: not the blessings before it, not the blessings after it. And before eating? No blessing beforehand. After eating? He does bless afterward.

Rabbi Yehuda disagrees: he blesses — before and after, both. The Sages limit his words to thought, not speech; Rabbi Yehuda frees them. Impure — but never cut off: the heart can always speak.

Quiz: What may a baal keri NOT do with the Shema?

Answer: Say it aloud — neither the blessings before it nor after it (he may only think it in his heart).

BRACHOS 3:5

Prayer Finds a Way

One standing in prayer who remembers he's a baal keri does NOT interrupt — he shortens the prayer and moves swiftly through the blessings. He went down to immerse: if he can come up, cover himself, and recite the Shema before sunrise — he does; if not, he covers himself in the water and recites right there.

But not in foul water, and not in flax-soaking water — until clean water is poured in. And how far from filth must he stand to recite? Four cubits. Prayer finds a way — even waist-deep in water.

Quiz: You remember mid-Amidah that you're a baal keri — what do you do?

Answer: Don't interrupt — shorten the prayer and continue.

BRACHOS 3:6

One Impurity Swallows Another

A zav who had a seminal emission — impure twice over — still needs immersion. A niddah who discharged semen — immersion required. A woman who was with her husband, then saw niddah blood — immersion required. Why immerse when already impure? For the keri — so he can learn and pray.

The Sages say: immerse for the keri too. But Rabbi Yehuda exempts them — the greater impurity swallows the lesser. And with that, chapter three of Brachos is complete.

Quiz: A zav who had a seminal emission — what does Rabbi Yehuda say about immersion?

Answer: He is exempt — the greater impurity swallows the lesser.