

## Mishnah 13

רבי שמעון אומר, הוי זהיר בקריאת שמע (ובתפלה).  
וכשאתה מתפלל, אל תעש תפלתך קבע, אלא רחמים  
ותחנונים לפני המקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יואל ב) כי חנון  
ורחום הוא ארך אפים ורב חסד ונתם על הרעה. ואל תהי רשע  
בפני עצמך:

*Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful with reading the Shema, and when you pray, do not make your prayers a fixed routine, but rather a plea for mercy and compassion before God, as it says, "For You are compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and are consoled for the evil."<sup>261</sup> And do not be wicked in your own eyes.*

**Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful with reading the *Shema*.**

He warned us about *Kerias Shema* even more than about prayer (reciting *Shemoneh Esrei*) because the permitted time for saying *Shemoneh Esrei* is long, extending until the fourth hour of the day, while the time for the *Shema* is shorter and should preferably be just before sunrise. This is the time when those who are

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<sup>261</sup> Yoel 2:13

especially meticulous (*vasikin*) pray. He tells us to pay special attention to this in particular because it requires great care.

**And when you pray, do not make your prayers a fixed routine, but rather a plea for mercy and compassion before God.**

Pray to God like a pauper pleading before Him and requesting his needs, for “a pauper utters supplications.”<sup>262</sup> Do not pray like someone requesting something he does not really need, because he does not plead with a lowly heart and broken spirit, and everyone needs to plead for his life, “for there is no one on earth so righteous that he never sins.”<sup>263</sup> In addition, do not view prayer as a burden, and do not pray as if you are discharging a debt you are obligated to pay.

**As it says, “For You are compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and are consoled for the evil.”**

*Everyone* needs God’s mercy. If things are going well for you at a time when God stays his anger and shows you compassion, [be aware that] it is not due to your great piety that God is being merciful towards you. Plead with God, lest He regret that He was “consoled for the evil.” Your sins may cause you to deserve punishment, and miracles do not happen all the time.

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<sup>262</sup> *Mishlei* 18:23

<sup>263</sup> *Koheles* 7:20

## Rabbeinu Yonah on Pirkei Avos

### Do not be wicked in your own eyes.

Do not consider yourself a wicked sinner who cannot repent. You will despair of the possibility of repentance, and if a sin presents itself you will feel that it is permissible for you; compared to all the terrible sins you've already committed in the past, this one seems insignificant.

You also should not consider yourself righteous. As it says in *Niddah*, when a fetus is in its mother's womb it is sworn to this oath: "Even if the whole world says that you are righteous, you should consider yourself wicked."<sup>264</sup> This does not mean that you should view yourself as totally wicked, but rather as half innocent and half guilty. If you do a single mitzvah you are fortunate, because you have tipped the scales in your favor. And if you have committed a single sin, woe to you, for you have tipped the scales to the guilty side. As it says in *Vayikra Rabbah*,<sup>265</sup> "One should always view himself as half innocent, half guilty, as it says, "A wise man fears, and turns away from evil."<sup>266</sup> Even though the wise man turns away from evil and refrains from sin, he is still fearful, because he views himself as wicked. As a result, he pursues mitzvos which tip the balance in his favor, and flees from transgressions which tip the balance against him.

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<sup>264</sup> *Niddah* 30b

<sup>265</sup> The correct source (with slight variation) seems to be *Kobeles Rabbah* 10:1.

See also *Kiddushin* 40b.

<sup>266</sup> *Mishlei* 14:16