



Sefer Seder HaYom (The Order of the Day)

*A wonderful and pleasant commentary
on the order of prayer according to the PaRDeS*

*By Rabbi Moshe Ben Yehuda Makhir
A contemporary of the Ari'zal in 16th century Tzfat.*

The Order of Learning After Prayer

*Translation and commentary
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Introduction

The author of the work, Seder HaYom, Rabbi Moshe Ben Yehuda Makhir was a resident of Tzfat and a contemporary of the Ari'zal. He served as the Rosh Yeshiva of Ayin Zetun.

An interesting point to note about Rabbi Makhir's work is that it shows no influence whatsoever from the Ari'zal. Indeed, Seder HaYom is an important document in that it records others systems of Kabbalistic practices and meditations other than the Ari'zal's system.

If this text were written prior to the life of the Ari'zal or prior to the dissemination of his Torah, such an oversight would be well understood. However, this is not the case.

At the time of the first publication of Seder HaYom (Venice, 1599) the Ari'zal had already passed away (in 1572) and his teachings were flourishing under the hands of Yisrael Sarug in Europe and Haim Vital in Damascus.

Thus for Seder HaYom not to have adopted the system of the Ari'zal indicates that its authority was not yet so widespread. Rabbi Makhir thus felt completely free to document for us other older traditions. It is a blessing for us that we have this precious work. Many of the traditions herein are unique and have no other written source. It is possible that Rabbi Makhir was writing down for posterity some of the older oral traditions of the pre-Ari Kabbalists.

The true value of this text is its simplicity. Unlike the Ari'zal the kavanot (meditations) of Rabbi Makhir are rather simple and straightforward.

The section translated here deals with the important topic of Torah study. Once one has finished one's morning prayers (Shaharit), one's spiritual obligations are not yet complete. One is required by Torah Law to study Torah every day (and night). This obligation becomes incumbent upon us first thing every morning. Yet, being that we begin the morning with prayer, our next opportunity is to be for Torah study. Rabbi Makhir discusses the value of study alongside the value of proper health. For the morning hours are meant for us to provide for both our spiritual and physical needs. This translation will thus discuss both topics together, even as Rabbi Makhir understood them to be one.

Sefer Seder HaYom The Order of Learning After Prayer

Text

How good and pleasant it is to unite Torah study with prayer. By this, one merits the pleasure of the radiance of the Shekhina as it is written; "They will go forth from strength to strength, unto G-d in Zion." (Psalm 84:8).

If you establish a regular order [of study] in the place of prayer, there is no loss therein, for even though one does not receive the reward of [especially] going [to the yeshiva], nonetheless one receives reward for joining the two together as one, without separation or loss of attention. This is [a] very good [thing].

Commentary

According to the Zohar and the Kitvei HaAri the morning prayer service, Shaharit serves the purpose of drawing down to Earth Divine radiance from the supernal planes.

Once the radiance is drawn down to Earth it needs a vessel in which to reside or else it quickly dissipates. The vessel that best holds Divine radiance is Torah. Therefore, the immediate study of Torah after Shaharit serves the purpose to seal the Divine radiance here among us.

In some places, the Synagogue was exclusively for prayer and a separate house of study (yeshiva) stood nearby. It was considered an independent mitzvah to walk to the yeshiva to study. This is considered preparation for the mitzvah and thus there is a separate reward for it.

Yet, even if one is to study Torah in the Synagogue, if this is done immediately after morning prayer than the coupling of the two, prayer and study, is considered a separate mitzvah too.



Text

If the time one spends [in study] is long and one's heart is weak and one is not able to study at length due to one's weakness, it is good that one should first have a bite to eat and then go [study]. This way one's heart will be settled and prepared. This is viewed as a necessary thing for the sake of learning, all the while that one is not doing this for personal pleasure, but only for the sake of strengthening oneself.

Commentary

While one's major emphasis must be placed on Torah study, this is still no reason for one to jeopardize one's health. It is a Torah commandment that we "safeguard our souls" which means that we are required by Torah law to maintain and safeguard our health.

In previous centuries, food was not as abundantly available as it is in our generation. There used to be no such thing as "fast-food." So if one did not eat when one had the opportunity, it was possible then that one would not be able to eat the whole day long.

Thus when one begins the day, after prayer and not before, one should have something to eat. In this way, one has some nourishment to strengthen him through the day. Also, according to the holy Zohar any food or drink before prayer, some say even a mere glass of water, is forbidden and can be compared to idolatry in that one is first serving the needs of the flesh and not of the spirit.

One should eat something after prayer and prior to study for two reasons. The first is that one should not miss the opportunity for breakfast. By eating breakfast one will have sufficient nourishment for the day, this is essential by Torah law. The second reason is that by eating prior to study the nourishment received will first go towards helping one be alert and sharp in the study of Torah. This is the great tikkun of the fallen sparks incarnate within different foods.

When we recite a Berakha (blessing) and eat a food and immediately thereafter perform a mitzvah (commandment) the sparks of holiness in that food are absorbed into the mitzvah and thus they ascend above fully rectified.

One must be careful, however, not to over indulge in the amount of food that one eats at this time. One is eating to perform two mitzvot, for the sake of the health of the body and for the sake of elevating the fallen sparks. Therefore, one should not be eating merely for the sake of physical pleasure.

While this may strengthen one's body, it can still be gluttonous to the soul and thus cause harm and not good.



Text

This is especially true if one is weak and is concerned that illness might occur if he doesn't eat soon. For then, it would certainly be a sin if he were not to eat and thus strengthen himself.

For it is a mitzvah for a man to seek the path of physical health, that he should be strong and healthy in studying Torah and in performing the mitzvot, from every aspect.

Commentary

These words need no elucidation. It is very clear how the Rabbi is placing emphasis on the matter of physical health as the vehicle for serving HaShem. These words echo the teachings of RaMBaM in his Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot.

Text

This is true even if it [means] taking time away from Torah and the mitzvot, for the mitzvot were not given to us to kill us, that we should die young and be taken out of this world. For what benefit is there in performing a hundred mitzvot [and by doing so] losing out on thousands more. G-d forbid that we should think like this, for one who does is a pious fool (Hasid shoteh) who loses himself in what he was not commanded by the Torah.

Commentary

What is implied here is that one is not eating and learning at the same time. In our day and age of fast food, we grab a cup of tea and some cookies while we are learning. This is breakfast. In previous generations, cookies were not so readily available. Even today, one should eat with appropriate attention being paid to what one is doing. One should wash (if eating bread) and recite one's berakhot with full kavana (intent). Then one should sit and eat, with the kavana that one is fulfilling the mitzvah of eating and thereby elevating all the fallen sparks.

One should not hurry and rush through one's meal, nor should one be extra slow and waste valuable Torah study time.

One studies Torah so that one can learn how to perform mitzvot. One of the mitzvot is to properly care for ourselves, not just by eating, but in all other things as well. We are warned that we are to live by the Torah and not die because of it. Unfortunately, some will use this argument as a rationale to violate or shortcut performing the mitzvot. Thank G-d that he knows the hearts of people and He, Barukh Hu U'varukh Shmo will give full recompense to those who try to twist His Word for their own lazy and evil devices.

Equally, on the other hand, one should not become so overly pious in the performance of humrot (extra religious restrictions not obligatory by Jewish Law) that one forgets their earthly obligations. Rabbi Makhir calls such a one a "hasid shoteh" (a pious fool). Such a one wants to become so devote that he forgets the realm of practicality. Some will



attempt to justify this as a step in faith. Yet, no step in faith can justify continued self-abuse. One is not supposed to starve oneself or otherwise act in ways that cause unnecessary personal hardships.

Text

Not only does one not receive a reward [for acting like this]; on the contrary, one will stand in judgement. After all the Torah has commanded us "to live by [the mitzvot], not to die [because of them]." Be careful and guard your souls." "Very carefully guard your souls." Many more [similar words are written]. We have been warned about this, that we safeguard our health so that we [remain] healthy and strong so that we may live upon the face of the earth, to study Torah and to observe mitzvot.

Commentary

One of the great misconceptions made by people seeking a higher level of spirituality is that they neglect their physical needs. Whether this is with regards to one's diet, hygiene or appearance, we are required by Torah Law to take care of ourselves. This means that we eat right, clean up after ourselves and present a descent appearance. All these things are included under the Torah edict to "safeguard" (i.e., to take care of) ourselves.

Even RaMBaM writes that one of the prerequisites for receiving the spirit of prophecy is that one be completely healthy and strong. This was the case with Eliyahu HaNavi, so should it be with us.

Text

Within this is included one who fasts often. His heart is weak and he has no power to stand, he thus nullifies his studying and his Torah. This for him is a sin and certainly not a mitzvah.

If he does this in order to do repentance for his sins and he needs to humble his soul, he should not simply fulfill the mitzvah of teshuva and [at the same time] nullify the mitzvah of the study of Torah, which is considered to be [of] equal importance to all the other mitzvot. Rather one should act in such a way that both can be fulfilled together.

Commentary

There was a time in Jewish history that pious Sages could fast for literally years at a time. Since the destruction of our Holy Temple, fasting has been considered a standard means of teshuva. However, as the generations have passed by, our physical strength to stand up under long fasts has deteriorated. Although the Ari'zal has stipulated hundreds of fasts for different specific sins, these are not presently observed. Today the norm is to give an amount of Tzedaka corresponding to the number of days that one should fast.

Some fast completely for a 24 hour period, not eating or drinking at all. Others fast only from sun up to sun down. Even this type proves to weaken a person and thus disable them from carrying out a full day's duty. When such a person is a Torah scholar, their



fasting can weaken them to the point where they cannot learn to their best capacity. When this is the case, it is best not to fast.

Fasting in itself is a means to an end. It is to make us more sensitive to the will of HaShem through our sacrificing our physical needs. Yet, the study of Torah provides us with an even greater sensitivity to HaShem. That is why the study of Torah is the greatest of all mitzvot.

If one can fast and continue one's study without interruption or decrease, then by all means one should fast. One should fast from sun up to sun down in the winter months, when the days are short. More than this, one should discuss with one's Rabbi.

Text

One should not eat for the sake of filling one's stomach, rather one should eat a small thing enough to restore his concentration and that his spirit is able to stand within him. Yet, let not one nullify his time of Torah study.

Commentary

These words again reflect the advice of RaMBaM and the Gemara. Again, the admonition is given that one should be careful with one's time not to diminish Torah study time.

Text

Our Sages have taught regarding the verse, "This is the law (torah) of the one who dies in a tent," - the Torah is only preserved by the one who is willing to die for it." This does not mean that one should afflict oneself because of it to the point of death, G-d forbid. Rather this means that the Torah will not be preserved by the one who pursues after the pleasures of this world and its desires.

One who pursues [these things] will certainly not pursue after the Torah meticulously with all its general and specific [details]. Only the one who upholds [the Torah] will find within it rest. Regarding the one who is willing to die for it, this means that one does not pursue the extra things [in life] but rather eats only to maintain his health. One eats only what is necessary.

Commentary

As Rabbi Haim Vital clearly points out in his Sha'arei Kedusha, mankind is a composite being with both spiritual and physical essence. Our bodies are our shells, our garment only. Our true selves are our Neshama souls. If we live our lives following the desires of our physical bodies, then we never realize our true, inner nature.

When one lives by Torah, one surrenders to a higher, spiritual force. One's contact with this physical world is kept to a minimum, providing only what's needed for one's daily



needs. More than this is considered detrimental and harmful to the soul. If one is full of "body" then adversely, one is lacking of "soul."

Text

This is considered to be like death [in the eyes] of other people who walk in darkness and who pursue the pleasures and enjoyments. [Yet], it is not due to this that one comes close to death. On the contrary, all his days he will be healthy and strong. He does not burden his body [with excess] food and drink. Regarding this did the Sage say, "This is the way of Torah, eat bread with salt, drink water in moderation," meaning one is not to pursue the excesses and those things that cannot be found. One should take only that which easily comes to hand at any time, that which is not a burden or a trouble to the mind.

Commentary

These wise words reflect the wisdom of our Sages in Pirkei Avot, where it is says, "who is [truly] wealthy? The one who is satisfied with his portion [in life]."

One who lives a life of faith does not pursue after the toys of modern society. The person of faith recognizes that all that is owned or acquired actually belongs to G-d. It is as if, all our possessions are on loan to us. G-d provides us with all our needs.

Therefore, there is no need to toil and trouble over the temporary things in life. They are only temptations that tempt our minds away from the things of true spiritual value in life.

Text

Salt is anything that provides taste to spread over bread. Whatever it is, let it be something readily accessible. Water in moderation, means that one should not drink to fill ones stomach and thus become weighed down. This is necessary for if one does not eat much he should not drink much. Being that one does not drink much one will not become heavy and thus one will be able to study Torah according to his will.

Commentary

Again, one should simply accept the good things in life. When this is the case, then all life is in moderation. When life is in moderation, then one's diet, both of food and drink, is in proper balance. This leads to maximum physical health.

Text

Regarding what it says, "live a life of difficulty" this does not mean that one should make oneself to physically suffer, meaning that one make oneself sick. Rather the suffering is in ones soul, which craves after the delightful foods and drink. Yet, [the student of Torah] disciplines himself to lessen his cravings [for these things], however not completely from all food (G-d forbid) as I have explained.



Commentary

Many people feel that by observing strict humrot (opinions of Halakha) which are not required by Law they somehow atone for their sins and make them more righteous. While this may be true in some cases, it is not true in all cases.

One should not embitter his life thinking that this will bring him closer to G-d. The only suffering one should allow upon himself is feeling the lack of pleasure that comes with the performance of sin and rebelliousness.

We must live in the real world and therefore we must eat, drink, procreate, clothe ourselves and otherwise take care of ourselves. Yet, these things, while permitted, still should not be performed in excess.

Text

The person of wisdom when he sees these things will understand them with ease, they are clear to the one with knowledge.

Know that of the strictest laws of the holy Torah is the law of Shabat observance. The one who observes even one Shabat in accordance to all its laws merits many things.

Even so, the laws are liberal with regards to saving a life. Not only this, but even with regards to a question of life & death and not just a certain danger [can the Shabat be violated]. Not just regarding a question of life and death for a Jew, [can the Shabat be violated] even if there is a question [whether the person in question] is a Jew. Even to maintain life momentarily [were our Sages strict] and ordained that the observance of Shabat be waved.

Commentary

The example of the Shabat is mentioned here simply to provide proof of the essential nature of the value of life.

Text

Learn from this a lesson. What with such a strict negative commandment before us, which is punished by excision and stoning and still we do not hesitate to violate it for the sake of other commandments. Even more so, when there is no sin before us, yet there is a possibility or concern about illness should we be careful to protect ourselves. This matter is rather simple to me.

Commentary

The laws of the Shabat are very strict. An intentional violation of the Shabat laws can lead to excommunication or even the death penalty. Nonetheless, the strict laws of Shabat are put aside for the sake of saving human life. If saving life is so important then we must learn how to protect life through the proper observance of the laws and traditions of heath.



Concluding his discussion of health, Rabbi Makhir now returns to the topic of the proper style of Torah study.

Text

One should sit and study according to his level and ability, whether this be [the study] of Bible, Mishna or Gemara.

Commentary

In actuality, one is required by Jewish Law to study all of these topics. Indeed Jewish Law mandates that one is also required to study Kabbalah. One should study what one can and make extra efforts to study and understand that which is most difficult.

Text

The best and most auspicious time to understand and to learn is from midnight until sunrise. Another [good time] is from sunrise until noon prior to lunch, for then one's organs are at rest and quite and the mind is apart from all one's labors and no one is there to cause bother. [At this time] one is able to comprehend matters of religion, everyone according to his ability and attainment.

Commentary

The Zohar says that the most auspicious time for prayer and learning is from midnight onwards. Awakening and studying at this hour is practiced by Kabbalists to this day. Just before sunrise, Shacharit is begun, arriving at the Amidah at crack of dawn. After prayer, a Torah lecture is given or Hok L'Yisrael is read. This is the Kabbalistic way.

Yet, here Rabbi Makhir makes mention of a point not mentioned elsewhere. The auspicious time is said to be from midnight to sunrise. Rabbi Makhir extends this time to midday. He places emphasis that this is a conducive time for study for the body is not yet weighed down with heavy foods and the mind is yet quite before the days work. This does not mean that one hasn't eaten anything (as referred to above). Rather one has eaten a small portion, enough to strengthen him, but not enough to satiate.

Aside from this practical reason for morning being the most appropriate time for mystical pursuits, there is also a Kabbalistic reason.

The Ari'zal has taught us that the day and night are equally divided under the forces of mercy and severity. The day is the general time of mercy, the night the general time of severity. Yet, when midnight comes the strength of the severity is broken and although it is still night, the power of the days mercy is in ascendant. Thus midnight renews the forces of mercy and is auspicious. At midday the opposite occurs and although it is still day, the forces of severity are in ascendance all the while that the sun is waning and the night is coming. To balance the forces of severity our Sages have warned us that the Mincha prayer service recited at this time (i.e., afternoon) is the most auspicious and important prayer of the day.



Rabbi Makhir recognized this teaching of the Ari'zal, possibly without ever hearing it from him. No other Kabbalist extends the auspicious morning time beyond prayer and learning. Rabbi Makhir, therefore, shares with us something new.

Text

When one begins study, one should pray to G-d first that he not have any obstacles or make any mistakes [that would take him] from the good and straight path and thus come to understand and to ordain the clean to be unclean and the unclean to be clean. If one teaches others [one should pray that the students] will not mistake the intentions of his words and understand the opposite [of what he means]. This then is the prayer:

"May it be your will HaShem my G-d and G-d of my fathers that there not arise an obstructing matter by our hands and that we not stumble in matters of Law. May our friends rejoice in us. May we not declare that the pure is impure, or the impure to be pure, nor the permitted to be forbidden or the forbidden to be allowed, nor the unkosher to be kosher, or the kosher to be unkosher. May we NOT cause our brethren to stumble in any matter of Law and may we rejoice in them. For [You] HaShem from your mouth give wisdom, knowledge and intelligence. Open my eyes and I will see the wonders in your Torah. You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence, the delights that are in your right hand for eternity."

Sefer Seder HaYom **The Way To Learn**

Begin your studies with ease, slowly, word by word, so that you not be mistaken on the straight path and that you be able to concentrate in truth. For one will only err or make a mistake if one is not careful with his words, not reading carefully or by not paying attention. Rather one must know that [there is more to learn than what meets the eye].

[Only] the one who delves deeply into the intentions of a subject will acquire knowledge of its essence.

This can be compared to one who squeezes a cluster of grapes using the tips of his fingers. Only a little juice comes forth. Then he throws the cluster away. We find that the juice that has been squeezed out is the least good of the cluster and the most dilute of the grapes. The essence and the best are still in the grape cluster. And what caused this to be? His own laziness and his lack of effort to squeeze the grapes properly with all his might . . .

All he squeezed out was water and then he speaks badly about the grapes that they are neither sweet nor strong. Yet, his [own] actions caused this. He doesn't know how to squeeze the grapes. Therefore, his actions were not successful.



This is how it is with learning. There is a great divide between the one who simply reads on the surface of the waters and the one who seeks to find the light of truth, to understand and master the law and the way.

The taste of [true] learning is sweeter than honey and honeycomb. This is not the experience of the one who [studies superficially, like reading a letter]. Such a one goes in darkness and proclaims his ignorance. The days and years go by and no one finds this one to have a brain. His ways are not straight enough to see a thing through the fog and to bring it into the light, to stand something upright, to understand true meaning [of a thing] so that he will not stumble.

This then was the minhag (tradition) established in the yeshivot to pilpul (deeply discuss from every angle) Talmudic subjects and difficult passages. Even though this appears to be a waste of time, being that no laws or judgements are learned thereby. Nonetheless, [this style of learning is pursued] in order to [teach one] how to think clearly so that one will know how to penetrate all matters that come to hand, to shed light on any subject.

One who learns in other [lesser] ways gets swallowed up by the mighty waters and ends up with nothing in his hand. [Such a one causes there to be] spread about a bad reputation for our holy and profoundly deep Torah. For it appears that there is nothing to Torah other than the same understanding that he had when he began to look at things. Thus, the pshat (surface level learning) can be compared to a person's outer garment that one wears over his important business suit protecting it from the elements.

The essence of the Torah, its secrets and hidden, deep implications are concealed to everyone when they begin study. [This is how it remains until] one comes along who has a mind strong enough to withstand the trouble and effort of intense study day after day, until HaShem reveals the matter to him fully. [HaShem does this because He sees] the goodness of the person's intent to know and to understand, thus He gives him his desire. All is dependent upon the person.

Conclusions

As we know, Torah study is divided into four sections: pshat, remez, drash and sod. These four are the study of Bible, Halakha, Gemara and Kabbalah. Every male Jew is required by Torah law to study all of these. Rabbeynu HaAri'zal has written that if one fails to study all four sections during one's lifetime, one's soul is not received above into the Heavenly abode. Such a soul is required to return to Earth to make up that which it lacks.

Many times this argument is used to emphasize the importance of Kabbalah study. Yet, I must emphasize that even among those who study Kabbalah, that they still have a daily obligation to study Gemara and Halakha.



With the upsurge of interest in Kabbalah and mysticism, many Jews are now coming to study these topics. At the same time, they are neglecting the study of Gemara and Halakha. The lack of pshat study is just as much a sin as the lack of sod study.

Of course, there are those who come to study Kabbalah who are not religious. Some Rabbis will allow this, believing that this is the way to bring these secularists back to Torah and mitzvot. The Rabbis who are most adamantly opposed to secularists studying Kabbalah are the Kabbalists themselves.

The Kabbalists recognize the true order of tikkun needed for the upkeep of the worlds. They recognize what happens when light goes into a vessel unprepared to receive it. They are very well aware of the "breaking of the vessels" and the creation of evil.

Let this serve as a lesson. Welcome to all who walk the halls of Torah study. Pay your entrance fee first which is the complete observance of the mitzvot and then come in and wander, even into the hallways of Kabbalah. But before you get there, make sure you are properly prepared.

First, learn how to pray. Daven (pray) every morning IN A MINYAN!!

Then with Talit and Tefillin on, study Torah. First, study a section of the weekly Torah portion. Then spend at least a half-hour studying Halakha. Finally, spend a few moments to review or read a Kabbalistic or Hasidic passage. Let the awe and wonder of it inspire you throughout your day. In an hour, you have fulfilled your daily Torah study obligations.

Let me conclude and say: If you take care of the Torah, the Torah will take care of you!