YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY**

**By Rav Moshe Taragin**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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**Shiur #03: The Nature of *Tefillat Ha-Derekh***

The *gemara* in *Berakhot* (28b) presents the “*tefilla*” known as *tefillat ha-derekh.* The simple understanding of this *halakha* is that *Chazal* instituted a special *tefilla* to be recited when traveling due the unique dangers of transit.

However, the view that *tefillat ha-derekh* is patterned after a *tefilla* raises a number of questions. First, we have no precedent of *Chazal* adding *tefillot* that conclude with the name of Hashem. Although various *tefillot* were added to the daily structure of *Shacharit* (such as the *Birkhot Ha-Shachar* and *Birkhot Keriat* S*hema*), these are not stand-alone *tefillot* but sections appended to *Shacharit*. Alternatively, the precedents we do have for additional stand-alone *tefillot* (such as the famous *tefilla* of R. Nechunya ben Hakana upon entering and exiting the *beit* *midrash*) do not conclude with an actual *berakha*. It is difficult to imagine *Chazal* instituting a stand-alone *tefilla* that concludes with a *berakha*. In his comments on this *gemara*, the *Pnei Yehoshua* raises this point in considering the status of *tefillat ha-derekh*.

Additionally, the language of this “*tefilla*” may indicate that it should not be considered a halakhic *tefilla*. The original concept of *tefillat ha-derekh* was delivered by Eliyahu HaNavi in a conversation with R. Yehuda, in which Eliyahu instructed that “when you travel, you should [first] consult with your Master (*himalekh be-konekh*).” If this were a classic *tefilla*, why wouldn’t Eliyahu simply articulate it as such? Why doesn’t he simply encourage travelers to pray for protection? Evidently, the text we refer to as *tefillat ha-derekh* may be understood as something **other** than a *tefilla*.

The alternate model toward understanding *tefillat ha-derekh* may be glimpsed in an interesting debate surrounding the syntactical structure of this text. Tosafot (*Pesachim* 104b; see also the R”I, cited by the *Tur*, OC 110) explain that *tefillat ha-derekh* does not begin with the word “*barukh*” because it is only a *tefilla*, and many *tefillot* do not begin with the word *barukh*. However, the *Tur* cites the Maharam MiRotenberg, who claims that ideally *tefillat ha-derekh* should be juxtaposed to a different *berakha* so that it begins with the word *barukh* of the previous contiguous *berakha* (*berakha ha-semukha le-chaverta*).

Evidently, Tosafot maintained that *tefillat ha-derekh* is indeed a *tefilla* and does not require an introductory mention of the word “*barukh*,” whereas the Maharam MiRotenberg may be asserting that *tefillat ha-derekh* is not a *tefilla*, but rather a *berakha*. Most classic *berakhot* begin with the word “*barukh*”; those that do not are juxtaposed to an earlier *berakha* so that they are associated with the “*barukh*” of the first *Berakha*. *Tefillat ha-derekh* is not different from any other *berakha* which requires either an actual mention of the word *barukh* or juxtaposition to another *berakha*.

A similar debate surrounding the nature of *tefillat ha-derekh* and its syntax emerges between the Ra’avad and the Avudraham. The Ra’avad (*teshuva* 44) claims that not all *berakhot* include the name of *Hashem* and the word *melekh*. *Berakhot* that are not “*kavua*,” - are not recited with set regularity - do not require *Shem* *u-malkhut* (the name of *Hashem* and the word *melekh*). To prove his theory, the Ra’avad cites two examples of *berakhot* that do not contain these elements: *zimun* (before *Birkhat Ha-Mazon*) and *tefillat ha-derekh*. Since these *berakhot* are not fixed, but are rather recited only under certain conditions, they do not require *Shem u-malkhut*.

The Avudraham rejects the Ra’avad’s proof, claiming that *tefillat ha-derekh* is not classified as a *berakha*, but rather a *tefilla*, and that is why it does not include *Shem* *u-malkhut*. The absence of *Shem u-malkhut* from *tefillat ha-derekh* in no way reflects a principle about *berakhot* in general. Obviously, the Ra’avad views *tefillat ha-derekh* as a *berakha*, as he employs it as proof to a concept that governs *berakhot* in general.

A additional syntactical issue surrounding *tefillat ha-derekh* is the issue of inserting specific additions to *tefillat ha-derekh*. A statement of the Ra’avyah (*Hilkhot* *Tefilla* 86) endorses personal additions to the standard text of *tefillat* *ha-derekh* provided by the *gemara*. For example, if a person is traveling in the desert, he may mention specific desert-related perils in his *tefillat ha-derekh*. This flexibility to shape *tefillat ha-derekh* to personal circumstances is more characteristic of *tefilla* than of *berakhot*. We rarely find *berakhot* that can be formatted for specific conditions, but we do allow *tefilla* to be personally crafted.

Having traced various discussions in the *Rishonim* surrounding the syntax of *tefillat ha-derekh* and whether it is modeled after a *berakha* of a *tefilla*, it is possible to better understand two debates amongst the *Amora’im*. The *tefillat* *ha*-*derekh* text initially provided by R. Yaakov articulates *tefillat ha-derekh* in the singular: “escort me, protect me…” Abaye disagrees and mandates that *tefillat* *ha-derekh* be articulated in the plural: “escort us, protect us…” In rationalizing Abaye’s view, Rashi claims that the plural form of *tefillat ha-derekh* is modeled on the employment of the plural during *tefillot* in general. Just as *tefilla* is phrased in the plural, so should *tefillat ha-derekh* be articulated in the plural tense. Evidently—at least according to Rashi—Abaye associated *tefillat ha-derekh* with *tefilla* and demanded a classic *tefilla* grammar. Presumably, R. Yaakov disagreed, arguing that *tefillat ha-derekh* is not a *tefilla* but a *berakha*, and the singular phrasing is therefore more appropriate.

An additional debate among the *Amora’im* may be based on this question of whether *tefillat ha-derekh* is a *tefilla* or a *berakha*. R. Chisda demanded that *tefillat ha-derekh* be recited while standing stationary, while R. Sheshet allowed it to be recited while traveling. It is unclear why R. Chisda demanded standing still during *tefillat ha-derekh*. Is this merely a technical requirement, to allow greater focus and *kavana*? Or does R. Chisda view *tefillat ha-derekh* as a *tefilla* that requires standing, as in the case of most *tefillot*?

Finally, this question frames an interesting “contradiction” between *tefillat ha-derekh* and an ensuing mishna in Berakhot. The *mishna* in *Berakhot* (54) describes the unique *tefillot* that a person adds upon departing a city and when arriving. This extra *tefilla* for someone departing a city appears to be redundant, since *tefillat ha-derekh* is also recited when departing a city. Why doesn’t the *mishna* list two *tefillot* to be recited upon departure – the *tefilla* listed in the *mishna* as well as *tefillat ha-derekh*? In fact, the *Beit Yosef* cites the *Kolbo*, who merges the *tefilla* of the *mishna* with *tefillat ha-derekh*. However, the two *gemarot* do not refer to each other, and it appears that they are discussing completely different *halakhot*. Viewing *tefillat ha-derekh* as a *berakha* and not a *tefilla* would solve the redundancy issue. The *mishna* discusses a *tefilla* that is recited when departing a city, while the *gemara* discusses a *berakha* recited when traveling.