

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVII: Shelach (Num. 13:1–15:41)

Essay 8. The order of the *Shema* in the Torah and in prayer

בְּרִכּוֹת ריש פָּרָק ב' אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן קֶרְחָה לְמָה קִדְמָה "שְׁמַע" ל"וּהִיָּה אִם־שָׁמַע"? כְּדֵי שְׂיִקְבַּל עָלָיו עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם תְּחִלָּה, וְאַחַר כֵּן יִקְבַּל עָלָיו עוֹל מִצְוֹת, "וְהִיָּה אִם־שָׁמַע" ל"וּיֵאמָר", שְׁ"וְהִיָּה אִם־שָׁמַע" נוֹהֵג בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה "וַיֵּאמָר" אֵינּוּ נוֹהֵג אֲלָא בַּיּוֹם. וְהַקְשׁוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת לְמָה קִדְמָה שָׁמַע וְכוּ' וְאִם תֵּאמַר תִּיפּוּק לִיָּה דְקִדְמָה בַּתּוֹרָה, וְתִירְצוּ דְהִכִּי קֵאָמַר מִפְּנֵי מָה קִדְמָה אַף לְפָרְשַׁת צִיצִית דְקִדְמָה לְכֻלָּם. אֲלָא וַדַּאי אֵין אֲנִי חוֹשְׁשִׁין לְזָה מִשּׁוּם דְּאֵין מוֹקְדָם וּמְאִוָּחַר בַּתּוֹרָה, וְאִם כֵּן הִיָּה לוֹ לְהַקְדִּים פְּרֻשַׁת "וְהִיָּה אִם־שָׁמַע" שֶׁהִיא מְדַבֵּרַת בְּלִשׁוֹן רַבִּים עַכ"ל. וְנִרְאָה קִצַּת דּוּחַק לְחַלְקֵי בֵּין לִשׁוֹן יְחִיד לְלִשׁוֹן רַבִּים שֶׁהָרִי רֹב הַתּוֹרָה נֶאֱמָרָה בְּלִשׁוֹן יְחִיד.

In tractate *Berachot*, the beginning of chapter 2:

[The three paragraphs of the *Shema* prayer are not adjacent to one another in the Torah, nor are they recited in the order in which they appear.] **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said: Why, does the [first portion of] *Shema*¹ precede [the second portion of] *VeHaya im Shamo*²? So that one will first accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven [i.e., the awareness of G-d], and only then accept upon himself the yoke of the commandments. [Why did the second portion of] *VeHaya im Shamo* [precede the third portion of] *VaYomer*³? [Because the paragraph of] *VeHaya im Shamo* is practiced both by day and by night, [while] *VaYomer*, [which discusses the commandment of *tzitzit*, ritual fringes], is only practiced during the day.**

- Mishnah *Berachot* 2:2; *Berachot* 13a

The Tosafists asked:

Why do we not give the reason [for why the first portion of *Shema* precedes the second portion of *VeHaya im Shamo*] as “because it is written first in the Torah?” Because what the Tanna means to ask is why [the first portion of *Shema*] precedes even the [third] portion of *tzitzit*, which is the first of all the sections [of the *Shema*] to be written in the Torah [as it appears in Numbers,

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¹ Deut. 6:4–9: “Hear, O Israel! The L-rd is our G-d; the L-rd is One!”

² Deut. 11:13–21: “If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the L-rd, your G-d, and serving Him with all your heart and soul . . .”

³ Num. 15:37–41: “The L-rd said to Moses as follows: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments . . .”

where the other sections appear in Deuteronomy]? **We must therefore say that we do not care because there is no chronological order** [literally, “early or late”] **in the Torah. That being the case, we ought to have given precedence to *VeHaya* [*im Shamo*], since it is written in the plural tense.**

- Tosafot on Berachot 14b

It seems a bit forced to distinguish between singular tense and plural tense, since most of the Torah was said in the singular tense.

וחזין מדרבם נראה לומר דאף על גב דקנימא לן אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה מפל מקום היכא דאיכא למדרש—דרשינו. והכי נמי יש לתת טעם למה נכתבה בתורה "ויאמר" קודם לשאר הפרשיות, דהתם בגמרא (דף י"ד) איתא רב משי ידיה, וקרא קריאת שמע, ואנח תפילין ומצלי. והכי עביד הכי וכו' ותרין, רב פרבי יהושע בן קרחה סבירא ליה, דאמר עול מלכות שמעם תחלה ואחר כך עול מצות. אימר דאמר רבי יהושע בן קרחה, להקדים קריאה לקריאה, קריאה לעשייה מי שמעת ליה? ומסיק דשילוחא הוא דעונית. ופירש רש"י השלים קלקל שאיחר להביא לו תפילין והוזקק לקרות כדי שלא יעבור זמן קריאת שמע וכו' עכ"ל.

Apart from their way, it seems to say that even though we hold that there is no chronological order in the Torah, nevertheless, anywhere that there is [a possibility] to expound [something], we expound [it rather than explain that there is only a teaching that could also have been derived in a different manner].⁴ Thus too we can give a reason why the Torah recites *VaYomer* before the other sections, for there in the Gemara (page 14b), it is brought:

Rav washed his hands, recited *Shema*, donned tefillin, and prayed. How could he do that [i.e., say the *Shema* before putting on tefillin]? . . .

Rav holds in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha, who said [that the acceptance of] the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven [takes precedence and should] come first, followed by the acceptance of the yoke of the commandments. [Therefore, Rav first recited *Shema*, and only then donned tefillin.]

[The Gemara challenges:] **Say that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said to give precedence to recitation [of the portion concerning the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven over] recitation [of other portions. But] did you hear him [say the *halacha* gives precedence to] recitation over performance [of a mitzvah]? . . .**

The conclusion is that the messenger was at fault.

- Berachot 14b

Rashi explained that the messenger erred in that he was late to bring [Rav's] tefillin, and [Rav] was compelled to recite the *Shema* before donning tefillin, in order that he not miss the time for reciting the *Shema*.

⁴ Cf. Pesachim 24b, 77b.

משמע מהכא שהתפילין קודמין לקריאת שמע משום דעשייה קודמת לקריאה שהמעשה גדול מן התלמוד. ואפשר דמשום הכי קדמה בתורה "ויאמר" שפלה מדברת בעשיית ציצית כדי לגלות לנו סברא זו שהעשייה קודמת, אמנם בקריאה אינה קודמת מפני טעמים אחרים. ומעתה שהתפילין קודמין לקריאת שמע, נעקר קריאת שמע הוא פסוק ראשון כדאמרין שמע ישראל וכו' זו קריאת שמע של ר' יהודה הנשיא וכו', או פרשה ראשונה לדעת רוב הפוסקים, הנה לנו להקדים פרשת "והיה אם-שמע" שיש בה עול מצות כדי לרמוז שעשיית המצות קודמת לקריאה.

The meaning from here, that tefillin precedes the recitation of the *Shema*, because action precedes the recitation, is because acting on a mitzvah is greater than studying about the mitzvah.⁵ It is possible that because of this, *VaYomer* preceded in the Torah, that all of it speaks about the performance of the mitzvah of tzitzit, in order to reveal to us this opinion that action comes first, however in the recitation of the *Shema* it does not come first because of other reasons, as noted above. Now that we understand that the mitzvah of laying tefillin precedes the recitation of the *Shema*, and the main part of the recitation of the *Shema* is either the first verse—as it is said, “The Sages taught [in a *Baraita*: The single verse,] ‘Hear, Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the Lord is One, this is Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s recitation of *Shema*”⁶—or the first section, according to most authorities, we should advance the second section *VeHaya im Shamo*, which has within it the yoke of the commandments, over that of the third section, in order to hint that performance of the commandments precedes the recitation of the commandments.

וזהו למה קדמה "שמע" ל"והיה אם-שמע". ותריץ כדי שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים תחלה, והואיל שאי אפשר לקבל עול מלכות שמים שלימה בלא תפילין כדאמרין התם בגמרא הרוצה שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים שלימה וכו'. אם כן כשאנו אומרים פרשת שמע קודם מטעם שיש בה קבלת מלכות שמים, משמע נמי שהתפילין קודמין משום דעשייה קודמת, שהרי הקבלה אינה שלימה בלא תפילין קודם, ומשום הכי בתורה קדמה "שמע" ל"והיה אם-שמע" לגלות לנו הסברא דקריאה קודמת לקריאה, אבל פרשת ציצית קדמה להורות שהעשייה קודמת לקריאה, ועוד שהטלית קודם לתפילין.

This is why *Shema* precedes *VeHaya im Shamo*. The solution is in order that he will accept the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven upon himself first, and since it's impossible to accept the complete yoke of the kingdom of Heaven without tefillin, as it says there in the Gemara: “And Rabbi Yochanan said: One who seeks to accept upon himself the complete yoke of the kingdom of Heaven should relieve himself, wash his hands, lay tefillin, recite *Shema*, and pray, and that is [acceptance of] the complete kingdom of Heaven.”⁷ If so, when we say the section of *Shema* first, for the reason that it includes acceptance of the kingdom of Heaven, it also has the meaning that the tefillin have priority because acting on a mitzvah takes priority. After all, the acceptance is not complete without tefillin first, and because of this, in the Torah, *Shema* precedes *VeHaya im Shamo* to reveal to us the explanation that recitation [of the portion concerning the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven over] precedes recitation [of other portions, but the section of tzitzit precedes, to show that action precedes reciting, and also that the prayer shawl, which includes the tzitzit, precedes tefillin.

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⁵ Kiddushin 40b. This is the opinion of Rabbi Tarfon. Rabbi Akiva has the opposite view, that study is greater than action. The majority agreed that study is greater, but only because it leads to action.

⁶ Berachot 13a.

⁷ Berachot 14b–15a.