

כרם

Kerem

דוד

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A COLLECTION OF COMMENTARIES
ON PIRKEI AVOT WITH
EXPLANATIONS
FROM ACCOUNTS
BY OUR SAGES

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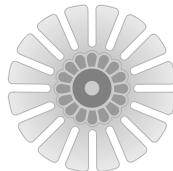
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❖ *Introduction* ❖

Sefer Messilat Yesharim (Chapter 11) tells us that concern for personal honor and being a dedicated servant of Hashem are not compatible. Inevitably, there will be conflicts -- and human nature is such that the honor-seeking individual will give precedence to his own needs.

Ramban, in his Igeret haKodesh, says that he who considers himself superior to his fellow man is akin to one who has rebelled against the Kingdom of Heaven. This is because it is as if he is using the Heavenly Kingdom's "garments" for his own glorification.

In what type of things, then, might man legitimately take pride? Perhaps wealth? No, for wealth comes from Hashem. Perhaps honor? No, for that as well is Hashem's.

We see, then, that whoever seeks personal honor cannot legitimately call himself a servant of G-d. The verse tells us that Kavod Hashem fills the earth. This leaves no place bereft of His Kavod. There is therefore no place where one would not be compelled to be concerned that His Kavod is properly respected. This would mean that those who think of their own honor are ignoring the reality that Hashem's Kavod is present there as well. Obviously, no one like that could rightfully be called "trusted servant."

Another verse supporting this idea appears in Sefer Yeshiyahu, that *I will not give my Kavod to anyone else*. Tehillim has a relevant verse as well on this matter. Similarly, there are Rabbinic Midrashim that bring this idea that he who clothes himself in honor is appropriating the honor and glory that belongs to the King of Kings.

That a person would willfully remove himself from having the status of "servant of G-d" is severe indeed. For, Hashem took us out of *Mitsra'im* for no reason other than that we would serve Him forever and dedicated ourselves to being His servants. This is evident from the many mitzvoth He commanded us specifically that we should always remember that we were slaves in *Mitsra'im*. Sefer Devarim's version of the Ten Commandments is one example: *And you shall remember that you were slaves in Mitsra'im and that Hashem took you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. Accordingly, He commands you to "do" the Day of Shabbat.* Rashi

there comments, that it was on this condition that He redeemed you, that you should be His slave and do his mitzvot.

Sefer Hapardes and Machzor Vitri bring a *marshal* in Rashi's name, of a slave who has been captured and sentenced to a life of suffering. A King proposes a deal: He will free him, but only on condition that the slave will afterwards do whatever the king asks. The slave agrees. And the king, each time he has the slave perform some task, reminds him again and again that the basis for all this is the deal they had made from the outset, that the king would take him out -- but only if the slave would remain indebted to him and be prepared for constant tasks. It was on this condition that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu redeemed us from *Mitsra'im*. And this is why are told to mention *Yetsiat Mitsra'im* throughout our tefillot.

It could almost be said that as long as one clings to thoughts of personal honor, he cannot be possibly be a faithful servant. One might almost say that he also may not rightfully be called a *Yisrael kasher*. Given that the mitzvot were given to reinforce and cultivate the master-slave relationship between ourselves and Hashem, whatever one does to act otherwise necessarily undermines and negates that model.

It seems to me that Pirkei Avot, from beginning to end, emphasizes that theme.

The first mishnah in Pirkei Avot opens by reminding us that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua. The final mishnah of the last chapter begins by reminding us that all that was created by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, He did so solely for the sake of His Honor.

Sefer Yetzirah 1:6 tells us that the entirety of Torah is like a circle; it is as if its end is bound to its beginning. If so, I wonder how this applies to Pirkei Avot. What binds its beginning and end?

Let us start with the first mishnah. It begins *משה קבל תורה מסיני*. Why does it say *m'Sinai* rather than *m'Ha Kaddosh Baruch Hu*? Our commentary to that mishnah discusses this point.

Moshe is described as *very much more humble than all men*. He learned this trait from *Har Sinai*. Our Rabbis tell us that Hashem selected Sinai -- as opposed to any other mountain -- upon which to give the Torah due to its having "lowered itself" before Hashem. Moshe saw this -- and incorporated

that trait into himself as well. One could say that the trait most closely identified with Moshe, that of humility, was “from Har Sinai.” That is why Avoth tells us that it was from Sinai that he received Torah.

Later on in Moshe’s life, soon before he was to die, he told Yisrael that they could learn *mussar* from the heavens and earth. (This according to *Sifrei* 305.) Moshe says (in Devarim 30:19) that he would bring heaven and earth as witness. The midrash explains this to mean that he is telling them to consider the heaven and earth’s never having changed their “middoth.” Specifically, was there ever a day when the sun and moon had not risen? Had anyone ever heard of planting wheat and then harvesting barley from them? Of course not, for never have they altered the *teva* imbued within them by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

Although one can fairly say that the natural world has no choice, and therefore receives neither reward nor punishment for not deviating from its “middoth,” one can still say that man has what to learn from Nature: You, who were created for reward and punishment, how much more so must you stick to your “middoth.” It is incumbent upon the Jew to do what he was created for: To serve Hashem through Torah and mitzvot.

One could say that this is what Moshe Rabbeinu himself did.

He looked at *Har Sinai* and considered the *kal v’chomer*: This mountain receives no reward for its humility, yet it understood that this is the proper way to act when in Hashem’s presence. How much more so, one like myself, who understands that he was created for no reason other than for the sake of being rewarded and punished by Hashem.

He who conducts himself with humility feels no need to respond in kind to those who insult him. This is because he cares only about *Kavod Shamayim* -- and not about his own *kavod*. Perhaps that is the reason Avoth ends with the statement that all of creation is for the sake of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*’s Honor. One could say that this teaches that when one is particular to always act humbly, he will eventually come to the realization that the entire world was created only for the sake of Hashem’s honor.

Man himself is undeserving of *kavod*; only Hashem is. Man is to be pained by hearing of the disparagement of Hashem r”l, not of the disparagement of his own self.

Note the gemara that says that one may not violate Shabbat so as to save from fire a Torah scroll written by a heretic. (This rule applies to weekdays as well.) Rabbi Yishmael, in the gemara there, derives this from a *kal v'chomer*: When it comes to making peace between man and his wife, the Torah says that even a Name written in holiness is to be erased. These, who cause enmity between Hashem and His people, how much more so should it be true [that a (not really) holy Name written by them is to be erased.] For, it says [in Tehillim], that *those who hate You, Hashem, I will hate as well. And with those who rise up against You, I quarrel. With the utmost hatred, I hate them. I regard them as my own enemies.*

I believe that the above explains why Moshe said to Hashem, after the episode of the Golden Calf, . . . *Show me your Kavod*. Otherwise, why had Moshe apparently changed his mind and was now desirous of seeing Hashem's *kavod*? Is it not true that earlier, at the incident of the Burning Bush, Moshe feared to gaze upon Hashem's presence? What had changed now?

I believe that one is compelled to say that Moshe had not changed his mind at all. Even now, he did not really wish to see Hashem's presence, as he knew that whoever would try and do so would be struck dead. This was evident from what occurred to Nadab and Avihu, who were struck down by the *midat hadin* for having gazed upon the Shechina.

The question therefore remains as to what Moshe was looking to see -- and what he did not wish to see.

My suggestion is that when Moshe said, *Show me your Kavod* he was not actually asking that Hashem show him His essence. Rather, he was asking that Hashem grant him the ability to discern the *Kavod Hashem* hidden within each and every human being. Every Yisrael has within him a *חלק אלוה ממעל*. The *tselem Elokim* within man is called *kavod* (Seforno Tehillim 57:9).

To the extent that man endeavors to uproot from within himself tendencies towards raw physicality, the "G-dly" soul within him will grow correspondingly. Of course, this is not something evident upon superficial observation. And that is why Moshe spoke as he did: He was asking the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* to grant him the ability to sense the "G-dly" soul hidden within each Yisrael.

Moshe's intent was that he be able to honor (לכבד) each and every individual in accordance with the degree to which they had succeeded in developing their "G-dly" soul and to the extent that they were serving Hashem. For, surely it was proper to pay more honor to those whose souls were greater as compared to those who had not yet succeeded in cultivating their G-dliness to the same extent. Another consideration was that Moshe was concerned that Yisrael would sin once again. He therefore wanted to be able to discern which of them had sinned and which ones not. Moshe hoped to thereby sanctify Hashem's Name.

G-d's response to Moshe was that he would not be permitted to see His Kavod, for *no man may see Me and live*.

Poetically, one might say that the above verse is saying that it is forbidden to honor an individual man according to the level he had reached. And one also may not presume to honor him according to the extent he had developed his G-dly soul. Rather, as long as Moshe was alive, he was to view *EVERY* Jew equally and to not presume to judge whose soul is more developed than someone else's. Each and every Jew is to be seen as *children of Hashem*. Even though they sin, they remain a Yisrael. Each has the ability to do teshuvah and to restore the *chelek Elokah*, their G-dly essence.

Once one leaves this world, however, and will no longer live (תחיה עוד ולא), only then might one hope to discern the Kavod Hashem hidden within each individual. Only at that point might one -- even Moshe Rabbeinu -- distinguish one man from another according to the degree that one person's G-dly soul is greater than another's. At that point, it will be "evident to the eye." That is because to the degree that someone served Hashem in the lower world, that is how great his reward will be in the Next World.

(It is possible to be certain that the reward one sees in his fellow in the Next World was based solely on his performance in the Lower World, because it is axiomatic that after death, no further reward may be earned. For, it is no longer possible to engage in good deeds. As it says in the gemara, speaking metaphorically, only he who endeavors on "Erev Shabbat" will get to "eat" on "Shabbat.")

The Kaddosh Baruch Hu was saying as well to Moshe that he should not even attempt to look at the *midat hakavod* placed by Hashem within

every individual. Nor should it be the basis for why Moshe would honor a man. Rather, said the Kaddosh Baruch Hu to Moshe וְרֵאִיתָ אֶת אַחֲרָי -- *You should look at My back*. This means that Moshe should look at even the least amongst Israel, who are the “back part,” the far end of the Nation, and show them respect.

In other words, Moshe was being told וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרֵא, *and my Face you shall not see*. This means: “Show honor not just to the “*gedolim*,” who are considered פְּנִים and who are the פְּנֵי הָעַם. Rather, Moshe was to honor even those of lower standing, for they as well have the מַמְעַל אֱלוֹהַּ.

This is how Moshe learned the lesson that he must show *kavod* to one and all, even to the simplest of people. Eventually, Moshe would say to Yehoshua, “. . . *Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets, if Hashem would but place His spirit upon them!*” Moshe’s own honor meant nothing to him, for he was sensitive to *Kavod Hashem* at every moment and in every place. This was how he lived his life, with constant, ongoing concern for the *Kavod Hashem* -- and none for the *kavod* of himself.

I believe we have discovered the reason why our Rabbis instituted that prior to learning Massechet Avoth, one should say כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. It is as if the Rabbis are telling us what the true purpose is of learning Avoth, namely to inculcate the value that all of Yisrael are equal, that all are *tzaddikim*. Each of us is to treat every other member of Yisrael with equal respect and honor.

One should not fall into the trap of telling oneself, “Why should I respect Ploni the unlearned or Ploni the peasant farmer?” Rather, each of us must honor every other member of Yisrael, without exception or pre-judgement. This is alluded to in the Ramban footnoted above.

In truth, why would someone even presume to swell with pride regarding his own self? Isn’t all honor Hashem’s?

I would take this even farther and say that this *kavod* is to be extended -- in a certain sense -- not only to the average and simple member of Yisrael, but even to those we think of as *resha'im*. By this, I mean no that one must honor the *resha'im*, but that in one’s heart, one must love them and try to help rehabilitate them and draw them closer to the paths of our creed. The exception would be those who not only sin, but draw others to sin. As for those not in that category, one must try and interpret whatever they do in

a positive light, to the extent that it's plausible. For, perhaps they did not choose to go astray, but never knew anything different, due to the way they were raised.

David Hamelech said: *Those who hate You, Hashem, I will hate as well*. Included in this were those who had desecrated Hashem's Name -- and thereby diminished His *Kavod*. He honored the *tzaddikim* -- but never pursued or sought honor for himself. Quite the opposite, as we saw with the incident of his dancing with abandon and joy before the Ark of Hashem, when he acted in a way that some -- particularly his wife, Michal -- might construe as unbecoming a king. Michal, as we know, was embarrassed, feeling that David should have shown greater restraint and not acted like a commoner in his enthusiasm for the Ark. David's reply to her was "*And I shall behave even more humbly than this, and I shall be lowly in my eyes; and among the maidservants of who you spoke -- among them will I be honored!*"

The commentary *Metzudat David* expands on the above verse, interpolating David's to be saying, "Had I acted with even more seeming abandon, had I been even more lowly in my own eyes and taken even more liberties with my own honor - even in the presence of the maidservants you mention - with deeds like that, I would be even more 'honored!' How could I be said to be disgracing myself when, behold, I was doing it for the sake of the *kavod* of the Ark?"

The gemara even tells us that David would consult with Mefiboshet prior to doing whatever he did, without any sense of embarrassment.

Let me tell you a story: A certain fellow, a *yoreh Shamayim*, once turned to me with complaints about what he saw as his bad fortune. We are talking here about an individual whose sons were all learning in *kolelim* and *yeshivot*. His issue was that he was having no success in *parnassa*. When speaking to me, he was almost at the point of blaming Hashem, G-d forbid.

I must tell you that I was stunned.

How could a *talmid chacham*, someone who has achieved so much in Torah and guides his children along the path of Torah, speak this way? This man had willingly spent great amounts of money on his children's Torah education, had given out large sums to the poor. Yet out of his mouth, such things could be uttered? He would question Hashem's ways, almost to the extent of voicing actual complaints?

I began to investigate. What matter of person was he? I discovered that he was prone to anger. And now I understood. It was the horrendous trait of anger that drove him to this. It had damaged the man's faith.

Those who tend to anger and are tremendously exacting with others are almost incapable of honoring their fellow man. Even the most innocuous comment they view as a slight. It takes almost nothing to trigger their anger; they're practically liable to jump down the throats of everyone around them!

It's natural to expect that their trust in Hashem will be affected as well.

Just as they cannot honor their fellow man, so can they not fully honor and give due credit to Hashem. This is why our Rabbis taught us that he who tears his garments, breaks his utensils, and squanders his money due to his rage is to be viewed as if he were an idolater. Some state this as a general principle: He who angers easily is as if he had worshipped idols.

Accordingly, each of us must take great care to improve and refine our personalities. Otherwise, how can we be proper servants of Hashem? How would we reach our goal of complete trust in Him?

We must work on ourselves to become pleasant, both to Hashem and to man. This is what is called a "*tzaddik tov*." Gemara Kiddushin tells us that he who is *tov* both to *Shamayim* and to mankind is a "*tzaddik tov*." If he's *tov* to *Shamayim*, but not to his fellow man, he's a *tzaddik* who is not *tov*.

I hope that we have shed some light on the importance each of us must place on striving to honor every one of our fellow Jews.

Let us not presume to be able to "read" what level of holiness they may or not be on. The futility of that can be derived from the story of Moshe Rabbeinu, where even one as great as he was denied the ability to discern the *kavod Hashem* imbued within man. When he wished to see the *Kavod Hashem* of Hashem Himself, he was denied, for no man may see the *Kavod Hashem* and live. It would then follow that the same rule would apply when seeking to see the *Kavod Hashem* within man. Hashem denies us that ability because He wishes that we treat each and every human being, from the seemingly insignificant to the prestigious, with an equal measure of *kavod*.

From G-d's perspective, every human being is significant, not only because they have a holy *neshama*, not only because they have improved themselves to a certain degree, but because they are His creations. All are His

servants. It is therefore improper to honor just those who appear prestigious while ignoring those who appear to your eyes relatively inconsequential.

Rather, it is Hashem alone who can see within us and know our true nature and our true standing. It is only He who can discern who is truly a *tzaddik* and who is truly a *rasha* and only He can veritably distinguish not only between who is a *rasha* and who is a *tzaddik*. but also to genuinely distinguish between that which is truly *tov* versus that which is truly *not*.

May it be His will that we all merit *Olam Haba*, bound to the *nefashot* of all the *tzaddikim*. Amen.

I call this sefer “Kerem David” in order that I might sustain the memory of my holy uncles, HaRav HaTzaddik Raphael Pinto (who passed away ה"תש"ם י' שבט), HaRav HaTzaddik Meir Pinto (who passed away ה"תש"ם ט' אדר), whose names are alluded to in the word כרם and who left this world without offspring. May it be His will that through the merit of learning this sefer, that their lips will quiver with speech even from within the grave.

It is with the greatest respect that I wish to thank our friend, HaRav Yisrael Messinger from Monsey, NY, son of our Rabbinic friend HaRav Moshe Shlomo, who has been close to us and to our institutions for many years. He has invested tremendous amounts of effort and endeavor into this *sefer*, writing down the original hebrew from audio recordings, organizing it, editing it, and all other stages of preparing it for publication. To him, his family, and to the *avreichim* who assisted him, may Heaven grant them their full reward. May they merit long and good lives and long-lived offspring that will continue their path of Torah and Mitzvoth.

I would like to express my gratitude to my wife, Vivian bat Mamach, may she live. Throughout all my endeavors, she has stood by my side. Her ongoing support has been a constant source of strength. I am especially grateful for how she was willingly accepted the situation of being alone at home with our children, so as to provide me with the opportunity to serve the public from morning to night. May Hashem grant her a full reward. What's mine is hers. My prayer is that together we will share much *nachat* from our sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters, may they live.

I would also like to extend my blessing, the blessing of a son to his dear mother, to *Marat Mazal Tov*, may she live, wife of my father and master, the

tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his memory be for a blessing. May she merit long and healthy life and to see much *nachat* from all her offspring.

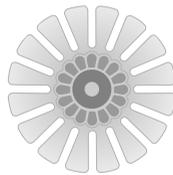
I wish to offer special thanks all those who have supported and strengthened our institutions, to our Rashei Kollelim, Rashei Yeshiva, and *maggidei shiur*, both in Eretz Yisrael and *chutz la'aretz*. I mention as well for a blessing the administrators of the Beit Pinto institutions in Eretz Yisrael, France, and the United States. May the Heavens grant their full reward. May they succeed at all they set their minds to and may their portion be with those who bring merit to the public. Amen, may it be His will.

Every time that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu has granted me the opportunity for a family *simcha*, I have published one of my *sefarim* as a memento. The hebrew original of this *sefer* was published to coincide with the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of our son, Michael Yosef Alexander. May it be His will that through the merits of his holy forefathers, he will merit to be a *gadol baTorah* and *yirat Shamayim*. May we have *nachat* from all our offspring, may they live.

The are the words of the author,

David Chanaya Pinto, may he live

*Son of the Holy Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, may his memory be blessed
Grandson of our master, the Tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto, may his memory be blessed
from Morocco*



***Foreword from the editor of the Hebrew Edition,
Rabbi Yisrael Baruch Messinger¹***

I praise and thank Hashem for lifting me above my humble status and granting me the privilege of associating with the royalty of the Jewish nation, our Torah scholars and rabbis, and for giving me the rare opportunity of preparing this holy book for print. This volume is a compilation of the written and spoken words of Rabbeinu *shlita* on *Masechet Avot*, which, according to the custom instituted by our ancestors, is learned each Shabbat between Pesach and Shavuot, and by some, through the summer months until the last Shabbat before Rosh HaShanah.

This is the fourth of Rabbeinu *shlita*'s works to be published. First was the *Pachad David* series on the Torah and the holidays, consisting of four large volumes. Next came a single volume comprising *divrei Torah* on various subjects, and a commentary on the Pesach *Haggadah*. Thousands of Jews sit and learn these *sefarim*, drawing strength and encouragement to grow in *avodah* and *yirat Shamayim*.

Anyone who has studied Rabbeinu's Torah knows that he always brings out the aspect of *mussar*, the ethical lesson to be learned from the text, in such a way as to enable each person to apply it in his own life. And if this is true regarding Scripture, how much more is it true of *Pirkei Avot*, which consists entirely of ethical teachings and paths to higher levels of piety. Rabbeinu has mined this rich treasure field and found precious gems of wisdom for life.

The commentary on the text has been enhanced with the addition of stories from the lives of the author's holy ancestors that relate to the sayings of the Tannaim in *Avot*, and each story has been appropriately juxtaposed to a relevant mishnah. Stories of *tzaddikim* stir the heart to strive higher in service of Hashem, and every Jew feels the longing to reach the level of his holy forefathers. These stories, together with Rabbeinu's words of Torah, make a potent combination. For the most part, *sippurei mofet*, highlighting miracles that occurred through the *tzaddikim* of this illustrious family, were not selected. Although hundreds of such stories are available, only a few are included in this volume, because we preferred to include stories that highlight the refined *middot* of the *tzaddikim* and the extent of their self-sacrifice in service of Hashem. Much effort was

¹ Rabbi Yisrael Baruch Messinger is the editor of the original Hebrew version of this book. The original foreword is embellished with decorative language in classical Hebrew style, which cannot be adequately rendered into English; those who are able to read the original Hebrew are encouraged to do so, so as to better appreciate the editor's labor of love.

expended on clarifying the *perush* of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura and purging the text of errors. To this end, we have followed the original edition, published close to Rabbi Ovadiah's death in the years 5408-09 (1648-49 CE) in the Venice *Mishnayot*. For the reader's convenience, vowel markings have been added to *pesukim* and parts of *pesukim*, as well as to words with more than one possible reading. Hundreds of source references are included, not only for *pesukim* and Talmudic or Midrashic sources, but also for ideas that Rabbi Ovadiah borrowed from his predecessors. This is the first time that such editing has been done on Rabbi Ovadiah's commentary, and we undertook the task in order to remove strumbling blocks and produce a *sefer* of high quality. Regarding Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura, the Ridbaz wrote in a responsum (ק"פ חלק רביעי, סימן אלף), "And Rabbeinu Ovadiah wrote the same in his commentary on the Mishnah. And this man was famous for his wisdom, and the foremost among the rabbis of Jerusalem. He was a *talmid* of Ashkenazim, and he saw all the words of the Rishonim, because he came at the end of their era." Rabbi Ovadiah's words are even cited as halachah in the *Shulchan Aruch* (סדר הגט סעיף ד' אבן העזר), and his commentary is included in nearly every edition of the Mishnah in print; many other *perushim* by both Rishonim and Acharonim have been excluded in favor of his commentary. Evidently he had some special Heavenly merit, and accordingly, we too have reprinted his comments in a form befitting their stature.

Many individuals have assisted in this project, too many to list here, and in order that none be forgotten unintentionally, I beg that they should all consider themselves personally thanked with these words. I must make one exception and mention the name of Rav Eliyahu Matosov *shlita*, who generously reviewed the entire *sefer* and made many enlightening comments. May all those who contributed, helping to bring the teachings of a *tzaddik* to their present form, be blessed from the Source of All Blessing.

Although I feel unworthy, with the distinguished author's permission I will add a few thoughts on the *masechet*, given to me by the One Who graciously gives insight. A verse in the Torah informs us that "Man is a tree of the field" (יט, דברים כ, א). Apparently man is compared to a tree of the field so that one should contemplate a tree and emulate its attributes. In the spring and summer, all trees are equal in that they all have green foliage. Some trees bear fruit as well, but the common denominator among them is the life force that is awakened in the long, warm days.

When autumn comes and the mild weather begins to turn cold, one sees very obvious differences. The foliage of one tree turns red while another tree's leaves turn yellow. Some lose their leaves quickly, some little by little, and some trees are evergreens that are never without foliage and never change color; each tree follows the natural pattern that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu gave it during the Six Days of Creation.

Human character traits are similar. Our Sages said that “A man is recognized by his pocket, his cup, and his anger” — in other words, as long as everything goes along as expected and nothing out of the way occurs, a person's individual traits remain concealed, and he exhibits the same well-mannered exterior as everybody else. But when someone tries to take his money or property from him or causes him pain or trouble, his true inner character is suddenly revealed.

If he has good character traits, they will now show him in a good light, and if he has bad traits, they will be unmasked. One person is slow to anger and another is quick; one is hard to appease and the other is easily reconciled, and so on with every human trait. No two individuals have the same attributes of mind (ברכות נח, א). And so, some can maintain their even temper like the evergreen tree even when chilly winds begin to blow among its branches, and others cannot keep up their well-mannered façade. Thus, in another analogy to a tree, our rabbis said, “Anyone whose wisdom is greater than his deeds is like a tree that has many branches and few roots; the wind comes and uproots it” (אבות ג, י). But until a wind comes, or until someone comes along and annoys a person, no one can tell if his wisdom is greater than his deeds or his deeds are greater than his wisdom.

As I leave the vineyard of *Kerem David*, I raise my hands to Hashem in thanksgiving for granting me the privilege of being involved in this sacred task. For many years I have been preparing the *divrei Torah* of Rabbeinu *shlita* for print, and they have been published in several places. This volume on Pirkei Avot was the first to come out, and I hope that I have not detracted in any way from Rabbeinu *shlita*'s words, and that myriads of Jews all around the world will study this *sefer*, delight in it, and find it spiritually uplifting. If any error should be found in this work, it is due to me and not to the author *shlita*, for although the text has been carefully edited and proofread by myself and others, and every effort has been made to make Rabbeinu's words clear and well understood, nevertheless it is impossible to be human and not err. We have tried to make sure all errors have been corrected, and I hope I have fulfilled my task.

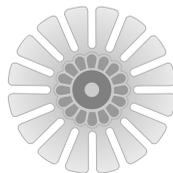
It should be noted that in this edition the *mishnayot* are divided as they are in the Vilna Shas, the most widely accepted format, in order to minimize confusion.

I pray to the Creator of heaven and earth that I should merit the privilege of continuing to labor in this vineyard and complete the volumes of *Kerem David* on the weekly Torah portions, on the *moadim*, and other topics on which we have been busily compiling material. It is a joyful and satisfying task to engage in the “battle of Torah,” to clarify the meaning of words spoken by a *tzaddik* whose *divrei Torah* are like an overflowing spring, a source whose waters will not deceive, bringing forth fresh ideas daily. May we merit to fulfill them, as well.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my father and teacher, the crown of my head, *moreinu* HaRav Moshe Shlomo *shlita*, who has stood at the right hand of Rabbeinu and his *mosdot* for years, together with my mother and teacher *tichyeh*, without thought of reward. Their part in Rabbeinu’s work of establishing centers of Torah study and purity in many locations throughout the world is great, and it is due to them that I have the privilege of editing Rabbeinu’s *divrei Torah*. May Hashem grant us the privilege of seeing Jerusalem rebuilt swiftly, may our eyes look upon His return to Zion, may we hear the sound of the *shofar* heralding the Mashiach, and may we witness the fulfillment of the words of the prophet that are placed at the head of this *masechet*: “And your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever.”

Amen.

Yisrael Baruch Messinger
Monsey, New York

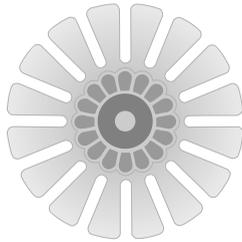




Kol Israel



כל
ישראל
יש להם חלק
לעולם
הבא
שנאמר
ועמך כולם
צדיקים
לעולם
יירשו ארץ
נצר
מטעי
מעשה ידי
להתפאר



כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֶלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא שְׁנֵאמַר
 (ישעיה ס) וְעַמְּךָ כָּלָם צְדִיקִים לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ
 נֶצֶר מִטְעֵי מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי לְהַתְפָּאֵר

It is customary to begin one's study of tractate *Avot* by reciting this mishnah, although it is actually borrowed from tractate *Sanhedrin*. Why did the rabbis institute this practice?

One reason, perhaps, is to remind us that transgressions committed against one's fellowman are, in a sense, more severe than those committed against G-d. If a person sins against the Kaddosh Baruch Hu and subsequently repents, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu forgives him. But if the sin is against one's fellowman, then even if the sinner repents, he cannot be forgiven until he has appeased the offended party. (*Yoma* 85b)

This idea is brought out in the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which is told in the Talmud. (*Guitin* 55b). Our Sages say that because of this incident Jerusalem was destroyed:

A resident of Jerusalem once sent a messenger to invite his good friend Kamtza to a feast. By mistake, the messenger invited a man named Bar Kamtza, who happened to be an enemy of the man giving the party.

Thinking that his enemy wanted to make peace with him, Bar Kamtza came and took a seat at the feast. The moment the host spotted him there, he went over and ordered him to leave. Bar Kamtza asked the host to let him stay, now that he was already here, rather than subject him to the shame of being thrown out. His insistence angered the host even more, and he began to insult Bar Kamtza in front of everyone.

The leading sages of the day were among the diners at the feast, and they thought it better to ignore the scene and not interfere. Hurt and enraged that these influential figures hadn't spoken up for him, Bar Kamtza went to the Roman Caesar and told him that the Jews were rebelling against him.

The ruler decided to check the veracity of this report by sending an animal with Bar Kamtza to be sacrificed in the Temple on the

Caesar's behalf. If the animal was duly sacrificed, he would assume the report was groundless. On the way to the Jerusalem, Bar Kamtza wounded the animal slightly.

It was a small injury that the Romans would not consider a defect for sacrificial purposes, but by Torah law it disqualified the animal from being offered in the Temple. Bar Kamtza brought the animal to the Kohanim and told them that Caesar had sent it to be sacrificed.

Upon examining it, they found the defect and consulted the Sages about the correct course of action in this dangerous situation. Rather than anger the Romans and risk loss of Jewish lives, the Sages wanted to allow a leniency and have the sacrifice brought despite the defect. But Rabi Zechariah ben Avkulos objected. He feared that this would set an improper precedent — people would think that an animal with this particular defect could be offered on the Altar.

The Sages proposed killing Bar Kamtza as a *malshin*, to prevent him from going back to Rome and reporting that Caesar's sacrifice had not been brought, but again, Rabi Zechariah objected. He feared that people would think that one who renders an animal invalid for a *korban* is liable to the death penalty. So the sacrifice was not offered and Bar Kamtza was not stopped.

The Roman ruler thought that the Jews had rebelled against him, and he sent his legions to destroy Jerusalem. Rabi Yochanan said, "The meekness of Rabi Zechariah ben Avkulos destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land."

Rabi Yochanan's statement is puzzling. At the beginning of the story, the Talmud states that the destruction of Jerusalem was due to the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, and in that context the story was told. The Talmudic rabbis also said that the Second Temple was destroyed because of the prevalence of *sinat chinam*, groundless hatred, and the story of Bar Kamtza seems an apt illustration of the destructive power of hatred. Why, then, does Rabi Yochanan focus on Rabi Zechariah's meekness as the cause of the destruction?

I would resolve this question by saying that both statements are correct, and they are interconnected. The Sages at the feast saw Bar Kamtza being put to shame and did not protest, yet when asked to decide whether to offer an animal

with a defect as a *korban*, they all had something to say about it, and an intense debate took place. The Divine Attribute of Justice spoke out against them: Master of the Universe, when these Sages saw a man being publicly humiliated because of groundless hatred, they said nothing. And now, when it comes to a question about a *korban*, all of a sudden they all have opinions to offer! They are not worthy of dwelling upon their land.

If they had also remained silent when the calf was brought before them for a decision, and had allowed it to be sacrificed, it might be possible to judge them favorably and say that they are simply passive men who lack the courage to protest. But since they protested about a defective animal and remained silent when a man was being humiliated, the Attribute of Justice had a valid accusation against them, and it wasn't long before the Temple lay in ruins and the Jews were led away in captivity. This was why Rabi Yochanan said it was Rabi Zechariah ben Avkulos's meekness that destroyed the Temple, for it left an opening for the Attribute of Justice to bring its accusations.

In the times of King Achav, despite the fact that idolatry and wickedness were very prevalent among the Jews, they enjoyed Divine protection and victory when they went out to war, and this, the Midrash tells us, was because they refrained from speaking ill of one another — in contrast to the generation of Shaul HaMelech, who were all Torah scholars, yet they fell in battle because of the *lashon hara* they spoke. (*Devarim Raba* 9:5) Again, it was mitzvot between man and his fellow that tipped the scales.

We see, then, that transgressions against one's fellowman are more severe than those committed against G-d, and this is underlined by the manner in which each type of sin is atoned for. If a sinner repents, then Yom Kippur atones for all his sins against G-d, but until his fellowman forgives him, Yom Kippur cannot atone for interpersonal injuries, no matter how fervently one confesses and regrets them.

So perhaps the rabbis instituted the practice of reciting this mishnah before beginning the chapters of tractate Avot in order to impress upon us the importance of *mitzvot bein adam l' chavero*, by reminding us that every member of the Jewish people, even the wicked who refused to keep the Torah's commandments, have a share ready for them in the World to Come.

Every Jewish soul is a spark of Divinity, and even a person who was wicked all his life but repented fully on his last day does not have his wickedness

mentioned to him. (*Kidushin* 40b) A Jew always has a chance to gain his share in the Next World by abandoning his evil ways and committing himself to observe the Torah from that moment on. As the Rambam puts it, “Repentance brings the distant close — last night this person was abhorrent to G-d, repulsive, kept at a distance, and an abomination; today he is beloved and desirable, close and favored.” (*Teshuva* 7:6)

On the other hand, if a person has injuries against his fellowman on his record, he is not necessarily assured of his portion in the Next World even if he changes his ways, because sometimes atonement for such sins is very difficult, or even impossible, to obtain, since it requires seeking out the injured party and appeasing him or her. Unless it becomes second nature to treat people with respect at all times, a person may not even be aware of the many injuries he has inflicted on others. Therefore it behooves everyone to study tractate Avoth and absorb its teachings well so as to develop good *middot* and acquire an understanding of how to relate properly to others, and thus be less likely to stumble into serious transgressions against one’s fellowman.

The message of this introductory mishnah, then, is that a share in the World to Come is ready and waiting for every Jew, and it is relatively easy to acquire it through *teshuvah* for one’s sins against G-d, but when it comes to the *mitzvot bein adam l’chavero*, much work is required to avoid losing one’s Olam HaBa, and study of this tractate is an essential component of that task.

In support of its assertion that every Israelite has a portion in the World to Come, the mishnah cites the words of the prophet Yeshayah, “And your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever,” which were spoken in order to advocate for Israel. The Kaddosh Baruch Hu had previously been angry at Yeshayah for speaking against them when he said, “I dwell among a people of impure lips.” (*Isaiah* 6:5) The Midrash says that when Yeshayah spoke those words, angels came and singed his lips, although he had spoken truly. (*Tanhuma Vayishlach* b) With the verse quoted here in the mishnah, Yeshayah was correcting his error, and the Kaddosh Baruch Hu was reconciled to him. We see, however, that retribution came swiftly when the prophet spoke ill of the Jewish nation, in contrast to the Kaddosh Baruch Hu’s willingness to tolerate offenses against His own honor and wait patiently for the sinner to repent.

We also learn from the simple meaning of the verse that every member of the Jewish people has a share in the World to Come, for each one of us is “the branch

of My planting, the work of My hand in which to take pride.” The Kaddosh Baruch Hu sent each *neshamah* down to This World, and He knows that this is a physical world of temptations and that “there is no wholly righteous person in the land who will do [only] good and not sin.” (*Kohelet* 7:20)

Knowing this, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu imbued man with a hidden power by which he can regret his sins and return to the path of Torah. (*Rambam Girushin* 2) Indeed, He does take pride in Israel, and has made them unique in the world, and thus, every Jew will be inwardly spurred to do *teshuvah* before he departs from this world. And once he has done *teshuvah*, he is considered a *tzaddik* and worthy to receive his portion in Olam HaBa.

Even if a person lives out his lifetime and never once has a moment of regret for his sins, he will still do *teshuvah* eventually, for his *neshamah* will return to this world in a second incarnation, and if he fails to do *teshuvah* in that *gilgul* too, he will be reincarnated yet again. This must happen before the Mashiach comes and gathers in all the exiles, and eventually that *neshamah* will surely be purified from all its iniquity, as the Rambam writes (*Teshuva* 7:5): “Israel is redeemed only through *teshuvah*, and the Torah has promised that Israel will eventually do *teshuvah* at the end of its exile, and then they will be redeemed immediately, as is said, ‘And it will be, when all these things will come upon you... you will return to Hashem your G-d. And Hashem your G-d will bring back your captives and show you mercy, and gather you from all the nations where Hashem your G-d has scattered you.’” (*Devarim* 30:1-3) The verse in *Yeshayah* also asserts that “they shall inherit the land forever,” which can be understood to mean that every member of the Jewish nation has his share in the land of Israel as well.

If so, then it must be that the entire nation will do *teshuvah*, because in order for this inheritance to take place, the people must merit the coming of Mashiach and the ingathering of the exiles to the Holy Land. Eretz Yisrael cannot support transgressors indefinitely; therefore if they are to “inherit the land forever,” this indicates that they will, indeed, all be *tzaddikim*.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא

It happened one time that a fabulous *darshan* arrived in the city Essaouira, home to the Tzaddik Rav Chaim Pinto the Younger. All flocked to hear the words of this amazing *darshan* excepting one individual: Rav Chaim.

Shabbat afternoon, following *Mincha*, the great *darshan* would be speaking in the main synagogue. The town was buzzing with anticipation. Once again, everyone would be there, except for Rav Chaim.

The people could not understand. Why wasn't the Rav joining them?

They approached him for an explanation and were simply told, "You will regret having attended." He gave no further clue as to what he meant.

None of the townsfolk heeded the Rav's warning.

As expected, the *derasha* amazed the crowd. Following the speech, the *darshan* announced that he was leaving. To great fanfare, many accompanied him as he departed, heading towards the docks.

Given that it was still Shabbat, it certainly was a curious thing that he was now walking down one of the piers.

To everyone's amazement, the man stepped onto a ship, proceeded to grab a cigarette from his pocket, and then lit up!

It soon became clear that this fellow was a complete Non-Jew! Somehow, he had studied with Jewish sages and was now passing himself off as a Jew!

"How could this be? We gathered in order to hear words of Torah from a mouth as unholy as this one's? And, the Tzaddik, Rav Pinto, realized this from the very beginning! How could he have known? Surely, it must have been through *Ruach Hakodesh*!"

Once they reached the Rav's study, his answer was that he's neither a prophet nor a son of a prophet, nor does he possess *ruach hakodesh*. None of the above qualities was needed in this case; all that's required is to know a certain verse in *tanach* and the *Zohar*.

It says in Proverbs 6:23, *For a commandment is a candle, and the Torah is light*. . . Asks the Holy Zohar, "Why is it that only the Jews sway as they learn? It is because the Jew's soul is compared to that of Hashem's, which is compared to a burning candle, as it says in the verse, *Man's soul is the Lord's*

lamp . . . (Proverbs 20:27). This soul is like a burning candle that will never extinguish. Just as this candle will never cease to flicker, so too with the Jewish soul. Therefore, Jews sway (like a flickering candle) as they learn, while non-Jews do not.

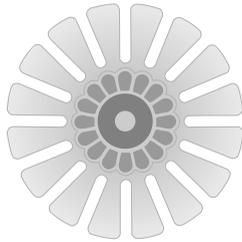
Rav Pinto explained that he had witnessed this darshan prepare his talk. The whole time, the darshan was bent over a sefer, motionless. That's what gave him away. "Those legs had never stood on Sinai. This fellow did not have within him a higher soul."

"So why didn't you warn us?" asked one of the community leaders.

"I wanted to teach you a lesson," replied Rav Chaim.

"If someone you don't know appears before you, offering to teach you Torah, don't jump at the opportunity. Rather, look carefully into his background. See who he is. For, we are not permitted to trust the Torah teachings of anyone other than those who fear Hashem."





Chapter One

משה

קבל תורה מסיני

ומסרה

ליהושע

ויהושע

לזקנים

וזקנים לנביאים

ונביאים

מסרה לאנשי

כנסת הגדולה

הם אמרו שלושה

דברים

הוו

מתונים

בדין

והעמידו

תלמידים

הרבה

ועשו סיג

לתורה

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמְסָרָהּ לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ
 וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים וְזִקְנִים לְנַבִּיאִים וְנַבִּיאִים מִסְרוּהָ
 לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים
 הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין וְהֶעֱמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה וַעֲשׂוּ
 סִגָּ לַתּוֹרָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרַק אַ מִשְׁנֵה א

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי

“*Moshe received Torah from Sinai,*” begins our Mishnah. This is curious. Why does it say that he received it from Sinai? Hadn’t he gotten it from the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*?

It might be that this wording alludes to the famous midrash that tells of the highest mountains in Eretz Yisrael coming from afar to claim for themselves the rights to have the Torah given upon them. (According to the midrash, this illustrates the verse in Proverbs, “*A man’s haughtiness will humble him.*”) Came along Mount Sinai. It said, “I am very lowly.” Because of Sinai’s having said this, Hashem decided that this would be the mountain upon which He would rest His glory. This was the mountain upon which He would give the Torah. This illustrates the second part of that verse, “. . . *but one of humble spirit will grasp honor.*”

This taught Moshe Rabbeinu a lesson. “Look at this mountain. It’s nothing but soil and rock. Whatever it does, it will receive neither reward nor punishment. Yet, despite this, it humbled itself before the Creator. Personally, I am commanded to be modest. If I succeed, I am rewarded. If not, I’m punished. Compared to that mountain, how much more so must I humble myself before Hashem.”

That’s why the mishnah is worded, “*Moshe received the Torah from Sinai.*” It teaches us that just as Sinai merited to have the Torah given upon it because of *its* great humility, so did Moshe merit being chosen as the receiver of Torah due to *his* great humility.

The wording “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai” further hints to this idea by the fact that it says that he received it from “Sinai,” rather than “Mt. Sinai.” Mountains, of course signify great height. Great height signifies haughtiness. Omitting the “Mt.” from that name further suggests the absence of haughtiness.

This is therefore a fitting introduction to Avoth. For it includes the elements thematically central to this tractate: Proper Conduct and Acquisition of Torah. We learn that we cannot expect to properly acquire Torah except through humility. This we see from the juxtaposition of Moshe and Sinai.

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua.

Why does the mishnah only say that Moshe “received” the Torah, whereas Joshua, and all the teachers of the following generations had the Torah “passed on” to them?

We might explain the difference in language this way: the recipient of a gift receives it completely intact, but afterwards, if that recipient bequeaths it to an heir, it may not be fully intact. Similarly, when a *rav* teaches Torah to a student, the student will retain only as much as his intellect allows him to comprehend. Since the student’s wisdom has a lesser scope than his *rav*’s wisdom, the student cannot be said to have received all the Torah that the *rav* possesses.

The mishnah, then, is teaching us that although Joshua was faithful to his task and taught all the Torah he had learned to the leaders of the next generation, he did not have the same capacity as Moshe Rabbeinu and could not receive it in the same perfect form as Moshe himself received it, directly from the Kadosh Baruch Hu. Thus the Torah that he passed on to the Elders was not quite the whole Torah that was originally in the Kadosh Baruch Hu’s possession.

The difference between Moshe Rabbeinu and Joshua bin Nun was that only Moshe ascended to a higher plane to learn Torah and bring it down to this earth. He did not eat or drink for forty days and nights; he was removed from material existence. Nearly all the gates of understanding were opened for him, such that he became almost Divine, as it were, as our Sages learned from the *pasuk* , “And You made him only a little less than G-d” (*Tehillim* 8:6; see *Rosh HaShanah* 21b). The Midrash says that “from the middle up” he was Divine, and that is a level that no man ever reached, a level higher than that of the ministering angels, as the Kadosh Baruch Hu Himself testified, “Mouth to mouth I shall speak to him, through vision and not through riddles, and he will behold the image of Hashem,” and nowhere do we find such statements about the angels.

Thus, Moshe was able to receive the Torah in its entirety, exactly as it was, directly from the Kadosh Baruch Hu, and therefore it is called by his name (see *Shabbat* 89a), or as the *pasuk* says, “Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant” (*Malachi* 3:23), for even his body was a spiritual entity and was able to take in the spiritual essence of the Torah.

None of the sages who came after him, however, received the Torah in this manner. They did not ascend to supernal heights, removing themselves completely from the material world; they could only learn the Torah insofar as the capacity of their human intellect enabled them.

The full spiritual essence of Torah cannot possibly enter a mind that is bound to a physical brain. Thus the Tanna did not write that Joshua “received” the Torah from Moshe, because he did not truly receive it; rather, Moshe passed it on to him to the extent that he was capable of comprehending it, and the process was repeated with all those who were entrusted with the tradition in every subsequent generation.

Likewise, the Tanna does not say that Moshe “gave” the Torah to Joshua, and Joshua gave it to the Elders. Torah is not a gift that can simply be given, nor can it be inherited. Only those who toil over it can understand it. Moshe Rabbeinu toiled for it for forty days on Mount Sinai, neither eating nor drinking. He learned Torah and forgot it, until it was given to him as a gift (*Nedarim* 31a). Similarly, in the Gemara (*Eruvin* 54a) the Sages expounded on the Torah’s words, “And from the desert, a gift” (*Bemidbar* 21:18): “One who makes himself like a desert, to him the Torah is given as a gift,” but the Torah cannot be received as a gift without toil.

In the Gemara (*Niddah* 30b) the Sages said that a fetus in its mother’s womb is taught the entire Torah, but at birth, an angel comes and taps it on its mouth, causing it to forget all its Torah. What is the point of teaching it Torah if it is all going to be forgotten? The point is that we should know that everyone has the ability to learn the entire Torah, but it is not given as a free gift; if one toils for it, it is granted. If not, it will not be his.

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua.

The question posed in the previous *derashah* can be answered in another way, as well, which I derived from the laws of marriage.

When a man wished to consecrate a woman as his wife, he must deliver an item of a certain value, known as the *kiddushin*, to her (typically a gold ring). He may give it to her directly, or he may appoint a messenger to bring it to

her. Likewise, the woman may appoint a messenger to receive it from him on her behalf. But there is a difference between these two messengers: when the prospective husband sends the *kiddushin* to his bride through a messenger, she is not consecrated to him until the messenger actually delivers the *kiddushin* to her, and the bridegroom can cancel the marriage any time up until the *kiddushin* comes into her hand.

If, on the other hand, the bride appoints someone to accept the *kiddushin* on her behalf, the *halachah* says that “the messenger’s hand is equivalent to the woman’s hand,” and she is consecrated to her husband as soon as the messenger receives the *kiddushin*. At this point the marriage cannot simply be called off, and if the husband does not wish to go ahead with it he must give his bride a bill of divorce (the details of these laws are found in *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, siman* 35-36 and 141).

Now, when the Jewish nation stood at Mount Sinai, the Kadosh Baruch Hu consecrated them to Him as a man consecrates a woman as his bride (see *Taanit* 26b, *Devarim Rabbah* 3:12, *Kolbo siman* 62). We find in the Torah that Israel said to Moshe Rabbeinu, you speak to us and we will hear; let G-d not speak to us (*Shemot* 20:15). In other words, they appointed Moshe as their messenger to receive the Torah on their behalf. Thus, the moment he received it from the Kadosh Baruch Hu, it was theirs.

It now becomes difficult to understand how Moshe permitted himself to break the Tablets before presenting them to the people. The Tablets belonged to them, not to him. Furthermore, the Kadosh Baruch Hu had appointed him as His messenger as well, and his task was to bring the Tablets to the people of Israel. Instead, he broke them!

We can answer, however, that as Israel’s appointed messenger, as soon as Moshe received the Torah on their behalf, it was as if he had brought it to them, since “the messenger’s hand is equivalent to the woman’s hand.” Thus he had already fulfilled his mission, and if he now saw fit to break the Tablets, he could do so. The Kadosh Baruch Hu approved of his decision, as we find in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 87a). And since the Tablets had been in Israel’s possession already, the Kadosh Baruch Hu could not simply cancel His arrangement with the Jewish people. They would remain consecrated to Him until such time as He formally divorced them. But as the prophet Yeshayah says, “This is not a bill of divorce with you” (50:1); in other words, the Jewish nation remains consecrated to G-d (see *Sanhedrin* 105a; *Eichah Rabbah* 1:3).

Accordingly, the Tanna wrote, “Moshe received Torah from Sinai,” since he was the messenger appointed to receive it for the whole Jewish people. Only the initial receipt of the Torah was effected in this way, however; afterwards Moshe and the leaders of all subsequent generations had to teach Torah to every Jewish individual, so that the people should not think that the obligation of Torah study rests only upon the sages of the generation, and that the rest of the people can rely on them without studying or praying. Thus, immediately after giving the Torah, the Kadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, “And these are the statutes which you shall place before them” (*Shemot* 21:21). He was to teach them to the people over and over again, explaining until everyone understood them (*Eruvin* 54b).

Nevertheless, the Tanna does not say that Moshe handed the Torah over to every Jew, but that he passed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, who passed it on in turn to the greatest scholars who came after them, and so on it every generation up to the present time (see Rambam’s preface to his commentary on the Mishnah), so that every Jew should accept the authority of the Torah sages and not rely on his own wisdom, for if he does he will inevitably make mistakes in *halachah*.

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua.

In the episode of the war with Midian, the Torah says, “And Elazar the Kohen said to the soldiers... everything that comes in contact with fire, pass it through fire and it will be pure” (*Bemidbar* 31:21-23). The Gemara explains that Elazar, not Moshe Rabbeinu, taught these laws to Israel, for Moshe had forgotten the *halachos* of purifying vessels because he had come to anger, and anger causes one’s wisdom to depart from him (*Pesachim* 66b). But why did Elazar substitute for Moshe in this case, rather than Joshua, Moshe’s closest disciple and attendant?

The answer might be that if Joshua had been the one to teach them, the people would have thought that the time for Moshe Rabbeinu’s passing had come, and that since he had forgotten the laws of *hag’alah*, he must have forgotten the whole Torah, especially after the Kadosh Baruch Hu had already informed Moshe that his passing was imminent (*Bemidbar* 31:2), and after Joshua had already been declared their next leader. Furthermore, Eldad and Meidad had been prophesying for a long time that Moshe would die in the wilderness and Joshua would bring them into the Land of Israel (*Sanhedrin* 17a). This would cause them to lose respect for Moshe Rabbeinu.

Joshua, therefore, summoned up all his humility and self-control and did not speak, until finally Elazar the Kohen was forced to teach the people instead. Since Elazar was not Moshe's most prominent disciple, they thought nothing of it. And because Joshua acted with humility and put his own honor aside for his master's honor, he merited taking the crown of leadership after Moshe's passing, for he was similar to him in the quality of humility.

Our Sages said that “service of Torah is greater than studying it” (*Berachot* 7b), regarding the importance of close attendance upon a Torah scholar. Going even further, they said that “one who studies and reviews, but has not attended upon Torah scholars, is an utterly ignorant person.” In other words, the student gets more from his *rav* by waiting upon him and observing his behavior closely, than by just listening to his teachings. Joshua bin Nun had both of these advantages; he waited upon Moshe Rabbeinu as well as being his student, as the *pasuk* says, “And his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a youth, would not depart from the tent,” from which our Sages inferred that he never left Moshe for a moment (*Temurah* 16a).

Elazar the Kohen, too, effaced himself before Moshe Rabbeinu. He did not teach the laws to the people in his own name, as if he himself had heard them from the Kadosh Baruch Hu. Rather, he said, “This is the law of the Torah which Hashem commanded Moshe” (*Bemidbar* 31:21), emphasizing that he was merely relaying what Moshe Rabbeinu had heard from Hashem — and it was this humility that made him worthy to teach Torah to the Jewish nation.

Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.

Why are these three precepts brought together in one statement? What is the connection between them?

We might find a connection by examining the story in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 31a) that tells about several gentiles who wished to convert and join the Jewish people. Each of them asked a Tanna to teach him Torah, but only on some apparently whimsical condition. They came before the Tanna Shamai, and he turned them away. When they came before Hillel, however, he accepted them as converts, and patiently explained to them all they wanted to know, despite their peculiar demands. Some time later, the converts met one another and said, “Shamai's stern approach nearly uprooted us from the world; Hillel's unassuming ways brought us to shelter under the wings of the *Shechinah*.” This

illustrates how the world is upheld by the willingness to take one's time and not judge hastily.

Training many students to become teachers in their own right is itself a way of safeguarding the Torah, for without rabbis to instruct the people in the details of the Law, the Torah would become a free-for-all, like an unguarded city. Thus we find many places in the Talmud where the Sages found a breach in the law and repaired it by adding restrictions as a safeguard. This is the duty of the rabbis and *dayanim* of every generation, whenever they see lapses in Torah observance, to make *takanot*, rulings designed to protect the integrity of the Law. Our leaders have always made such rulings for the Jews of their time: Moshe Rabbeinu, Joshua bin Nun, the Prophets, the Talmudic Sages, and the Geonim who came after them. Some of the most famous *takanot* were made by Ezra the Scribe and Rabbeinu Gershom; many others have been made at various times by the leaders of communities throughout the Diaspora, and some of these *takanot* were codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Another connection can be found between the three precepts stated by the Men of the Great Assembly. Teaching students with patience, taking the time to answer their questions thoroughly, will ensure many successful students, for as we are warned in the next chapter (mishnah 5), a short-tempered person cannot teach. Yet a teacher must command respect, otherwise his students might become overly familiar with him, and therefore he should set boundaries, making it clear when they've gone too far in interjecting their own opinions. As it says in *Ketubot* (103b), "Cast bile on the students." So on the one hand a *rav* must teach his students with patience and a pleasant manner, but on the other hand he must set boundaries to preserve their respect for him, in order not to lose his effectiveness as a teacher.

And if he trains many students, his Torah learning will continue even after his death, for his students will transmit what they heard from him to their students. As the Talmud says (*Berachot* 64a), *talmidei chachamim* have no rest, neither in this world nor in the next world. And just as this teacher had no rest in this world, for all his time was taken up with patiently explaining the Torah to his students until they understood it well, so he will have no rest in the next world, because, as Rabi Yochanan said, even in the grave, his lips will utter words of Torah whenever his teachings are repeated by his students (see *Yevamot* 36b), and thus he will live both in this world and the next.

This also sheds light on why the Hebrew word *aseifah* — "gathering" — is so often used to describe the death of the righteous, as it says of Moshe Rabbeinu

and many other *tzaddikim*, “And he was gathered unto his people.” Our Sages explain that *aseifah* is linguistically related to *hosafah*, “adding,” and the expression is meant to indicate that we shouldn’t think that when *tzaddikim* leave this world, nothing more is added to their Torah. The truth is that since they toiled over the Torah all their lives, and added restrictions in order to safeguard mitzvah observance, and also trained many students, their Torah continues to increase even after their passing, and their souls are elevated to higher planes in the next world when their students repeat their teachings and derive new interpretations from them.

Be deliberate in judgment.

This could be understood as an allusion to the ruling found in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat* 14:4), that if a *dayan* sees that one of the litigants suspects him of making a biased decision against him, he must explain the halachic basis of his ruling to the litigant, even if the litigant hasn’t requested it. The *Rema* adds that this obligation is even more incumbent on the *dayan* if the litigant explicitly asks for a written explanation.

In other words, the *dayan* should not be concerned with saving face. He should not refuse to explain his reasoning in order to preserve his dignity, but should take the time to demonstrate to the litigant that his decision is founded in *halachah*. This, even though it is hard to explain the intricacies of the law to someone who is not an accomplished Torah scholar, and despite the fact that a layman’s point of view tends to be diametrically opposed to the Torah’s understanding. Nevertheless, the *dayan* should try his best to explain his decision patiently in order to foster amicable relations between people.

If he conducts himself in this way, both G-d and his fellow man will be pleased with him, and many upright young scholars will come to learn from him, and they will not come out improperly trained. Thus the Torah will be safeguarded, and peace will prevail because the rulings of the *beit din* will be accepted. This can only be achieved if the *dayan* keeps an even temper. Rather than turning away litigants who are dissatisfied with his decision, he should draw them near with his right hand while keeping them at a distance with his left — a considerate manner should take precedence over a firm demeanor.

This may also help to explain why Rabbeinu HaKadosh, in compiling the Mishnah, chose to cite this particular statement by the Men of the Great

Assembly, out of thousands of sayings. For surely they made a great many wise statements, for they were 120 sages (see *Megillah* 17b, and Rambam's preface to *Hilchos Deot*). But the idea that Rabbeinu wanted the Jewish nation to retain was that the world's very existence depends on truth in judgment.

This idea is explained in the *Tur* in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah (*Choshen Mishpat* 1). He cites two *mishnayot*, both from the first chapter of *Avot*, which seem to contradict each other, and seeks to resolve the contradiction: in mishnah 2, Shimon HaTzaddik states that the world stands upon Torah, service of G-d, and deeds of kindness, whereas in the last mishnah of this chapter, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel states that the world exists upon truth, judgment, and peace.

Rabbeinu Yaakov, author of the *Tur*, expounds at length on the different intent of these two statements. The first statement, he explains, comes to tell us that the world was *created* for the sake of Torah, service of G-d, and acts of kindness, whereas the second statement means that once the world was created, its continued existence depends upon truth, judgment, and peace, and especially upon judges who render their judgments truly. Accordingly, our Sages say (*Shabbat* 10a) that every judge who judges with pure truth is considered by the Torah as a partner with the Kadosh Baruch Hu in His act of creation, for by virtue of his true judgments the Kadosh Baruch Hu's creation can endure.

And therefore, out of thousands of sayings by the Men of the Great Assembly, Rabbeinu, the redactor of the Mishnah, chose this particular one in praise of *dayanim* who take care in their judgments, for this ensures truth in judgment and perpetuates the world's existence. Later, he brings the statement by Shimon HaTzaddik that the world was created for Torah, service of G-d, and acts of kindness; and at the end of the chapter, he brings the statement by Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who explicitly says that without true judgment the world could not go on existing.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's words are brought later because he was among the latter Tanna'im, and he is quoted together with the other sages of his generation. But since Rabbeinu, the redactor of the Mishnah, wished to allude to this essential idea at the very beginning of *Masechet Avot*, he brought this statement from the Men of the Great Assembly, from which the crucial importance of truth in judgment may be inferred, as we have explained.

This same idea underlies our Sages' *derash* in the Talmud (*Sotah* 22a) on the *pasuk*, "And many are the dead that she has killed" (*Mishlei* 7:26). This, said the

Sages, refers to a *talmid chacham* who is qualified to give instruction and does not instruct, for he has the ability to contribute to the world's continued existence by giving true judgments, and since he does not do so, Scripture says of him, "And many are the dead that she has killed...." The world needs *dayanim*, and if there are no upright *dayanim*, corrupt *dayanim* will take over, and then there will be no protective fence for the Torah, for corrupt *dayanim* who take bribes break down the walls of Torah.

It is forbidden to stand before a *dayan* who is in his position for money, and it is a mitzvah to disregard him (*Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 1:1). In the Gemara our Sages said, "Whoever establishes a *dayan* that is not upright, it is as if he planted an *asherah* (a tree of idolatry) among the Jewish people." Thus, for a Torah scholar who is qualified to give rulings, it is obligatory to give them, and to render judgment according to the Torah.



שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשְׁיָרֵי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הוּא
 הָיָה אוֹמֵר עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד עַל
 הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵב

Shimon the Righteous was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: On three things the world is sustained: on the Torah, on the (Temple) service, and on deeds of loving kindness.

The Mishnah says that the world stands upon three things: Torah, *Avodah* (Service of G-d), and *Gemilut Chasadim* (Deeds of kindness). Why these three? Perhaps it is because our mitzvot hold up the world -- and all mitzvot fall into either of two categories: Between Man and Man or between Man and Hashem. And, without Torah study, how could we possibly know how the commandments should be properly fulfilled?

The first term in the mishnah, *Avodah* represents mitzvot between Man and Hashem. The second, *Gemilut Chasadim* represents those between Man and Man.

Even when it comes to mitzvot that seem absolutely intuitive, Torah knowledge is essential. How else would we know the details as to how to properly carry them out? Let's look at the mitzvah of Tzedakah, for instance. How much should one give? How should we optimize our contributions? What types of causes demand the highest priority? Which are of lower priority, but still deserving? If one has \$10 to give to tzedakah, is it better to give ten people one dollar each -- or is it better to give one poor person the entire \$10? Do certain types of poor people have precedence over others?

We therefore see how it is that the world rests upon three things. It rests upon the two categories of mitzvot plus the Torah study that informs how to properly do them.

Shimon HaTzaddik (the Righteous)

Why was he called Shimon HaTzaddik? Because all his life he thought of himself as lower in status than the Men of the Great Assembly, and not as one of them, and he always fled from honor, and therefore honor pursued him, and people began to call him a *tzaddik*, for whoever flees from honor, honor pursues him (see *Eiruvim* 13b).

On three things the world is sustained: on the Torah, on the service, and on deeds of loving kindness.

A number of commentators have asked why the mishnah lists these three particular things, when we find many places in the Torah that name other things without which the world could not exist. In *Nedarim*, for example (32a), our Sages say that heaven and earth would not endure without the covenant of *milah*, and in *Megillah* (31b) they say that heaven and earth would not endure without fixed schedules of prayer and learning. And many other statements like these may be found.

To answer this question, let us look at a passage in the *Sefer HaChareidim* (9:10), where the author cites a mitzvah from the Torah, “*Uvo tidbak* — You shall cling to Him” (*Devarim* 10:20). This is a commandment to remember Hashem at all times: at home and on the road, upon lying down to sleep and getting up in the morning. *Deveikut*, keeping one’s thoughts fixed on Hashem, is the basis of all of man’s duty in this world.

Now, if a person should ask, “How can I keep my mind always on the Shechinah? After all, I need to take care of worldly matters such as business, eating, drinking, and so on,” our Sages answered this question when they said that the world stands on three things. Through Torah, service of G-d, and deeds of kindness, one can achieve *deveikut*. When one engages in Torah study, he clings to the Shechinah, as the *pasuk* says: “Taste and see that Hashem is good” (*Tehillim* 34:9). Would anyone dream that a human being, born of woman, could possibly “taste” Hashem? But one can savor the taste of Torah study, and this brings a person as close as humanly possible to Hashem Himself.

All the more so can a person come close to the Shechinah through prayer. The Torah says of prayer (*Devarim* 13:5), “You shall walk after Hashem your G-d, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and heed His voice, and serve Him, and to Him you shall cling.” “Clinging” is listed immediately after “service,” to teach you that through service one can cling to the Kadosh Baruch Hu, and in our times, without the offerings in the Holy Temple, service is defined as prayer (see *Taanit* 2a, where *tefillah* is called “the service of the heart”).

And even when a person can’t be engaged in Torah or prayer because he is busy with worldly necessities, such as making a living, he can still cling to the attributes of the Kadosh Baruch Hu through acts of charity and kindness. As our Rabbis taught (*Shabbat* 133b), “Just as He is gracious and merciful, so should

you be gracious and merciful.” They further explained the words “You shall walk after Hashem your G-d” — can a human being walk after the Shechinah? Does the Torah not say, “For Hashem your G-d is a consuming fire” (*Devarim* 4:24)? Rather, we are to follow after the attributes of the Kadosh Baruch Hu. Just as He clothes the naked, so should you clothe the naked; He visited the sick, so should you visit the sick; He consoled mourners, so should you console mourners; He buried the dead, so should you bury the dead.

This is what our mishnah is saying. The world stands upon these three things, for everyone can fulfill at least one of them at any given time throughout the day, and these activities bring a person to *deveikut*, which is a positive commandment that is obligatory at all times.

On three things the world is sustained: on the Torah, on the service, and on deeds of loving kindness.

We find sources in the Torah to support the idea that the world was created on a foundation of Torah and deeds of kindness: in *Tehillim* it says, “A world is built of kindness” (89:3), and the Midrash says that the Kadosh Baruch Hu looked into the Torah and created the world (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1). But we find no allusion in Scripture to the idea that service of G-d is a foundation of creation.

I would propose this explanation: this applied before the Sin of the Golden Calf, but after the sin, service of G-d was given to Israel as another foundation of the world, along with Torah and acts of kindness. When Israel saw that Moshe didn’t descend from Mount Sinai when expected, they became desperate and bowed down to the calf, because they weren’t aware that serving substitute gods contravenes service of G-d, and they had no rituals for serving G-d to save them from the sin of idolatry.

Many commentators on the Torah have cited the passage from Rambam’s *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:46), where he explains that the Kadosh Baruch Hu commanded Israel to bring sacrificial offerings in order to refute the idolaters who worshipped sheep and cattle, and would not slaughter them. They believed that these animals and their products, such as wool and milk, would increase their powers in the heavenly realms.

To refute this notion and strengthen Israel’s resistance to it, the Kadosh Baruch Hu commanded them to slaughter these animals in His service.

After Israel made the error of worshipping the Calf, the Kadosh Baruch Hu

said to them, since you mistakenly thought that this was no contradiction to serving Me, I now command you to build the Mishkan and bring sacrificial offerings to Me there. This will atone for the sin of the Calf, measure for measure. As long as the *avodah* of the Mishkan hadn't yet been given to them, the Jewish people were forbidden to step onto Mount Sinai, or even to touch it. It was a deadly danger for them to approach the mountain upon which Hashem had descended. After the sin of the Calf, however, when they were given formal service of G-d in the Mishkan, Hashem taught them how to worship Him in a place where the Shechinah dwells, and furthermore, through their service of Him, He would come and dwell among them — not merely among the people, but within each individual, as our Sages learned from the word **בתוכם** (Rabbeinu Ephraim, *Shemot* 25:8).

This exemplifies the prophetic words of Shimshon, “Out of the strong came something sweet” (*Shoftim* 14:14). Our Sages used this analogy to demonstrate that in many instances something good comes out of a bad thing (see *Zohar*, part I, 240:1). Something good even came out of the Sin of the Golden Calf, although it was idolatry, for the Kadosh Baruch Hu gave Israel *avodat Hashem* instead of *avodah zarah*.

Since the service in the Mishkan was meant to atone for the worship of the Calf (*Tanchuma, Terumah* 8), the Kadosh Baruch Hu commanded Israel to donate gold and silver for the Mishkan, as they had done for the Calf. And since their dedication to the Calf had reached a point of life and death — they killed Hur and came close to killing Aharon as well (*Sanhedrin* 7a) — they also had to sacrifice life in Hashem's service in the Mishkan. Bringing an animal as an offering is considered a substitute for giving up one's own life (see Ramban on *Vayikra* 1:9). When bringing an offering, one should be thinking that it really ought to be his own blood being spilt, his own body being burned, if not for Hashem's merciful acceptance of this surrogate offering.

Even in these times, when there is no Mishkan or Temple, we have service of G-d in the form of prayer. According to the Rambam, prayer is a *mitzvat aseh*, a positive commandment (see his *Tefillah uNesiut Kapayim* 1:1); he learned this mitzvah from the *pasuk*, “You shall serve Hashem, your G-d” (*Shemot* 23:25), and from the Talmud (*Taanit* 2a) where our Sages inquire into the Torah's words, “And to serve him with all your heart” (*Devarim* 10:12): “What kind of service takes place in the heart? Prayer.”

There is a very important message here for each one of us, not to take the matter of prayer lightly, for as we have no Temple in which to perform service of G-d — which was given to us to displace *avodah zarah* — prayer is our only way of performing this service, and if we don't approach it seriously, the sin of the Golden Calf immediately rises up to accuse us.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד על התורה ועל
העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים:

On three things the world is sustained: on the Torah, on the service, and on deeds of loving kindness.

What was the typical day like for Rabbi Chaim Pinto, the younger? His assistant, Joshua, described it as follows:

“I would go to his home in the morning and find him in the Beit HaKenneset, already engaged at prayer. After prayers, he would go back inside, ask his wife what she needs, give her the money, and then set out, house to house, to the homes of the sick, the poor, and to the needy. He would personally go to the marketplace to bring back that which he would later distribute.

“Invariably, the grateful recipients would offer him something to eat. He would take only a small bite and then move on to the next home, never sitting down to an actual meal. As for me, however, he said that I should have something more substantial each time something was offered.

““But, Rabbi, with so many people offering, how could I possibly consume so much?” I asked. ‘You’re young; you can do it. To do otherwise might embarrass them.’

“Fridays, he would visit both the wealthy and the poor: the former, to collect Shabbat needs; the latter, to distribute it. When visiting the wealthy, he would tell them just how much they had already prepared and how much they would use in the course of that week.

“Based upon those he calculations, he would then tell them how much to give for the poor. Rav Chaim was involved with *gemilut chasadim* each and every day, in heat and in cold, from the morning to the evening, from one end of the city to the other, from the time of his youth until the time he was elderly.”

He embodied what it says in our mishnah, *The world stands upon three things: Torah, Avodah, and Gemilut Chasadim.*



אֲנִיגְנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכּוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצְּדִיק. הוּא
הִיָּה אוֹמֵר אֶל תְּהִי כְעֹבְדִים הַמְּשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת
הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס אֲלֵא הוּוּ כְעֹבְדִים
הַמְּשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס
וְיִהי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם:
משנה מסכת אבות פרק א משנה ג

Antigonus of Socho received from Shimon Ha-Tzadik. He used to say: Do not be like servants who serve their master in order to receive reward, but rather be like servants who minister unto their master for the sake of receiving a reward; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.

. . . אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על
מנת לקבל פרס אלא הוּוּ כעבדים המשמשין
את הרב שלא על מנת לקבל פרס . . .
. . . *Do not be like servants who serve their
master in order to receive reward, but rather be
like servants who minister unto their master for
the sake of receiving a reward, . . .*

The mishnah tells us that our service of Hashem should be *not* for the sake of reward rather than *for* the sake of reward. Compare this with what the Talmud says (in Pesachim 50b):

One should certainly involve himself with Torah and Mitzvoth, even if his intent is not for the sake of Heaven. For, the not for the sake of Heaven will lead to doing so for the sake of Heaven.

It would seem that the two sources are inconsistent. Presumably, the talmud's approval of service *not* for sake of Heaven includes doing so *for* the sake of reward. Yet, the mishnah tells us that such service is undesirable*.

* [ED NOTE: Of course, one could easily resolve this inconsistency by saying that both sources are actually saying the same thing. The mishnah is describing the ideal, while the talmud is merely offering encouragement to those who are presently not at the level where they can live up to that ideal. It therefore says that being on this lower level should not discourage you from doing mitzvot. Rather, do them no matter what the motivation -- and eventually you will come to do them for the right reasons. Rav Pinto, however, would like to show a different distinction.]

I believe that the talmud's "Not for the sake of Heaven" does not equate to "For the sake of reward." I believe that "Not for the sake of Heaven" more closely equates to "For the sake of personal honor, etc" In other words, he's thinking about how other people will react. For him, Hashem is not really in the picture, even as a provider of reward.

Ironically, this is why the talmud sanctions his behavior. This individual will eventually realize that seeking recognition and honor through mitzvah performance is ultimately futile. Once having seen the foolishness of this pursuit, he will recognize that the only true motivation is for the sake of His Name.

The one who acts solely for the sake of reward, however, thinks that his every move is pleasing to Hashem. He therefore wants is to "cash in." After all, he's doing all these great favors for the Creator of the World. The least one could expect is to get something in return. He has Hashem on his mind at every step. For that reason, he will never see the error of ways.

In a sense, this fellow is correct: Hashem *does* reward those who do mitzvot. The flaw in his thinking is only that he doesn't realize that reward should not be his primary motivator. As I said, though, because he sees himself as serving Hashem -- albeit, as a paid employee -- he's not about to view himself as having done anything wrong.

It is my contention that, in fact, when someone does a mitzvah purely to gain reward, Hashem will *not* reward him at all. The hebrew edition of our commentary to Avoth cites several examples which, I believe, demonstrate this. Here, I will focus on the story of Elisha ben Abuya, the great sage who ultimately left the path of Torah and became a heretic.

Abuya was a wealthy man. Of course, when it was time for him to have *brit milah* performed upon his son, he invited some of the greatest Rabbis of Yerushalayim. As they gathered together to study, fire surrounded them.

Abuya was taken aback. "Have you come to set fire to my house?" he asked. "Of course not," they replied. "We are immersed in Torah. Our study is so pleasing to Hashem that He has sent a fire, as if we were once again standing on Sinai."

"If that's the power of Torah," said Abuya, "then I hereby take the son upon whom I am about to perform *brit milah* and dedicate him to study."

Clearly, Abuyah's eye was toward the personal glory that the Torah study would bring his son, not for the sake of the glory it would bring to Hashem.

Elisha went on to become a great scholar, the teacher of Rabbi Meir. However, because his study was corrupted by thoughts of personal honor, already from the day of his *brit milah*, the reward never came and Elisha left the path.

Another story is told about Elisha. He once saw a man ask his son to go to a certain place and bring him some baby birds from their mother's nest. By doing so, the son would be performing two great mitzvot: That of honoring one's father and that of sending away the mother bird.

What Elisha then witnessed was the son climbing a ladder and then sending away the mother bird, so that he could then take the fledglings. Everything was in accordance with his father's wishes and in accordance with what is written in the Torah. More so, the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird is one of the few where the Torah specifically promises reward.

What happened next was that, as he was coming down the ladder, the young man slipped -- and died in the fall.

"Where is the reward promised in the Torah for this very mitzvah?!" exclaimed Elisha. "That's his 'length of days?!' That he should die immediately?"

With that, say the Rabbis, Elisha immediately became a heretic.

Of course, this story is quite puzzling. Elisha was a great *chacham*. Why didn't he consider that the young man was actually a *rasha* whose time had come for Divine punishment? In other words, the fact that he was now on a ladder, in a precarious state, gave Hashem the opportunity to give him the death he deserved?

Perhaps Elisha missed this because he was blinded by the belief that the mitzvot are to be done solely for the sake of reward. Without reward, why do the mitzvot at all? Therefore, he abandoned everything.

We see that the two stories describing Elisha's break with Torah carry a common theme: The error of thinking that mitzvot are to be done solely for the sake of reward. This corrupted him from the beginning and led to his downfall.

As it says in our mishnah, *Do not be as slaves who serve their master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as slaves who serve their master not for the sake of reward . . .*

Antignos Ish Socho received from Shimon HaTzaddik,

Why is Antignos called "Ish Socho — a man of Socho," rather than the more idiomatic Antignos of Socho, or Antignos from the town of Socho?

One explanation can be found in the Talmud (*Nedarim* 62a), where it says, “Let a man not say, I will study Scripture so that people will call me a sage, I will learn mishnah so that they will call me ‘Rabbi,’ I will study in depth so that I will be an elder and sit among the scholars, but rather, learn out of love, and eventually honor will come.” Now, since Antignos’s teacher was known as Shimon the Tzaddik, Antignos would often say to his students, do not study Torah so that people will call you a tzaddik or some other admiring title; just study out of love, not with the aim of receiving honorifics.

Antignos practiced what he preached, and referred to himself as “Ish Socho,” as if he were just a simple townsman from Socho, nothing more. And his students followed his example: they were called Yossi ben Yoezer Ish Tzredah, and Yossi ben Yochanan Ish Yerushalayim, designations of ordinary folk from their respective hometowns. Accordingly, Antignos’s *talmid* Yossi ben Yoezer is known for his saying, “Dust yourself in the soil of their feet” — don’t think of yourself as a sage; consider yourself as dust beneath the feet of sages, and certainly don’t study in order to achieve status, or to be called a sage or an elder who sits with the scholars.”

...be like servants who minister unto their master for the sake of receiving a reward.

Why does the mishnah choose to express this idea in terms of “master and slave”? I would posit that the Tanna wanted to teach us that all a man’s service in this world should be like that of a slave serving his master. A slave is purchased by his master for money; unlike a hired worker, he receives no salary for his work. Likewise, one should feel that he is a slave belonging to Hashem, and then as a matter of course he will expect no reward, but nevertheless will feel obligated to serve his Master and do His will, for he is his Master’s property.

And let the fear of Heaven be upon you.

It seems to me that Antignos meant this an addition to the dictum of his *rav*, Shimon HaTzaddik, who said that the world stands upon Torah, service of G-d, and deeds of kindness. Antignos was adding a caveat that a person should not engage in Torah study, service of G-d, and acts of kindness with the intention of receiving his due reward. When people think in terms of reward, they generally hope to receive as big a reward as possible. But what greater reward could a

person receive than to have the Kadosh Baruch Hu enable and help him to fulfill mitzvot? Since the world cannot continue existing without Torah and mitzvot, a person thereby becomes G-d's partner in upholding creation. No other reward he might receive can compare to that, and therefore, the performance of mitzvot in itself is the greatest possible reward.

Antignos goes on to say, "And let the fear of Heaven be upon you." A slave receives no pay from his master, but serves him entirely out of fear, since he is utterly dependent upon him for his very life. No salary could override the importance of that most essential benefit. Similarly, a person should feel that no reward could override the importance of the fact that his Torah study and mitzvot continually uphold the world, while the Kadosh Baruch Hu sustains him and provides for all his needs. When a person thinks in these terms, he naturally fears G-d and restrains himself from acting against His will.



יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרֵדָה וְיוֹסִי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ
 יְרוּשָׁלַיִם קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרֵדָה
 אָמַר יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בַּיַּת וְעַד לַחֲכָמִים וְהוּי מִתְאַבֵּק
 בְּעַפְרֵן רַגְלֵיהֶם וְהוּי שׁוֹתֵה בְצַמָּא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם:

Yosi ben Yoezer of Tzeredah and Yosi ben Yochanan of Jerusalem received the Torah from them. Yosi ben Yoezer of Tzeredah said: Let your house be a meetinghouse for the sages and sit amid the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst.

משנה אבות א:ד

The mishnah urges us to make our homes into gathering places for Torah scholars. By doing so, we might hope to grow in Torah. My question, though, is why the mishnah uses such a peculiar metaphor: that we should dust ourselves in the soil of their feet and thereby drink thirstily of their words.

Similar language may be found in *tehillim* and the explanation of the talmudic commentator known as “Maharsha” when this verse is quoted in talmudic tractate Kiddushin. The verse says, *Praiseworthy is the man who has filled his quiver with them . . .* The hebrew word that translates in biblical hebrew as “his quiver” is *ashpato*.

In modern and rabbinic hebrew, *ashpato* could also translate as “his refuse.” The Maharsha notes this dual meaning and comments that one should not ask,

“How could I possibly allow these scholars entrance to my home? Not only will they be marching in with their many students, but the whole town will wind up barging in here as well!? The whole house will be filled with their dust and ashpah!”

Continues Maharsha, *“This is what King David is referring to in Tehillim, [in our verse], ‘Praiseworthy is the man who has filled ashpato with them . . .’ Not only should one never think in such a way, but he should actually rejoice at the opportunity to have their ashpah come to his home!”*

We can now better understand the intent of our mishnah and why it chose this particular imagery.

We should rejoice at the opportunity to make our homes into gathering places for Torah scholars and not be bothered in the least by the “dirt” they’re certain to track in with them. In fact, we should cling to it!

This is the meaning of the mishnah’s, *dust yourself in the soil of their feet*.

What, then, is the meaning of the mishnah’s continuation,, *and drink thirstily of their words*? What’s the connection between dusting oneself with soil of their feet and in thirstily drinking their words?

I believe that it’s as follows: One cannot merit to develop in Torah except through seeking out torah scholars, following them in their footsteps, seeking to gain whatever one can from them. To be truly successful, one should be like a man in the desert suffering with desperate thirst. He’ll have his face in the dust all of the time, so to speak, trying to lap up every bit of water he could get. When he digs for water and finds some, will it bother him that his face will get dusty?

In the end, there will be water!

So too with Torah scholars. Will there be some “dust” that accompanies them? Of course!

In the end, however, there will be water -- the water of Torah.

And one can then drink, just as thirstily as a parched man in the desert!
Only those who feel that kind of thirst will merit to grow in Torah learning.



יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר יהי ביתך
 פתוח לרוחה ויהיו עניים בני ביתך ואל תרבה
 שיחה עם האשה. באשתו אמרו קל וחמר
 באשת חבירו. מכאן אמרו חכמים כל זמן
 שאדם מרבה שיחה עם האשה גורם רעה
 לעצמו ובוטל מדברי תורה וסופו יורש גיהנם:

Yosi ben Yochanan of Jerusalem says: Let your house be wide open and let the poor be members of your household, and do not talk much with women. This was said about one's own wife; how much more so about the wife of one's neighbor. Therefore the sages have said: He who talks too much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Torah and will in the end inherit Gehinom.

משנה אבות א:ה

Yossi ben Yochanan says that our homes should be wide open and that we should let the poor be members of our households. In certain ways, this statement could be seen as a continuation of the previous mishnah, which says that we should make our homes into gathering places for Torah scholars.

Certainly, it is a great mitzvah to turn one's home into a gathering place for scholars. Perhaps one might therefore think that when a poor person comes knocking at the door, that there's no reason to respond. "After all," one might say to himself, "since I'm presently involved in such a great mitzvah (hosting scholars), what obligation could I have to go do some other mitzvah (that of charity)?"

Of course, this is a misconception. The mitzvah of tzeddakah still applies, in its highest form -- with great generosity and a pleasant greeting. However, we are to do this not merely for the sake of the mitzvah of tzeddakah, but also as an expression of *kavod haTorah*. This is in line with the talmud's statement that we should be exceptionally careful when dealing with the poor, because it will be from their midsts that future ranks of Torah scholars will emerge. Therefore, it is as if one is once again bringing *talmidei chachamim* into one's home.

The mishnah says that we should treat the poor as members of our household, that is, that we shouldn't be any less generous in the quality and quantity of the food we serve them than we would be to our own family members. And, we shouldn't look down upon them. Rather, we should relate to them with friendship and dignity.

The mishnah continues with what appears to be a non-sequitur:

In fact, it is not a non-sequitur at all. The mishnah is saying that while it's true that we should bring the poor into our homes and treat them as members of our own households, this doesn't mean that we should overstep boundaries of modest conduct. One must not confuse the type of friendliness necessary to the mitzvah of tzedakah to over-friendliness motivated by the *yeitser hara*.

Ask what you could do for them, but don't let the conversation stray far afield.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

ויהיו עניים בני ביתך. . .

... *let the poor be members of your household* ...

Rav Chaim Pinto was known to spend hours upon hours in public areas, hoping to encounter out-of-town visitors, in the expectation that they will provide him with a generous contribution for the town's poor. He would explain that by giving charity through him, they would be fulfilling one of the higher forms of *tzedakah*, to give anonymously. As out-of-towners, they would have no idea who the recipients are and the recipients would not know their benefactors. Aside from the fact that this was a higher form of the mitzvah, eliminating some of the embarrassment from the recipients might make it easier for them to accept the help they need.

Those who frequented the town well knew that Rav Chaim had an uncanny ability to know just how much money was secreted away in their baggage. There was no way that they would be getting away with claiming they had nothing more than a few coins. They also knew that whoever gave *tzedakah* to Rav Chaim would meet with success the rest of that day.

If anyone needed to find Rav Chaim, they would know exactly where to look: amongst the least fortunate. He'd be there, sharing their sorrows and strengthening them to carry their burdens.

The upper-classes couldn't quite understand why Rav Chaim would be spending so much of his valuable time amongst the poor. Of course he had to be there to distribute funds, but why sit with them for so long? Wasn't it beneath the dignity of a Torah scholar?

Rav Chaim would explain that this is what was necessary in order to truly help them. After all, how could he possibly understand their needs unless he allowed them to share their lives with him? And, the best way to understand them was to become one of them.

. . . ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה באשתו אמר . . .

and do not talk much with women. This was said about one's own wife

The Rabbanit Mazal (wife of Rav Moshe Aharon) told the following story to her son (our Rav), showing him the extent of his father's *keddusha*:

"I once decided to put your father to the test, to see just how careful he would be when it came to *shemirat ha'eynayim* (the guarding of one's eyes from glancing at that which is inappropriate).

"What I did was change into clothes that he wouldn't recognize, put on a kerchief he wouldn't recognize, and altered my voice in a way that he wouldn't recognize. I looked like a different person.

"I then walked in to his room, asking for a *beracha*."

"What's your name?" asked the Rav.

"Mazal," she said in her disguised voice.

"And your mother's name?"

"Mazal bat Simha."

The Rav broke into a grin: "You have the exact same name as my wife and her mother!"

He then blessed her that she should have *kol tuv*, all good things.

"Perhaps you could bless my children as well?" asked the Rabbanit.

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"And what is the name of your husband?"

The Rabbanit told him. And this made the Rav laugh even more: "Your name is the same as my wife's, your mother's name is the same as my wife's mother, and your husband has the same name as myself!"

Then, in response to the Rav's next question, she told him the names of her children.

This was amazing: "Your name is the same as my wife's, your mother's name is the same as my wife's mother, your husband has the same name as me, and your children have the same name as my children!"

All the while, the Rabbanit peered at her husband, waiting to see if his curiosity would get the best of him.

It did not.

Not even this latest revelation piqued his curiosity.

"I'm your wife!" shouted the Rabbanit, finally speaking in her natural voice. "Don't you recognize me?"

Having heard her real voice, the Rav now knew who this was.

"Why did you do this?"

"I wanted to test you, to see whether I could tempt you to look into my face, the face of woman who you didn't know to be your wife. And, you passed. This confirms what I have always know: You are truly one who fears Hashem."

"You should not have done that. Of course I was curious! Baruch Hashem, that He protected me! It was He who gave me the strength to overcome the Yeitzer Hara! It's true that, in the end, I would have been gazing at the face of my own wife. However, that would not have been my intent. My intent would have been to look into the face of a woman other than my wife -- just to satisfy my curiosity."

And do not talk much with women. This was said about one's own wife.

This is puzzling. Where is it said that a man should not converse excessively even with his own wife?

I would suggest an explanation based on the story of Rabi Akiva. But to lay the foundation for my explanation, let us first look at another incident recounted by our Sages (*Eirubin* 53b): Rabi Yossi the Galilean was walking on the road. He encountered Beruriah, the wife of Rabi Meir, and asked her, "Which road should we take to Lod?" She replied, "Foolish Galilean! Didn't the Sages say not to engage in excessive conversation with a woman? You should have said, 'Which way to Lod?'"

Regarding Rabi Akiva, it says in *Ketubot* (62b): Rabi Akiva parted from his wife and went to the *beit midrash* to study Torah. He stayed there for twelve years, and when he returned home he was accompanied by twelve thousand *talmidim*. As he approached the house he heard a certain old man saying to his wife, “How long will you live this way, like a widow with a living husband?” She answered him, “If my husband could hear me, I would tell him to go back to the *beit midrash* and spend another twelve years there.” Hearing this, Rabi Akiva said to his *talmidim*, “In that case, let us return to the *beit midrash*, since I have my wife’s permission.” He turned around and went straight back to the *beit midrash*, without even entering the house to see his wife, and he stayed there for another twelve years. This is hard to understand. After coming all that way, why didn’t he at least pay a short visit to his wife to let her know he had come?

We can tie up all the loose ends here by looking ahead to mishnah 7 of this chapter, where Rabi Shimon says, “If one is walking along the road, reviewing his learning as he goes, and he stops learning to remark, what a beautiful tree that is, or what a beautiful field, Scripture considers him as having committed a mortal transgression.” Here we must ask, why does the mishnah specify that the scholar in question is walking along the road? Would the transgression be any different if he were sitting at home and broke off learning in the middle to think about other things? In fact, the Sages say, “Anyone who interrupts his Torah study to engage in mundane conversation will be fed burning coals” (*Chagigah*, 12b). However, the Torah specifically mentions that constant Torah study also applies “as you walk on the road” (*Devarim* 6:7). It is natural for someone on the road to pay attention to eye-catching sights along the way. This is why Rabi Shimon stresses that even while one is traveling, if he interrupts his learning to remark on one of these sights, it is a mortal transgression. (Clearly, then, it is even less excusable if one interrupts his learning to discuss mundane matters while at home or in the *beit midrash*.)

Now, Rabi Akiva had not yet entered his house when he overheard the conversation between his wife and the elderly neighbor. His intention had been to spend a short time with his wife and then, with her consent, go back to the *beit midrash*. But at that moment he was still on the road, and he and his *talmidim* were engaged in Torah learning. If he had entered the house at that point, having already understood that his wife was getting along well and was eager for him to return to the *beit midrash*, he would have been guilty of interrupting his learning.

Rabi Yossi the Galilean, too, was on the road when he met Beruriah and asked her the way to Lod. We can assume he was engaged in learning, since that is the way of *talmidei chachamim*, as it says in the Gemara: “A *talmid chacham* must not tarry in a filthy place, since he cannot remain for more than a brief moment without entertaining thoughts of Torah” (*Berachot*, 24b). Apparently it was necessary for Rabi Yossi to interrupt his learning briefly when he met a passerby, in order to avoid losing time by taking the wrong road (and presumably the purpose of his journey to Lod was for Torah study, too). But as Beruriah pointed out to him, he could have phrased his question more succinctly; thus he was guilty of *bitul Torah* because he extended the interruption a second or two longer than necessary. Such is the lofty level of meticulousness demanded of a Torah scholar of Rabi Yosi’s caliber.

I believe that Beruriah was implying that Rabi Yosi should have learned from his *rav*, Rabi Akiva, who did not stop learning even to visit his wife, not to talk unnecessarily with a woman, all the more so if the woman is another man’s wife. The story of Rabi Akiva’s abortive visit to his wife is where “this is said even regarding one’s own wife.”



יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִטַּי הָאֶרְבֵּלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.
 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רֵב וְקִנָּה לָךְ
 חֵבֵר וְהוּי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת.
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵין

Joshua ben Perachyah and Nittai the Arbelite received the Torah from them. Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend; and judge every man towards merit.

The Mishnah says that we should “make for ourselves” a Rav, acquire for ourselves a friend, and give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

One could conclude from this Mishnah that, rather than study alone, we learn from a teacher and then find a study partner with whom to review. Support for this might be found in the talmudic statement in Berachot that seems to condemn those who learn alone as well as the one in Ta’anit that is frequently invoked to mean, “A study partner -- or death!” (The more precise understanding, however, is that it refers to the need to attach oneself to the right kind of friend, the type that will not hesitate to chastise you when you stray from the right path. Our comments incorporate both meanings.)

It is important that we be careful to not join in friendship with those who might draw us to that which the Torah deems unsuitable. This doesn’t merely mean to stay away from those who are evil; that’s perfectly obvious. Rather, we should even avoid the company of those who might be quite average; inevitably, they will draw us to mediocrity. We are, after all, creatures of our environment.

Still, warns the teacher of the Mishnah, that doesn’t mean that we should look down upon those who very well might not be up to our own level. Nor should we think that we’re somehow superior to them. Nor may we look upon them condescendingly.

The mishnah says, *judge every man to the side of merit*. This comes juxtaposed to its earlier admonition to keep good company. It reminds us that we are all equal in the eyes of Hashem. Each of us has his own special qualities; each of us is unique.

There's another way of looking at this. One could say that the idea of acquiring for oneself a friend is very much tied to the idea of giving others the benefit of the doubt.

Let me explain.

Let's say that one has acquired for himself a very good friend. Then, he hears some people speaking badly about that friend. What will be one's immediate reaction? For sure, he'll say to himself that the story about his friend cannot be true; surely, the story tellers are making things up.

What has he just done? Biased in his friend's favor, he has refused to accept what they said (aside from the fact that one is halachically not permitted to believe such talk).

Perhaps the mishnah is telling us that we should not only be biased in our friends' favor, that is to always try and give them the benefit of the doubt, but we should act that way towards one and all -- in a sense, as if we had acquired every single Jew as a friend.

That applies to all our social transactions, be they in the marketplace, synagogue, or school.



נְתַאי הָאַרְבֵּלִי אָמַר הֲרַחֵק מִשְׁכּוֹן רָע וְאַל
 תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע וְאַל תִּתְיַאֵשׁ מִן הַפְּרָעָנוֹת:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵין

Nittai the Arbelite said: Keep far from an evil neighbor and do not associate with the wicked; and do not abandon belief in retribution.

... far from an evil neighbor and do not associate with the wicked

Seemingly, it would have made more sense if the mishnah had laid down this ruling in reverse order. If we are required to keep a distance from a bad neighbor, then obviously we shouldn't become close to a wicked person! So why doesn't the mishnah say, "Do not cleave to a wicked person, and in fact, take your caution a step further and keep a distance from a bad neighbor"?

Apparently, the mishnah comes to teach us that if one doesn't take care to keep a distance from a bad neighbor, he will gradually become closer to him and be influenced by his evil ways. Even a *tzaddik* can eventually turn into a *rasha* through contact with his wicked neighbor.

We find that even Yaakov Avinu was fearful of the influence of a bad neighbor. The Midrash says that when Yaakov saw Esav and his battalions, he became fearful. The Kadosh Baruch Hu said to him, "Of them, you are afraid? One spark from you, and one spark from your son, and you'll burn them all up" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:5). Why, in fact, was Yaakov fearful of Esav, after the Kadosh Baruch Hu had promised to protect him, as the Torah plainly says: "And behold, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go" (*Bereishit* 28:15)? The Kadosh Baruch Hu's words to Yaakov in the Midrash are not very clear, either.

We can say with certainty that Yaakov didn't feel threatened by Esav's physical might. What he feared was that his children might see Esav and his men doing as they liked and having a good time and think, "These fellows don't keep the Torah, and they get off scot-free, so why shouldn't we do the same?" The implication of the Kadosh Baruch Hu's reassurance to Yaakov was, "You needn't fear Esav's bad influence. As long as you and your sons are engaged in Torah learning, which is like fire, one spark of your Torah will burn up all the evil influence of those *resha'im*, and as long as you maintain your bond with the Torah, no evil influence can divert you from the proper path."

I could suggest an additional explanation of the Kadosh Baruch Hu's words in the Midrash which also shows the connection between this mishnah and the

one preceding it. The previous mishnah speaks of a person's responsibility to acquire a friend, and on that mishnah I cited a number of statements by our Sages on the evils a man brings upon himself by habitually studying alone. Now, we know from the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3), that Yaakov and his son Yosef studied together *b'chavruta*, and that before Yosef's brothers sold him, he and his father were learning about the *eglah arufah* (the calf that is slaughtered in atonement for an unsolved murder). What the Kadosh Baruch Hu was saying to Yaakov was, you need not fear that your children will form a harmful association with Esav's children, because you study Torah — which is compared to fire (see *Yirmiyahu* 23:29) — together with your son, and that association can annul any harmful effects of associating with them. When you and your son learn together, the spark from you and the spark from him combine to exert a powerful force that will consume any bad influence from your surroundings.

Thus the two *mishnayot* are linked: it is vital to associate with others, but forbidden to associate with the wicked. And how does one save himself from associating with the wicked? By having a worthy friend with whom he studies Torah.

We can learn what a crucial matter this is from the Midrash that says that Aharon HaKohen's death was a punishment upon Israel because they associated themselves with Edom (see *Tanchuma, Chukat* 14). This, the Midrash explains, is why the Torah mentions Aharon's passing immediately after the story of their encounter with the king of Edom. But this is puzzling, because Moshe Rabbeinu himself wanted to pass through Edomite territory, as the Torah clearly states: "Moshe sent messengers from Kadesh to the King of Edom: so says your brother Israel, you know all the hardship that has overtaken us..." (*Bemidbar* 20:14). Surely Moshe didn't do this without consulting the Kadosh Baruch Hu. Why, then, does the Midrash put the blame on Israel?

I would offer an explanation based on the *pesukim* themselves: the Torah relates that Moshe sent his request to the king, and the king stiffly declined, adding a threat that he would come out wielding swords against them if they dared to pass through his land. Nevertheless, the Israelites insisted on taking the shortcut through Edom (*Bemidbar* 20:18-19). Thus, even though Moshe had already changed his mind about going through Edom when he saw the wickedness of its people, the Israelites wanted to take the shorter route regardless, and accordingly, they were held culpable for associating with the wicked Edomites. Measure for measure, the righteous Aharon was taken from

them as punishment, and instead of benefiting from a shortcut, they were forced to go back eight stages of their journey, prolonging their stay in the wilderness (see Rashi on *Bemidbar* 26:13).

Keep far from an evil neighbor and do not associate with the wicked; and do not abandon belief in retribution.

In order to explain this mishnah properly, let us first turn to a Gemara in *Pesachim* (49b), which says that one must not travel on the road in the company of an *am haaretz*, because the Torah says, “For it [the Torah] is your life and the length of your days.” If this man, who won’t take the trouble to learn Torah, doesn’t value his own life, then surely he won’t value another person’s life. Rashi interprets this to mean that there is a tangible risk that the *am haaretz* might kill his fellow traveler.

The students of Rabbi Yonatan Lugasi, may Hashem preserve and protect them, raised two questions on this Gemara. First, can we really understand it as saying that an *am haaretz* literally doesn’t care if he throws his life away? We see with our own eyes that unlearned people take steps to safeguard their lives, just as Torah scholars do. And second, are we to take this warning as applying only to unlearned Jews, and not to non-Jews? This is contradicted by the fact that the Sages made no ruling against secluding oneself with an *am haaretz*, but they did make such a ruling against seclusion with a non-Jew, for fear that he could be a murderer (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 153:2).

The answer to these questions is found in another Gemara (*Berachot* 47b): “The Rabbis learned, what defines an *am haaretz*? Someone who doesn’t recite Keriat Shema morning and evening, said Rabi Eliezer. Rabi Joshua said, someone who doesn’t put on tefillin. Ben Azzai said, someone who has no *tzitzit* on his garment. Rabi Natan says, someone who has no mezuzah on his doorpost. Rabi Natan bar Yosef said, someone who has sons and doesn’t raise them to study Torah. Others said, even one who studies and reviews, but does not serve *talmidei chachamim*, is an *am haaretz*.”

These statements may seem very surprising. Why would someone be called an *am haaretz* due to his private disregard for certain mitzvot? And why did the Rabbis single out these particular mitzvot? I think the answer is that these mitzvot were given to Israel to protect them, both spiritually and physically, and therefore someone who neglects to keep them is showing a careless attitude towards his own well-being. Such a person isn’t worthy of the name *adam*; less

than a full-fledged human being, he is an *am haaretz*, one of “the clan of the earth,” not really a part of civilization.

Let me offer proofs that the abovementioned mitzvot were given as protection. Recitation of Keri'at Shema has the power to dispel the harmful spirits that surround a person (see *Berachot* 5a). When a man wears tefillin, the nations of the world are struck with fear of him, as the Torah says: “All the peoples of the earth will see the name of Hashem called upon you, and they will be afraid of you” (*Devarim* 28:10), and our Sages taught that this refers to tefillin (*Berachot* 6a). *Tzitziyot* can save a man from transgression, as in the story of the man who was saved from immoral relations when his *tzitzit* hit him in the face (*Menachot* 44a). And we are told outright that the mitzvah of mezuzah affords protection to the people living in the house from all kinds of evil (*Pesachim* 4a; also see Rashi).

In the same vein, if someone doesn't arrange for his children to learn Torah, he is depriving them of life in this world and the next. If it doesn't bother him that his children aren't learning and don't know how to do the mitzvot, then he certainly doesn't care about his own well-being, since it is a parent's nature to be more concerned about his children than about himself.

Neglect in all of these mitzvot is a sure sign of an *am haaretz* who doesn't fear Divine retribution and is unconcerned for his own physical and spiritual well-being. He thinks that everything will be all right, and that his neglect of Torah and mitzvot will be overlooked. But as it says in *Mishlei* (14:15), “A wise man fears and turns away from evil, but a fool exerts himself to pass, and slips.”

Now we have answers to the two questions raised by Rabbi Yonatan Lugasi's *talmidim*. It is forbidden to go out on the road with an *am haaretz* because someone who has no regard for his own life or that of his children certainly can't be expected to have any regard for other people's lives, and therefore we have to consider the possibility that given the chance, he might commit murder. This reasoning does not apply to a non-Jew. Non-Jews generally do not commit murder because their fear of the law restrains them. An *am haaretz*, on the other hand, knows that there is a higher Law and a Supreme Judge, yet he doesn't even do the mitzvot that would protect him and acts as if there were no retribution; therefore our Sages hold him to be a greater risk than a non-Jew. In a secluded place, however, a non-Jew's fear of the law is reduced, and in that situation he is considered as posing a potential threat — but an *am haaretz* poses a potential threat even on the open road.

Another interesting statement in the Talmud about the *am haaretz* (*Pesachim*, loc cit) is that it is permissible to “tear him like a fish.” Rabi Akiva said, “I was formerly an *am haaretz*, and I used to say, ‘If I had the chance I would bite a *talmid chacham* like a donkey.’” Rabi Eliezer said, “If not for the fact that we do business with them, they would kill us.” The hatred of *amei aretz* towards a *talmid chacham* is greater than the hatred of the nations of the world towards the Jewish people. Those who scorn the mitzvot of Keriat Shema, tzitzit, tefillin, mezuzah, and Torah education for their children hate those who fulfill these mitzvot.

All these concepts are included in our mishnah, in the succinct words, “Distance yourself from a bad neighbor, do not cleave to a wicked person, and do not abandon belief in retribution.” Associating with people who don’t value life poses a tangible physical risk as well as a spiritual hazard, and although such people don’t believe in retribution, it will surely come.

Keep far from an evil neighbor and do not associate with the wicked; and do not abandon belief in retribution.

The Torah says, “Esav took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, and his cattle and livestock and all the acquisitions he had gained in the land of Canaan, and he went to a land, because of his brother Yaakov, for their acquisitions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land of their sojourning could not support them because of their cattle. So Esav dwelt on Mount Seir; Esav is Edom” (*Bereishit* 36:6-8). Rashi explains that “he went to a land” means that Esav went to live wherever he could find land.

Rashi’s interpretation is puzzling. The very next *pasuk* says that Esav settled on Mount Seir, which seems to imply that this was the destination he had in mind from the start. And besides, is it reasonable to suppose that Esav would take his family, servants, and livestock, and pack up all his possessions to set out for an unknown destination? Surely he would first go out with a small party to reconnoiter, select a suitable place, and then move his household there. If so, then “he went to a land” is simply a more succinct way of saying he went to the place he had in mind — namely, Mount Seir.

Furthermore, we were already informed at the beginning of the *parshah* that Esav was living at Mount Seir: “Yaakov sent messengers ahead to his brother Esav, to the land of Seir” (*Bereishit* 33:4). Why, then, does Rashi seem to think

that Esav went off looking for a place that would turn up at random? An answer to this question is suggested by the words of our Sages: When Esav saw how much honor Yaakov had attained, he began to think of doing *teshuvah* (ט' י"א). We could say, then, that at that moment he decided not to return to Mount Seir. But he still didn't want to live in close proximity to Yaakov; he didn't want such a high standard of righteousness constantly before his eyes as an example to be followed (like people today who don't want to live in a neighborhood that is "too religious" and look for a place where the standards are more relaxed).

At that point, as the Torah recounts, Esav "went to a land," and as Rashi interprets it, to live in whatever place he would find. He no longer wished to live in Seir, where neither Torah nor good deeds were to be found, so he set out to find a more suitable home. And when the Torah says that "their acquisitions were too great for them to live together," it is referring to the acquisitions of Yaakov and his sons. "Acquisitions" here refers to Torah and mitzvot, as we find in the *pasuk*, "And afterwards they will go forth with acquisitions in abundance" (*Bereishit* 15:14; see *Yaarot Devash*, vol. I, *derush* 2 and the Ramchal's commentary on *Shemot* 11:2). The "acquisitions" of Yaakov and his sons were "too great" for Esav. Although he had done *teshuvah*, he only went so far as to turn away from his evil deeds; he didn't want to be a tzaddik like Yaakov.

And what happened in the end? "Esav dwelt on Mount Seir." He went back to Seir and returned to his evil ways. Because he didn't want to live near Yaakov and his sons, and even kept away from them, he couldn't maintain his resolutions. As we learn in a later chapter of *Avot*, it is vital to live among people who study Torah and fulfill its commandments: "Yossi ben Kasma says, if you were to give me all the gold, silver, gems, and pearls in the world, I would not live anywhere but in a place of Torah" (6:10). All the more so is it forbidden to leave a Torah community when one lives there already. Esav turned his back on Yaakov's Torah community, and in time he was drawn back to Seir, and he and his descendents lost their chance to be part of the Jewish nation.

Esav's failure to do *teshuvah* is also an apt illustration for the final words in our mishnah, "and do not abandon belief in retribution." What greater retribution could there be than the misery Esav brought upon himself? Not only did he lose his share in the Next World; he also made himself hateful to the Kadosh Baruch Hu, as the Navi says: "I have loved Yaakov... but Esav I have hated" (*Malachi* 1:2-3), and due to Hashem's aversion for him, he is not protected from the scourges of this world.

יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּי וְשִׁמּוֹן בֶּן שֵׁטַח קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם.
 יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּי אוֹמֵר אֶל תַּעֲשׂ עִצְמָךְ כְּעוֹרְכֵי
 הַדִּינִין. וְכִשְׂיֵהוּ בְּעֵלֵי דִינִין עוֹמְדִים לְפָנֶיךָ יֵהיוּ
 בְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּרָשָׁעִים. וְכִשְׁנִפְטָרִים מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יֵהיוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 כְּזָכָאִין כְּשֶׁקִּבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַדִּין:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֶחָד

Judah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shetach received the Torah from them. Judah ben Tabbai said: Do not make yourself like those that present before judges. When parties to a Torah suit are standing before you they should be in your eyes as wicked men, but when they have departed from they should be in your eyes as innocent, if they have accepted the verdict.

The mishnah says that the judges should initially view the litigants as *risha'im* and then, after the litigants have accepted the judgement, view them as being like *zaka'in*. In other words, until they've heard all the evidence, the judges are to view each party with equal suspicion. After they've heard the evidence and have made their decision, however, they are to view both litigants (even the one found "guilty") as being like *zaka'in*.

The language seems a bit strange; although we would expect the Mishnah's description to use two opposite words, this does not seem to be the case. The opposite of *risha'im* would be *tzaddikim*. The opposite of *zaka'in* would be *chayavin*.

What I mean to say is that, while it wouldn't seem possible for a *rasha* to be a *tzaddik* (this would be a contradiction in terms), it is certainly possible for a *rasha* to be *zakai*, at least as it applies to one particular case. In other words, just because someone brings a *rasha* to a *Din Torah*, claiming that the *rasha* owes him money, this does not make the plaintiff automatically correct. *Risha'im* remain *risha'im*, whether or not they are *zaka'in* (winners of one particular case). Conversely, just because it was decided in one particular case that a *tzaddik* owes someone money, that shouldn't make him lose his standing as a *tzaddik*.

One commentator suggests that the purpose of the juxtaposition of these two words was to say precisely what we just stated, that just because someone is judged to be the loser in a monetary dispute, that doesn't mean that we should now view him as a thief -- especially since we're talking about someone who has accepted the court's judgment.

A different thought comes to my mind, based upon the talmud's idea that when one does *teshuva m'ahava*, that is, he repents due to love for Hashem, his transgressions committed intentionally are counted as merits.

Particularly noteworthy is that the talmud does not say that the transgressions become mitzvot. It's obvious that this would be impossible, for at the time that the person did the act, his intention was not for doing a mitzvah, but for doing an *aveira*. Let's say that someone had eaten pork. Could we say that once he has done teshuva, the eating had become a mitzvah?

It would seem to me that the talmud's intent is to say that the merit of *teshuva* is so great that it eradicates the blemish that had been placed upon the sinner's soul and replaces it with virtue.

This holds true even for a thief.

He intended to steal -- and did, in fact, steal. However, now that he has broken his own ego and accepted the court's judgment, he is no longer a *rasha*. Rather, he is a *zakai*. Having not resisted the judges' determination, he has eradicated his soul's blemish and replaced it with merit.

He is now a *zakai*.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

וכשיהיו בעלי דינים עומדים לפניך יהיו בעיניך כרשעים

. . . *they should be in your eyes as wicked men.*

It happened that one of the wealthy citizens of Isvira once sold an apartment to another Jewish resident of that city. All terms were spelled out, the purchaser paid the full amount in cash, and then moved in. The buyer's and seller's houses faced each other.

A few days later, the seller made an opening in the wall facing his neighbor, creating a window that looked directly into the purchaser's house. Jewish law forbids this; it is known as *heizek re'iyah*, damage done through "looking." Aside from the invasion of privacy, it limits the victim's ability to freely enjoy his own property and is considered to have mystical consequences as well. This is actionable in a *Beit Din*, a Jewish court.

The purchaser's pleas that the window be closed off were met with deaf ears. The wealthy seller refused to make the accommodation. With no other choice, the seller went to the tzaddik Rav Chaim Pinto and asked him to determine whether the claim against his neighbor was justified.

The neighbor was quickly summoned to appear.

The court date arrived and both of the litigants laid out their claims.

The law was quite clear on this matter; it wasn't long before Rav Pinto recognized that justice was on the side of the purchaser. The wealthy individual had lost the case. His newly-opened window was a prime example of *heizek re'iyah*; it had to be closed off.

The wealthy individual was not used to being told that he was in the wrong. Feeling humiliated by the Rav's judgment, he covered his face and departed.

He accepted the decision and sealed the window, just as he was told.

However, he also sought revenge: In short order, he arranged for the drawing up of a forged document that would obligate the victorious purchaser to pay him a large sum of money.

He then hid the contract away, waiting for the right opportunity to spring it on his unsuspecting adversary.

Several years passed, and the purchaser had a son. Unfortunately, the man was so poor that he didn't have the money to pay for a festive meal. He didn't even have the chairs and table that would be used by his guests.

With two coins in hand, hardly enough to buy what was needed, he set out into the marketplace. Recognizing that these two coins would hardly suffice, he prayed to Hashem. He trusted that, somehow, things would work out.

When he got to the marketplace, he encountered a woman leading a donkey heavily laden with fresh spices for sale. With the two coins, the man was able to buy the entire load. He then brought the merchandise home.

His brother, who happened to be staying at the house at the time, immediately recognized that the spices were considerably more valuable than what his brother had paid. He took them to the local spice market and returned with tens of times more than the original purchase price. Overjoyed, he handed the large sum over to his poor brother. Even after their return trip to the marketplace to buy the table, chairs, and food needed for the festive meal, plenty of money remained.

That money was then invested into a business.

Baruch Hashem, the investment flourished and the formerly poor brother became quite wealthy.

All was not well, however. Once the man who sold him the apartment and then lost in a Din Torah noticed his neighbor's newfound fortune, he decided that the time had come for using the forged contract. Now, thought he, the tables would turn!

It wasn't long before the man proceeded to Rav Pinto's study and showed him the contract, demanding that the neighbor be called upon to pay the promised sum.

The neighbor was, of course, astounded.

He swore that he knew nothing about this supposed business deal and nothing of any supposed loans. Never, ever, had he engaged in any financial dealings with the seller other than the purchase of the house.

What was Rav Pinto to do? One side said that he was owed a large sum of money. The other side denied the matter entirely. The claimant, however, had in his possession a signed and certified contract.

The Rav told the men to return the next morning.

When the two litigants returned, each stated their claims one again: One said the other fellows him money and had the contract to prove it; the other said no such thing ever happened. Contracts carry more weight than verbal denials; unless it were proven counterfeit, the terms of the contract would be upheld.

Rav Pinto ordered that the document be turned over to him. He would place it into the *aron hakodesh* overnight and put it to the test: If the parchment was spotted after that time, that should show it to be authentic. If it remained unmarked, this showed it to be counterfeit.

The contract was turned over and the men were instructed to return the next day.

Together, they went to the *aron hakodesh* and removed the item in question. The Rav held it up: It was still unmarked.

"The contract is a forgery!" said the Rav. "Apologize right now for what you have done!" he demanded of the seller. "Stand in front of the *aron hakodesh* and express your contrition!"

The man immediately admitted to the whole scheme.

He never bothered his neighbor again.



שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן שֵׁטַח אָמַר הָיָה מְרַבָּה לְחַקֹּר אֶת
הַעֲדִים וְהָיָה זְהִיר בְּדַבְרֶיךָ שֶׁמָּא מִתּוֹכָם יִלְמְדוּ
לְשָׁקֵר:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵיט

Shimon ben Shetach said: Examine the witnesses diligently and be cautious in your words lest through them they learn to lie.

Our mishnah emphasizes the importance of seeing to it that the witnesses not be coached how to lie. Underlying this, of course, is the importance attached to the Din Torah's being based upon truth rather than dishonesty.

The talmud (Massechet Ta'anit 23a) says the following:

We find that in the days of Shimon ben Shatach, that rain fell for them on the eves of Wednesdays and Shabbatot, to the extent that their wheat kernels were the size of kidneys, their barley was the size of olive pits, and their lentils were the size of gold coins. They put away bundles of them for future generations, as examples for future generations, to demonstrate what sin could cause, as is stated in the verse, *Your sins have turned these [blessings] away; your transgressions have withheld the good from you.*

In order to give this some context, I would like to point out the verse quoted above appears in the same chapter in Yirmiyahu that says that punishment was brought upon that generation because their Dinei Torah were corrupt and unjust. They failed to uphold the rights of those most needing of their protection, namely the widows, orphans, and poor.

Both of our sources, the mishnah in Avoth and the gemara in Ta'anit, are said in the name of Shimon ben Shatach. He says in Avoth that judges should be careful to avoid tainting the judgment in any way. In the talmud, he describes the consequences of a corrupted court system, namely that the Land will become less fertile. Its produce will be less abundant and of lower quality.

Two verses in Tehillim would seem to hint at this. It says, *Truth shall sprout from the Land and righteousness will peer from heaven.* The verse is speaking of a time when there will be truth on earth. That commitment to truth will be reciprocated from heaven. The next verse says, *Also Hashem will provide what*

is good, and our Land will yield its produce. We see once again that the Land will flourish only when there will be justice. When there's no truth, meaning when the court system is corrupt and unjust, the Land will necessarily be denied its blessing.

I'd like to add another thought: It seems, according to the mishnah, that the point in time when the Land's yield was most abundant was that of Rav Shimon ben Shatach. What was it about that period that most lent itself to this phenomenon?

I believe that an answer to that question could be found in Tractate Makkot 5b.

The gemara tells a story about a *Tanna* named Yehudah ben Tabbai, who made a halachic ruling that a lying witness in a certain case be executed. Accordingly, the man was then put to death. However, although the man was proven guilty of an offense that calls for the death penalty, for technical reasons, it should not have been carried out. Lying witnesses, known as *eidim zomeimim*, who use their testimony to try and have an innocent man executed are subject to the death penalty. The executed man was that type of criminal. However, there is a technical rule that says that these types of lying witnesses cannot be executed unless they were part of pair that had both been proven liars. In other words, if only one is proven to have been lying (but there's insufficient evidence about his partner), then even the guilty one may not be killed.

The heretical sect known as karaites claimed that lying witnesses are executed only if their testimony results in the death of the person that they were testifying about. The Rabbis' interpretation was exactly the opposite: the witnesses are eligible to be killed only if they were *unsuccessful*. Although it would seem to be counterintuitive, our tradition considers the Rabbis' interpretation the authentic one.

Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai had been engaged in an ideological dispute with this heretical sect and wished to demonstrate the authenticity of the Rabbinic interpretation. This rare case of a false witness who was proven to have been lying and whose testimony was disallowed at trial was the opportunity to show that the courts follow the Rabbinic view -- not the karaites'.

Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai's intentions were purely for the sake of Heaven. Despite those intentions, however, he was wrong: as a single witness, the man was technically not eligible for execution and should not have been put to death.

In other words, Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai erred in judgment and wrongly had a man killed. The one who told him of his error was Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach.

His reaction when told? Did he attempt to justify his actions or argue that he knew better?

No.

His reaction was that every day for the rest of his life, he went to the gravesite of the criminal whose execution he wrongly ordered, prostrated himself upon his grave, and begged forgiveness. And, he vowed to never rule again in any matter, unless Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach was with him.

Although it was true that Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai had made a grievous error, his ruling might still be considered a *din emett*, not only because he had the purest of intentions, but because once he learned of his mistake, he immediately acknowledged responsibility.

He did not deny the truth.

The greatest error that a person can commit is a failure to admit mistakes. We are all human; we all make mistakes. When shown that we were wrong, we should not -- and cannot -- deny the truth.

Because Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai admitted the truth, we could say that his ruling (despite its being grievously flawed) was a judgment of truth.

And that, perhaps, is why during the lifetime of Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai and Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach, the crops flourished as they never had before.



שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטַלְיוֹן קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם. שְׁמַעְיָה אָמַר
 אֶהוּב אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה וְשֵׂנְא אֶת הַרְבָּנוּת וְאֵל
 תִּתְנַדַּע לְרִשּׁוּת:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵי:

Shemayah and Avtalion received the Torah from them. Shemayah said: Love work; loath the Rabbanut; and seek not undue intimacy with the government.

Shamaayah says that one should loath the “Rabbanut.” This does not mean that one is to hate Rabbis. Rather, it is reminding us to not actively pursue honor and positions of authority. Being a Rabbi has the potential of being an example of that type of role.

However, it need not be.

Someone who has the talent to bring fellow Jews closer to their Father in Heaven is obligated to seek out the Rabbanut. He must, however, keep himself focused on doing his work solely for the sake of Heaven -- and to not fall into the trap of pursuing personal glory and reveling in the power he holds over others.

In short, he should not love the Rabbanut (that is, the honor and authority that this position brings), but he should hate it. What he should love is Hashem and His Torah.

Also, he should not impose himself upon the community, using governmental pressure and the like. Those who do so are bound to influence absolutely no one. (It is for this reason that the continuation of the mishnah is that we should avoid being overly close to the authorities).

It is curious as to why the mishnah chose the wording that one should “hate” the Rabbanut. It would seem that a better way of phrasing it would be to say that one should “flee” from it.

Perhaps the reason is that it is not addressed to those who are unworthy of the Rabbanut, but rather to those who are worthy of it. It is telling them that they have no permission to avoid this responsibility, that is, to go into a different line of work.

The hebrew word “hate” is שֵׂנְא. It carries the same letters as the hebrew word נָשָׂא, which means to carry, to bear, to lift.

The mishnah is saying that one certainly should hate (אש) the Rabbanut. But, where it is possible for one to use that position to uphold G-d's honor, then one must do the opposite --- bear (אש) the Rabbanut, that is, to bear that position and not flee.

This is somewhat akin to the idea expressed elsewhere in Avoth that in a situation where there is no “Man,” push yourself to be a “Man.”

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

. . . *Love work; loath the “Rabbanut”.*

The gaon and tzaddik Rav Kalifa Malka was the brother-in-law of the tzaddik and *mekubal* Rav Shlomo Pinto. The two of them were highly successful merchants; just about everything they put their hands to was blessed with great profits.

This did not, however, blind them.

They never allowed themselves to forget that man comes from dust -- and to dust he will return. They dedicated great amounts of time and effort to Torah and to Divine Service, delegating the running of their business affairs to others.

Most of the day, the sat together, wearing tefillin and wrapped in tallitot, engrossed in study. Together, they would debate how to respond to the many halachic inquiries submitted to them. Once they had reached a joint decision, however, and composed their detailed explanation of the halachic rationale, Rav Shlomo would ask that his name not appear. The reason? Because he felt himself unworthy of appearing on the same signature line as his brother-in-law.

Among their businesses was the transportation of merchandise between Morocco and Portugal. Even when their affairs took them away from home on such journeys, their study sessions continued unabated.

Two versions exist as to where the Tzaddik Rav Chaim Pinto was born. One has him being born in Morocco; the second places his birth in Spain. According to the second version, this would have occurred when Rav Shlomo took his pregnant wife with him to Barcelona. She then gave birth to Rav Chaim there. Rav Meir Pinto trusts this version to be the most reliable and said that he had seen a letter where Rav Chaim mentions that Barcelona was his birthplace.

אֲבִטְלִיּוֹן אֹמֵר חֲכָמִים הִזְהָרוּ בְּדַבְרֵיכֶם
 שֶׁמָּא תַּחֲבוּ חוֹבַת גְּלוּת וְתִגְלוּ לְמָקוֹם מִים
 הָרְעִים וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הַתְּלָמִידִים הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיכֶם
 וַיָּמוּתוּ וְנִמְצָא שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם מִתְחַלֵּל:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵינָא

Avtalion said: Sages, be careful with your words lest you incur the penalty of exile and are called to a place where the waters of learning are impure and the disciples that come after you drink of them and die; and the Heavenly Name is consequently profaned.

The Mishnah tells us that Avtalyon warned his students to be careful with their words, lest they cause “an obligation of *galut* - exile.” In its strictest technical sense, we normally associate an “obligation of *galut* - exile” with those who commit accidental murder and are compelled to flee to one of the cities of refuge. What does Avtalyon mean when he warns that such an obligation might exist for something one has *said*?

An answer to this question may be found in the classic commentaries to our Mishnah, who explain that Avtalyon is saying that teachers of Torah must see to it that their words are not misunderstood and then distorted by heretics already predisposed to twist Rabbinic teachings towards their own ends. In line with this classic interpretation, I would like to suggest that the *galut* referred to is not the *galut* of Cities of Refuge (which is for accidental murderers), but the one mentioned in a later chapter of Avoth, which says that one should exile (*goleh*) oneself to a place of Torah [rather than remain in a place devoid of Torah scholars].

How would this fit into the interpretation suggested by the classical commentators?

The case of Antignus Ish Socco, described in early Rabbinic sources, illustrates just what could happen when a Rav’s teachings are insufficiently articulated: two students misunderstood one of his teachings so fundamentally, that they became alienated enough to prefer the path of heresy. (They even gained a significant following.) In the wake of such a tragedy, the Rav himself could wind up having to exile himself to a place of Torah, in order to escape being

surrounded by the heresy that, ironically, he himself bears some responsibility for causing.

You might ask, “Well, what of it? What’s so terrible about having to leave one location for another? After all, there are other places of Torah to go to.”

True, Torah is Torah, no matter where it is studied. However, things are not that simple. The Mishnah refers to this situation as a *Chilul Hashem*. Why? Just think what will happen when the Rav leaves: his students will leave along with him. The town will become bereft of Torah scholars.

And what will happen when visitors will pass through this town once-renowned for its Torah scholars? They’ll point at one place and another, saying, “Here’s where Rabbi so and so used to sit with his 100 students. Now, look at it: A ghost town! No one here has any use for Torah!”

Surely, a terrible *Chilul Hashem*.

A midrash in *Shir HaShirim Rabba* relates that Rabbi Joshua, upon entering Rabbi Eliezer’s Beit HaMidrash one time, kissed the stone that Rabbi Eliezer would sit upon. He said that the stone was akin to *Har Sinai*; the one who sat upon it, Rabbi Eliezer, was like the ark that contained the stones of the covenant. Without presuming that other teachers of Torah are anywhere near the level of Rabbi Eliezer, we can still say that every Beit HaMidrash is reminiscent of Har Sinai. Its abandonment, coupled with the departure of its primary teacher because of the spread of heresy (partially due to that teacher’s lack of caution), most certainly amounts to a *Chilul Hashem* of the first order. It’s like saying that he had caused the departure of the *Shechina*.

A similar idea is expressed in the gemara Berachot, where it says that when Hashem comes to a Beit HaKenesset and does not see a minyan of at least ten, He becomes angered. It also says that one who lives in the vicinity of a Beit HaKenesset, yet fails to pray there, causes *galut* to himself and to his children.

Perhaps these two gemarot shed some light upon our Mishnah -- and upon each other. One could say that this individual’s punishment is *midah k’negged midah* (measure for measure). By not entering the place of Hashem’s Presence, despite living in its vicinity, he angers Hashem and causes himself to be forced to go away from that Presence.

One could say the same for the Rabbi warned about in our Mishnah. Through his speech, he has caused the exile of himself as well as his students. Because of this, rather than being given the privilege of being able to go to a place of Torah,

he must go to a place of “evil waters” (as it says in our Mishnah). This place of “evil waters” is one without Torah -- hence its name (water=Torah).

Why would this be *midah k'negged midah*?

Because the students who he had misled -- and these students' own students -- are now drinking “evil waters” rather than the sweet water of authentic Torah.

Hence, he, too, will not get to drink from anyone else's sweet water.

Avtalion said: Sages, be careful with your words lest you incur the penalty of exile and are called to a place where the waters of learning are impure and the disciples that come after you drink of them and die; and the Heavenly Name is consequently profaned.

The episode of David HaMelech and Bat Sheva has much to teach us about the severity of *chillul Hashem*, desecration of G-d's Name.

After David's marriage to Bat Sheva, the prophet Shemuel brought him a message from Hashem: “Why have you degraded the word of Hashem, to do what is evil in His eyes? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife for yourself as a wife, and you have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon” (*II Shemuel* 12:9).

In the Talmud our Rabbis discuss the *pasuk*, “Make a favorable sign for me, and let my enemies see it and be ashamed” (*Tehillim* 86:17), as it relates to this episode. The Talmud says (*Shabbat* 30a), “David said before the Kadosh Baruch Hu, ‘Master of the Universe, forgive me for that sin.’ He answered him, ‘You are forgiven.’ David said, ‘Make a sign for me in my lifetime.’ He replied, ‘In your lifetime I will not make it known; I will make it known in the lifetime of your son Shelomo.’ When Shelomo built the Beit HaMikdash, and he wished to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, the gates clung to each other and would not open. His desire was not granted until he said, ‘Remember the kind deeds of David Your servant’ (*II Divrei HaYamim* 6:42). At that moment, the faces of all David's enemies darkened with shame, and the whole nation knew that the Kadosh Baruch Hu had forgiven the sin.”

This is puzzling. If the Kadosh Baruch Hu had already forgiven the sin years ago, during David's lifetime, then why did He make it known only during Shelomo's reign? I think the explanation lies in the fact that actually, there was no sin in David's marriage to Bat Sheva, as our Sages affirm: “Anyone who says that David sinned is unequivocally wrong” (*Shabbat* 56a). David's actions were in accordance with the halachah. Since in those days all married men about to go out to battle would give their wives a bill of divorce, David was not in fact

guilty of taking another man's wife. If so, then why did Hashem send Shemuel to relay those accusing words to David?

David's error was one of *chillul Hashem*; he failed to take into account how his act would look to the common people, who were not so well-versed in halachah and would think badly of him, thus desecrating the Name of Heaven. A person of stature is required to be more meticulous in his behavior than a common man (see *Yoma* 86a), and even more so if he is the nation's anointed king! Thus, David was punished for doing something that *appeared* to be sinful. Accordingly, the prophet's first words to him were "Why have you degraded the word of Hashem?"

Chillul Hashem is unique: unlike any other sin, full atonement for a sin of *chillul Hashem* can come only through the sinner's death (ibid). This is why the Kadosh Baruch Hu made it known to the people that David was forgiven only after David's passing. This in itself was a sign for all to see that David's sin was one of *chillul Hashem* alone.

This was a great honor for David HaMelech, to be cleared before the whole nation of all guilt except for that of *chillul Hashem*. At the same time, though, it indicates that the Kadosh Baruch Hu will not overlook this sin, not even for a great and righteous person. On the contrary, the greater a person's stature, the more care he must take about how his actions look to others.



הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם. הֵלֵל אָמַר הָיוּ
 מִתְּלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן אֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם
 אֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵיב

Hillel and Shammai received the Torah from them. Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and bringing them close to the Torah.

The schools of Hillel and Shammai were known for the many differences they had as to interpretation of Jewish Law. When the Mishnah says that Hillel and Shammai “received from them,” surely the wording has significance. What is it? Who are the “them” being referred to? (In and of itself, this wording is not terribly unusual; “received from them” appears four other times in Avot, all in this chapter. The question is what significance it has when applied to Hillel and Shammai.)

I’d like to suggest that it means that Hillel and Shammai received from *each other*. In other words, the systematic and fundamental disagreements they had in interpretation of Jewish law were no barrier to their being receptive to each other’s words of Torah.

Furthermore, the respective positions each school held were based upon having had different traditions, not due to personal animus. In other words, they were teaching what they *received* -- not systematically inventing disagreements out of spite.

Hillel would say, “...*be of the disciples of Aaron--a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace.*” This is said in the name of Hillel alone. However, we know from other sources that even though they systematically disagreed with one another, Hillel and Shammai loved one another all the same. For, this is the way of Torah.

Even a father and son, a teacher and his student, when they are involved in Torah and become “enemies” of one another [in learning], don’t move from that place until they love each other again.

In the case of Hillel and Shammai, the talmud (*Yebamot* 13b) describes how they exemplified this trait. It says that even though one permitted (while

the other prohibited) certain types of marriages, this did not impede either side from pursuing matrimonial matches with the other. (In the rare instance where the potential match turned out to be one of these disputed pairings, there would be full disclosure, so that the couple could voluntarily seek a match that was acceptable to all parties.) In other words, they did not automatically consider the other's children as beyond the pale of consideration, simply due to differing customs. (The same applied as to sharing each other's vessels.)

We see that their differences were in principle -- not personal.

Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace

For the traditional understanding of these words in our mishnah, see the commentary of Rabbi Obadia of Bartenura, who explains at length how Aharon specialized in promoting peace between people. I would like to offer another interpretation, based on our Sages' statement that when Aharon died, the Clouds of Glory departed (*Rosh HaShanah* 3a). That is to say, the Clouds of Glory, which had accompanied and protected the Children of Israel throughout their sojourn in the wilderness, were only present due to Aharon's merit, and they departed along with him.

I would venture to suggest that Aharon's quality of loving peace was the merit that brought the Clouds of Glory. Measure for measure, the Kadosh Baruch Hu rewarded him by giving the Clouds, which promoted peace among the people. We learn this from the Midrash (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 1): "There were seven clouds: four surrounding them on all sides, one above, one below, and one that would go before them, leveling the valleys and flattening the heights, and it would destroy snakes and scorpions, and make a smooth path for them." As long as the Clouds of Glory were with them, they were walking as though on a carpeted floor, untroubled by the elements or by wild creatures, and never encountering rough underbrush or stony terrain. Obviously, this promoted peace, since people generally get bad-tempered when they find a lot of obstacles in their way and stumble over things. In fact, this is the main reason given in the Talmud for lighting Shabbat candles — so that the peaceful atmosphere should not be spoiled by having to stumble around in the dark, bumping into things (*Shabbat* 25b).

This explanation adds another dimension to words of the *pasuk* cited in Rabbi Obadia's commentary: "In peace and equity he went with Me." Our Sages say that these words refer to Aharon (*Sanhedrin* 6b). The Hebrew word for "equity,"

mishor, also denotes a smooth, level plain. Because Aharon concerned himself with making peace between Jews, in his merit the whole nation walked on level ground and enjoyed peace.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

אוהב שלום ורודף שלום

loving peace and pursuing peace.

Rabbi Chaim was amongst the students of of Aharon, a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace. Once, in the course of a visit to Canada, he was told of a couple enmeshed in a difficult marriage, the wife nagging her husband at each and every step.

Rather than fight or be bitter, the husband defended his wife's behavior, accepting the situation with equanimity.

Of him, Rav Chaim said, "A tzaddik like this is surely destined for *Olam HaBa*."

That doesn't mean that the rest of his days on *this* earth should be like *Geheinom*, though!

Accordingly, Rav Chaim went to the couple's home, to see what he could do to ease the situation.

Speaking to the wife, he tried to help her understand why she should be more careful and not be so harsh with her husband. To an extent, Rav Chaim's words got through to her, and things improved somewhat.

That did not make Rav Chaim stop, though.

He kept up with the situation, returning time after time.

Eventually, thanks to his merit and his efforts, there was peace in the home.

Such was the way of Rav Chaim -- he exemplified love of peace and the pursuit of peace.



הוא היה אומר נגד שְׂמָא אֲבַד שְׂמָהּ. וְדָלָא
 מוֹסִיף יְסִיף. וְדָלָא יְלִיף קְטָלָא חַיָּב. וְדָא שְׂתַמֵּשׁ
 בְּתַנְגָּא חֻלְףִי:
 משנה אבות א:יג

He used to say: He who aggrandizes his name, loses his name. He who does not increase his knowledge, decreases it. He who learns not, forfeits his life. He who makes unworthy use of the crown (of the Torah) shall pass away.

Rabbi Obadia from Bartenura (15th century), whose commentary is printed in all standard editions of the Mishnah, says that the one who advances his name (thereby destroying it) is someone who does so through using authority and intimidation.

I would like to suggest another possibility: perhaps it refers to one who, rather than be satisfied with being known simply as “Rabbi so and so,” obsesses on being known “the Rabbi, The Genius” or “the Rabbi, the Tzaddik” or “Our Teacher, Our Master.” We’re not talking about someone who actually deserves those kinds of titles (those kinds of people don’t need to campaign). Rather, we refer to someone who does not deserve such lofty appellations, yet won’t let go until the whole world calls him “The Rabbi, the GREAT ONE.”

Because his quest leads to such obsession, there’s no time left for learning. Hence, whatever Torah he knew before is forgotten. And whatever right he had to be called, “Rabbi” is lost as well.

This also what is meant when the Mishnah says, *And one who make personal use of the crown of Torah shall perish.* This fellow chose to feed his ego with the crown of Torah. Hence, there’s nothing left of him.

Contrast this with a story told about an authentic giant, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh ben Jacob Ashkenazi (17th century), known as the Chacham Tzvi.

He once received a letter addressing him with the most magnificent praises and appellations. He took the letter to the Beit Midrash where his students were busy studying.

When he got there, he made a point of standing at the front to read the letter aloud, from beginning to end, for all to hear.

The students were astonished, mystified.

“Why in the world would our great teacher be parading such things before us?”

Of course, there was an explanation.

“There is no doubt that I am unworthy of the extravagant titles assigned me by this letter writer,” said the Chacham Tzvi. “In fact, I am very far away from all of them.”

“I read them aloud to you for a reason. I wish to publicly accept upon myself a personal challenge: Recognizing my very low state, I shall try to work on myself. Perhaps, I will one day become worthy of what this letter writer believes about me. After all, I would not want to consider him a flatterer -- or a liar.”

He who does not increase his knowledge, decreases it.

We need to understand why the Sages considered it obligatory to continually increase one’s service of G-d and one’s Torah. The answer is that this is the way the Kadosh Baruch Hu acts towards us, as we learn from the Arizal’s explanation of the words we say each morning in the blessings before Keriat Shema, “Who renews in His goodness every day, constantly, the act of creation” (שער הכוונות דרושי ברכת השחר ד”ה ברכת הנותן ליעף כח). According to the Arizal, this means that the Kadosh Baruch Hu gives new strength to man every morning, as is said in the *pasuk*, “They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (*Eichah* 3:23). By regularly demanding more of himself in his learning and service of G-d, a Jew shows his gratitude to the Kadosh Baruch Hu for the renewed energies he receives every day.

When a person lives by this principle, the Kadosh Baruch Hu immediately rewards him with increased abilities. He will find himself making new achievements, praying with greater *deveikut* and rising to higher levels of understanding in his learning, going beyond his former limits. Our Sages expressed it succinctly: “Anyone who increases, is given an increase” (*Taanit* 31a). Obviously the converse is also true: when a person serves Hashem out of habit, like a robot, and doesn’t strive for higher levels, his spiritual capabilities wither.



הוא הִזָּה אוֹמֵר אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי מִי לִי. וְכִשְׁאֲנִי
 לְעַצְמִי מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עֲכָשְׁיוּ אִימָתִי:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵיךְ

*He used to say: If I am not for myself who will be
 for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I?
 And if not now, when?*

The Mishnah says, *If I am not for myself, who is for me?* In order to understand this, let's remember a Rashi in Chumash, in Sefer Shemot. The verse has G-d speaking to Moshe, telling him, **אני יקוק** - *I am Hashem*.

Rashi explains what this phrase, *I am Hashem* means -- in other words, he explains the message that G-d is trying to convey when telling this to Moshe.

What Rashi says is that G-d is reminding Moshe that He can be relied upon to ultimately reward people for the good they do -- and that He can be relied upon to punish them for their transgressions as well.

As long as man is cognizant of that simple truth, the **אני יקוק**, he will not sin; he will not desire to anything but that which is good.

One understanding of the Mishnah's phrase, **אם אין אני לי** is that is saying that if man does not keep **אני יקוק** on his mind, then he will be in a situation of **מי לי** -- Who will be for me? Who will protect me from sin?

David HaMelech said in Tehillim, *And as for me, closeness to G-d is good*. David HaMelech's primary aspiration was to be close to G-d. Even when Hashem related to him with Divine Justice, rather than Mercy, David HaMelech appreciated the closeness that the Divine Contact had brought him. This is consistent with the Rabbis' statement that just as one is obliged to bless G-d for the **טוב**, so must one bless Him for the **רעה**.



שְׁמַאי אוֹמֵר עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קָבֵעַ. אֲמֹר מְעַט
וְעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה וְהוּי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסִבָּר
פְּנִים יְפוֹת:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אִטו

Shammai says: Make your study of the Torah a fixed habit. Say little and do much, and receive all men with a cheerful face.

The Mishnah says, **קבע** עשה תורתך -- make your Torah [study] **קבע**. The word **קבע** contains the letters **ק - ע - ב - ב**. These letters could be rearranged to form the word, **עקב**. One word (**קבע**) means to make something a permanent fixture; the other (**עקב**) means (among other things) heel.

By way of creative wordplay, let me suggest that the Mishnah is saying as follows: One should see to that he fulfills each and every mitzvah of the Torah (that is, to make them **קבע**) -- including those that are commonly taken lightly by the masses (that is, tread upon with the heel **עקב**).

Chief among the latter is the mitzvah of Torah study, which is especially taken lightly by the masses. In other words, one should see it that he is **קבע עתים** for Torah, that is to set (**קבע**) fixed times for this mitzvah that the average person seems to take so lightly that it is almost as if he treads upon it with his heel (**עקב**).

Although it's a bit of a digression, I might add that one who adheres to a consistent, fixed schedule for Torah study -- even though it might only constitute a small percentage of the time spent on other activities that day -- is considered an **עמל**, that is one who "labors" at Torah.

This might seem somewhat incongruous: After all, what's he doing other than sitting down for a *shiur* or with a *chavrutta* for a small portion of his day?

However, let me explain.

It is known to one and all that the times we spend on Talmud Torah are exceeding precious -- to the *yetser hara*. In fact, it cannot stand it.

Whenever we sit down to learn, the *yetser hara* is relentless. It is full of suggestions, all designed to convince us to attend to all kinds of other matters.

"Weren't you up late last night? You deserve to stay in bed a little longer this morning! What difference does it make if you miss just one learning session?"

I'm sure your *chavrutta* won't mind." (Alternatively, "I'm sure that the Rabbi won't even notice your absence!")

Or, as we sit in *shiur* or as our *chavrutta* is speaking to us, they *yetser* has other ideas: "Have you really thought through all the angles on that deal that you're about to sign? Are you so certain? No? Let's try and work it through right now!"

There's no doubt about it: It takes great dedication and stupendous effort to not listen to those entreaties.

Those who succeed at pushing the *yetser* away deserve the highest praise. They could not have done this without some very hard work.

This is why they are considered as עמלים, *laborers* in Torah.

No matter if their full-time job is something else.

The Mishnah continues that one should *make Torah study a permanent fixture of your life. Say little and do much. And receive every man with a pleasant countenance.*

Aside from the fact that they were all said by the same person (Shammai), perhaps there's another connection between the above exhortations.

As we've said previously, *making Torah a permanent fixture of one's life*, can only be accomplished by going to battle with the *yetser hara*.

What does that have to do with *Say little and do much*, the next words in the Mishnah?

Perhaps, it's telling us that there's no surer way of calling the *yetser* to action than announcing to him beforehand what you'd like to do. Especially if you're proclaiming that you wish to do that which the *yetser* most abhors: Talmud Torah.

Therefore, just go about your business. Skip the fanfare. Sit down to learn.

(We also know that, according to the Rabbis, the way of the righteous is to do much and say little. That's the opposite of what the *reshayim* do.)

I'd like to add another thought as to how the different elements of the Mishnah are connected.

The Rabbis teach that whoever interrupts his "words of torah" in order to engage in ordinary conversation deserves a "simmering coal" in the mouth.

We therefore see that if someone has something other than words of Torah to discuss (during the time already set aside for learning), he should -- at best -- be as brief as possible. For, this is the time he has made his Torah קבע.

What if a poor Jew happens to show up at your home, right when you've just sat down to your fixed learning time? Do you wave him away? After all, one is not permitted to interrupt one's learning session!

The answer is, "Don't simply point to your gemara and let the fellow know he's not welcome."

Rather, give him a smile. Invite him in. Sit him down. Offer him something to eat. Something to drink.

Treat the man with courtesy, generosity, and friendship.

Not only is this permitted, but if the host decides to throw the poor man out the door so as to not "waste" more than a few precious moments of learning, that learning will count for nothing. This is because the goal of learning is that it should bring you to *ma'aseh*, to deed.

What then is the distinction? Hasn't the gemara told us that we shouldn't interrupt our learning? That when it's time to learn, it's time to learn -- and to not be distracted or diverted?

It would seem that our case and the case of the gemara are not identical. We are talking about interrupting for the sake of the mitzvah of accommodating guests; the gemara was talking about doing so for something mundane.

In fact, the Rabbis tell us specifically that the mitzvah of accommodating guests takes precedence over talmud torah. Not only that, but seeing to the needs of flesh and blood guests has priority over greeting the Shechina!

This last principle is learned from Avraham Avinu. Upon noticing the approach of what he understood to be hungry travellers, he ran to greet them -- despite the fact that he had been communing with the Shechina at that very moment! Only afterwards did he return to communing with the Divine Presence.

One might ask how Avraham Avinu could have been so audacious: Would one leave a king waiting in order to tend to the needs of one of the king's servants?

Avraham understood, of course, that this was no ordinary king. This was the King of kings. And, by becoming engaged in *gemilut chasadim*, Avraham was not defying the King, but emulating Him.

This idea could be tied in with that of departing one's learning for the sake of indigent guests as well. For, the Rabbis tell us that when one is deeply engaged in Torah study, the Shechina hovers over that place. Not only that, but when it comes to a talmid chacham, the Rabbis tell us that G-d Himself participates in the learning.

Despite this, needy guests come first.

Even though it might mean walking away from one's learning.

And, it might mean walking away from the *Shechina*.

Make your study of the Torah a fixed habit

I came across a very surprising statement, quoted from a *midrash*: “Anyone who fixes specific times for Torah study is called a nullifier of the Torah, as is said, ‘It is time to act for Hashem; they have nullified Your Torah’” (*Tehillim* 119:127). Yet the Gemara tells us that when a person is brought in for judgment he is asked, “Did you fix times for Torah study?” (*Shabbat* 31a).

I think the contradiction may be resolved as follows: Shelomo HaMelech wrote, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every endeavor under the heavens” (*Kohelet* 3:1). That is to say, a time was set for everything in this world, except for Torah study, for which no time was set, because the obligation to study it rests upon a Jew at every moment of his life. “You shall ponder it day and night” says the well-known *pasuk* in *Joshua* (1:8). The whole universe stands upon the Torah and those who study it: “If not for My covenant, day and night, I did not put the statutes of heaven and earth in place” (*Yirmiyahu* 33:25; see also *Pesachim* 68b).

A man is not obligated to study Torah only in his free time. Rather, even when occupied with physical needs such as eating, he can study instead of occupying his mind with inconsequential thoughts. While working on tasks that don't require much mental concentration, he can think over what he has learned or focus on essential concepts such as Hashem's Presence and Oneness. In the preface to *Sefer HaChinuch*, the author enumerates six *mitzvot tamidiot*, commandments that are applicable at all times, for every Jew, every day of his life.

Therefore, as the Midrash says, “Anyone who fixes specific times for Torah study,” that is, someone who limits his learning to certain hours of the day only, and pays no attention to spiritual matters while he's busy with material necessities, “is called a nullifier of the Torah,” because Torah was never meant to be compartmentalized and kept only for a morning or evening *shiur*.

At work, most people don't devote every thought, every moment, to performing the tasks they do for a living. They think about their families and all sorts of other things while working, without any noticeable harm to their job

performance. So if the task at hand doesn't require your full attention, why not focus the unoccupied part of your brain on spiritual matters?

Several of the Tannaim, men of staggering spiritual stature, were called after the crafts they practiced for a living, such as Rabi Yitzchak the Blacksmith or Rabi Yochanan the Shoemaker. Now, these were no simple workmen, and they certainly didn't consider their crafts to be their main occupation in life, or set aside eternal matters in favor of temporal affairs. Why, then, were they known by these designations?

What these names come to teach us is that even during the minimal hours that they spent working to support themselves and their families, their minds were full of Torah. Even while engaged in ironwork or shoemaking, Rabi Yitzchak was still Rabi Yitzchak, and Rabi Yochanan was still Rabi Yochanan.

Torah is meant to permeate every area of your life. This is why the mishnah says, "Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life," and not, "Make a fixed time for your Torah study."

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

אמור מעט ועשה הרבה
Say little and do much.

Massan Bochbot was one of the more prominent Jewish merchants in the city of Mogador. His business endeavors were quite far-reaching; in short, most of what he did met with great success.

One year, prior to Sukkot, he travelled to a nearby city to purchase etrogim that he would then sell in Mogador.

On his return, he was jumped by bandits.

Their intent was to rob him of his money and then kill him.

Massan had secreted away a substantial sum, five hundred doro. Understanding very clearly what kind of danger he was in, Massan vowed that if he should somehow survive, he would donate the entire amount to Rabbi Hadaan, son of Rav Chaim Pinto. Massan was hoping that the merit of Rav Chaim Pinto (and that of the substantial donation) would help him survive the attack.

Massan did come out of it alive.

As thankful as he was for being spared, once he returned to Mugador and the fear of dying was no longer before him, he decided that he wasn't quite prepared to part with as much as he originally said he would. Yes, it was a vow. And, yes, the merit of that vow and the merit of Rav Chaim Pinto had certainly figured large as to why he was saved.

Still, five hundred doro was a huge sum!

It's not that he was about to forget the vow entirely; it's just that he'd be donating a lesser amount.

None of this was hidden from Rav Chaim: all had been revealed to him in a dream. He summoned Rabbi Hadaan and told him the entire story. He instructed his son to not accept a single coin less than the full five hundred.

Sure enough, the merchant appeared at Rabbi Hadaan's door, one hundred doro and five etrogim in hand.

"Thank You so much for the etrogim!" said Rabbi Hadaan.

"Rav Hadaan, I have one hundred doro for you as well! All, for tzeddakah!" answered the merchant.

"Five hundred is the correct sum; I will not accept a single doro less -- for that is what you pledged" Rav Hadaan told the startled Massan.

Massan was stunned: "How could this be? How could he have known?"

Rav Hadaan told him that everything had been revealed to Rav Chaim in a dream, that Rav Chaim had summoned him to tell him about it, and that Rav Chaim had instructed him to not accept anything less than the full pledge.

The balance of four hundred was handed over immediately.

The Rav then gave him some good advice: "Better to not vow at all, than to vow and not fulfill.

And, when one is unsure as to whether he'll follow through, it's best to not say, 'I pledge the sum of . . .' Say instead, 'I volunteer the sum of . . .'

Massan had learned his lesson.

With that, the Rav handed him back the five hundred.



רָבֵן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב
וְהִסְתַּלַּק מִן הַסֵּפֶק וְאַל תִּרְבֶּה לְעֵשֶׂר אֲמִדוֹת:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵיטוּ

Rabban Gamaliel says: Provide yourself with a teacher and remove yourself from doubt, and do not accustom yourself to give tithes by estimation.

The Mishnah says that one should make for oneself a “Rav,” stay away from doubt, and not accustom ourselves to tithe imprecisely.

Although one could say that these three admonitions appear together only because they were all said by the same person (Rabban Gamliel), I would like to suggest that they are thematically linked as well.

The basic idea is that when all of one’s decisions are made in consultation with one’s personal Rav, doubt will not exist. When would it happen that one will be forced to “act according to estimation?” That lack of certainty occurs when one has not designated for oneself a Rav.

When one has a personal Rav, ספק becomes פסק. (*Sa-fek* [doubt] becomes *pe-sak*).

The Rabbis in Massechet Berachot tell us something similar: *Whoever takes benefit from this world without offering a blessing beforehand, has sinned.* (He is considered as if he had taken from that which is *kodesh* and used it for something personal and mundane, which is called *me’ilah*).

The gemara continues and asks, “*What’s his remedy?*” It answers, “*He should go to a Chacham.*” To this, the gemara protests: “*But this sin is already accomplished; what good will it do to go to the Chacham at this point?*” The answer: “*Let him go to the Chacham beforehand -- and have him teach him the laws of berachot! That way, he’ll no longer come to sin!*”

In other words, the trip to the *Chacham* will free him of *sefeikot*. (For, he will know the correct blessing).



שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּנוֹ אוֹמֵר כָּל יְמֵי גְדֻלָּתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים
 וְלֹא מָצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב אֶלָּא שְׁתִּיקָה. וְלֹא הַמְדַרְשׁ
 הוּא הָעֵקֶר אֶלָּא הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה דְבָרִים
 מְבִיא חֲטָא:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵין

Shimon his son says: All my days have I grown up among the wise and I have not found anything better for a man than silence. Studying Torah is not the most important thing rather fulfilling it. Whoever multiplies words causes sin.

Rabbi Shimon makes a point of saying that all his life he has been raised among the wise and found nothing better for the body than silence.

That's what he has learned from being amongst the wise? Isn't that quite obvious? Any fool could have told him the same thing!

We even have a verse in *Mishlei* (Proverbs) that says, *Even the fool is silent* . . . Therefore, what wisdom would one need in order to arrive at the same conclusion?

The Mishnah's wording suggests an answer.

It says that that there's nothing better for the *body* than silence. Perhaps the Mishnah means is, that while silence might very well be good for the body, the *neshama* needs something else. We see this in the gemara Chulin: *What אומנות (craft) should one develop in this world? He should make himself into a mute. I would have thought this would apply as well when one is learning Torah. However, the verse says (Tehillim 48:2), "Justice shall you speak."* Isn't it curious that the gemara used the word **אומנות** - *craft*, in reference to silence? Is it really such a skill? Maybe there's a difference between the silence practiced by the fool versus that practiced by the *chacham*.

I mean as follows: The fool practices wisdom so as to conceal his foolishness; no skill required. All he has to do is keep his mouth shut. Surely, Rabbi Shimon did not have this type of silence in mind.

However, great wisdom *is* required for another type of silence, namely that of the Chacham. What skill is that? It's the wisdom to know when to keep silent -- and when *not* to.

To chatter all day long, no great wisdom (or skill) is needed. To never say a word about *anything*, no great wisdom (or skill) is required either.

However, the greatest of wisdom is demanded in knowing how to distinguish between that which is worthy of comment and that which is not. That which is worthy of being repeated versus that which is not. That which fulfills a purpose that the Torah considers valid versus that which does not.

Shlomo HaMelech taught us this principle in Kohelet 3:7: . . . *a time to be silent and a time to speak.*

Often, there are things that seem like *bitul Torah* (a time wasting neglect of Torah study), but are, in fact, a fulfillment of Torah in its highest form. This principle is stated in the gemara Chulin, *Some times, the bitul of Torah is its foundation*, meaning that not only are there times for study, but there are times when one needs to do something that superficially seems like neglect of Torah, but is actually what gives it an essential foundation.

Similarly, there's another gemara that says that just as there is an responsibility to say that which will be heard (meaning, reproach), so is there an obligation to remain silent, when the reproach will be fruitless.

We therefore see that while, as a blanket rule, one could say that silence is the best policy as far as the body is concerned, that doesn't apply to the spirit. For, the spirit is nourished by more and more words of Torah and words of tefillah, but the physical body is served to its greatest degree by silence. The physical body is for the doing of deeds, for its purpose is action. This why the continuation of our Mishnah is, *The essential thing is not study, but deed.*

That part of the Mishnah refers to the physical body. When it comes to the spirit, however, there's no doubt that the more that one engages in words of Torah and tefillah, the better. For, that's what brings greatest reward towards the *olam haba*, which is the world of souls.

Studying Torah is not the most important thing rather fulfilling it.

It almost seems that this goes without saying. What believing Jew would ever dream of saying, "I'll study Torah, but I won't do what it says"? That would put him in the category of the absolutely wicked, since anyone who refuses to do basic, daily mitzvot such as tefillin, Keriat Shema, and so on, is called a *rasha*, even if he studies Torah all day long.

I would raise another question as well: if the mishnah means to tell us that the main purpose of Torah study is that we should do the mitzvot, then why does it use the word *midrash*, rather than *talmud* as in the Sages' dictum in *Kiddushin* (40b), "Great is *talmud* (Torah study), for *talmud* leads to deed."

Apparently, the mishnah is not simply saying that the main purpose of Torah study is to do the mitzvot, but something a little more sophisticated, and the clue to this idea is the use of the word *midrash*. I believe that this mishnah is talking about two major stages in a Torah student's life. It is directed at those who learn in yeshivah as youngsters, and then, when they grow up and get married, go out to work to support their families. The mishnah is cautioning these Jews to remember that the Torah they learned is not just part of their carefree school days when they only had to perform in the classroom, but is meant to be put into practice now that they are out in the "real world" with all its challenges.

In the world of business, outside the protective walls of the *beit midrash*, it is easy to stumble into dishonest practices, *lashon hara* and *rechilus*, and a host of other sins. Now that you are out in the world you have come to the essential thing, the real test of whether your studies have molded you into a true *ben Torah*, who lives what he has learned.

And if not, then what good were all those years spent in the *beit midrash*?

Studying Torah is not the most important thing rather fulfilling it.

Our Rabbis said, "When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on high, the ministering angels came before the Kadosh Baruch Hu and said, 'Master of the Universe, what is this one, born of woman, doing here among us?' He said to them, 'He has come up to receive the Torah.' They said to Him, 'Give it to us.' the Kadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, 'Answer the angels.' Moshe said to Him, 'I am afraid they will burn me with the breath of their mouths.' the Kadosh Baruch Hu said to him, 'Hold onto my Throne of Glory, and answer them.' Moshe then said to them, 'This is a Torah in which it is said, "I am Hashem, your G-d, who took you out from the land of Egypt. Did you ever go down into Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Furthermore, what do you need the Torah for? It says in it, you shall not murder, you shall not steal; do you have any evil inclination trying to tempt you into committing these sins?" They immediately admitted to the Kadosh Baruch Hu that the Torah should be given to Israel" (*Shabbat* 88b).

Now, clearly this story is not meant to be understood simply. Did the angels not know that they have no *yetzer hara*, and that they didn't go down to Egypt,

until Moshe Rabbeinu pointed out these facts to them? And didn't they know for what purpose he was there with them in the heavenly heights? Why, then, did they ask, "What is this one, born of woman, doing here among us?" We know from the Midrash that the angels stopped chanting their songs of praise when the Torah was given (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9), from which we can infer that they knew Moshe had come to receive the Torah and give it to the Jewish people.

We know as well that Moshe did not come uninvited. The Torah clearly states, "And to Moshe He said, 'Come up to Hashem'" (*Shemot* 24:1), and it also states, "Moshe ascended to G-d, and Hashem called out to him from the mountain...." (*Shemot* 19:3). Is it conceivable that the angels, the servants of the King, meant to interfere with the King's favorite, whom the King Himself had personally summoned to His royal palace? Obviously the servants have no say in the matter. Besides, if they wished to submit an appeal that the Torah be given to them instead of the Jewish people, why didn't they say so as soon as the Kadosh Baruch Hu summoned Moshe to come up? Why wait until the last minute, when Moshe was already there to receive it?

It seems safe to assume that the ministering angels knew perfectly well that the Torah as a set of commandments or a code of behavior was irrelevant to them, yet they wanted it nonetheless. I would posit that they viewed it as a holy object that would protect them, like an amulet.

Many people, too, keep certain holy books or *kameot* as a *shemirah*, for their protective value, even though they aren't capable of understanding what's written in them.

What Moshe was telling the angels was this: the holy Torah is not a *kamea*, an amulet. A *kamea* has protective properties, irrespective of its owner's comprehension of the words written on it, because those properties are built in, as it were — the *kamea* was written for the purpose of protection. The Torah, however, is meant to be studied. Yes, it does afford protection for those who study it and follow its precepts (see *Sotah* 21a), but not for those who don't study it or keep its commandments. Merely possessing it is not enough. As our Sages said, "Anyone who involves himself with observance involves himself with study; anyone who does not involve himself with observance does not involve himself with study" (*Yevamot* 109b).

As for the question of why the angels didn't voice their appeal right away when the Kadosh Baruch Hu summoned Moshe, I would answer that the angels

thought that the Kadosh Baruch Hu was merely going to teach the Torah to Moshe, who would then return to the earthly realm and teach it to Israel; they didn't realize that Moshe was actually going to take the Torah away with him. When they saw that the Torah was not going to remain in the heavenly realm to protect them, they were distressed and became angry with Moshe. That was why Moshe was afraid to tell them that since they didn't follow the Torah's precepts, the Torah was no protection for them in any case.

Moshe Rabbeinu's answer to the angels turns out to be a fine *derash* on our mishnah. The Torah was certainly given to be studied in depth, but the essential thing is to actually fulfill all the precepts and commandments that one learns by studying it. Since you angels are not equipped to perform the mitzvot, and most of them aren't even applicable to you, it is best to let it be given to the Jewish people. They can fulfill its commandments, and since their Torah study and observance upholds the entire universe — including you angels — you too will benefit. In fact, this is the way to get the protection you desire, for unlike a *kamea*, which only protects the one who keeps it on his person, the Torah will protect you from a distance, from its proper place among men in the earthly realm.



רָבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר עַל שְׁלוֹשָׁה
 דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד עַל הַדִּין וְעַל הָאֱמֶת וְעַל
 הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר (זְכַרְיָה ח) אֱמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט שְׁלוֹם
 שֶׁפָּטוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אֵיחָ

Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel says: On three things the world is sustained: on truth, on judgment, and on peace, as it is it says (Zechariah 8:16): “Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace.”

Rabban Gamliel says that the world stands upon three things: law, truth, and peace. In my opinion, his words are directed towards those for whom Torah study is their profession. He does not wish them to think that each and every endeavor aside from learning should necessarily be outside of their realm of involvement.

Given the great importance attached to Torah learning, it is certainly true that Torah scholars should primarily focus on learning. However, it is certainly the responsibility of everyone who is capable of doing so, to help uphold Torah values, help bring fellow Jews back to Torah, and help maintain peace between man and his brother. Is it possible that when a Torah scholar sees two Jews quarreling, that he should turn his back and say, “What does this have to do with me?” just because becoming involved might lead to losing time from one’s learning?

Rather, the scholar (like everyone else who is capable) should urge the parties to go to go to a Beit Din or some other intermediary so that they can resolve their dispute and end the bickering.

Rabban Gamliel is saying that whoever thinks that his private learning exempts him from all these things, makes his Torah into a mockery. We are brought to this world for no reason other than to make it a better place to live and to contribute towards having a righteous society.

The Torah scholar in particular has a great deal to offer, because “the gates of wisdom” are opened before them. Therefore, it is especially their responsibility to do whatever is possible to help their fellow Jews. Such has always been the

practice of the great *tzaddikim* throughout the ages. Never did they consider it a waste of time to help another Jew, nor did they shrink from becoming actively involved in making the world a better place.

Rabbinic sources are replete with stories about how our greatest Rabbis, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel amongst them, did all kinds of public good, whether for the community or for the individual. In cases where there was no one else to help, never did they say, “It’s not my job” or “It will take me a way from my study.”

I said that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel was specifically addressing Torah scholars here, as opposed to those who don’t have a strong background in Torah study. One reason I believe that is because, when it comes to adjudicating disputes, deep knowledge of Torah is essential. Lacking that kind of background, even those with the best of intentions could misjudge where true justice lies, in the Torah’s estimation. Not only are the Torah’s laws exceedingly intricate, but they are sometimes counterintuitive. And, they are often quite at variance with secular norms.

Only a Torah scholar is equipped to judge properly. Given that Torah is the basis of the world, just think what would happen if these kinds of matters were left up to those who are least qualified think in a Torah fashion! It would destroy the very world!

And just think what would happen if the Torah scholar who was called upon to sit on a Din Torah had shunned contact with the world up to that time? He wouldn’t know how to apply his Torah knowledge or how to properly understand the nature of the dispute!

Therefore, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel is telling them to not entirely isolate themselves, wrongly thinking that to do otherwise would be *bitul Torah*.

There’s another way of explaining Mishnah’s use of the terms, **אמת, דין, ושלו**. When two come before a Beit Din for litigation, the judge is obligated to judge with **אמת**, with *truth*. (In other words, according to the law). Once the decision is announced, it is inevitable that one of the litigants will see himself as having lost. He’ll carry forth his resentment and the two litigants will continue to quarrel. The judge is responsible to see to it that this does not occur. Rather, he should take steps to see to it that the litigants leave the court room in peace. In other words, not only does he have a responsibility towards **אמת**, which means to decide according to the law, but he also has responsibility towards **שלו**, meaning that his **דין** of **אמת** must end up with

שלום (to the extent that this is realistic). This is why the Mishnah brings a proof from the verse in Zechariah, *Truth, and a judgement of peace, you should administer at your [city] gates*. I'd like to go further with this and suggest another interpretation as well.

Again, the Mishnah mentions three elements, **שלום, דין, אמת**.

Let us suggest that *shalom* reflects back on the judge, not just on the court case or on the co-litigant.

What this means is that the judge should not think, now that he determined that A owes money to B, that A intentionally stole from B and that the judge can therefore look at A as a thief from here on in. (And, hate him as well -- after all, isn't a thief to be hated?)

Rather, the judge should find it within himself to believe that there must have been extenuating circumstances or that, quite possibly, there's something else about the situation that should lead him to believe that A is really not so bad after all.

Shlomo HaMelech already pointed this out, in his great wisdom, when he said *The thief is not to be scorned, if he has stolen to satisfy his soul, because he is hungry*.

This idea of **שלום, דין, אמת** can be explained in yet another way. It often occurs that Rabbanim and Dayanim have fundamental disagreements as to how to apply the halakha to a particular case. Since the goal is a *din* of **אמת** (or should be), the arguments can (and should) get pretty vociferous at times. Each Rav will bring proofs so in order to establish the **אמת**? Perhaps, all they're doing is showing off. Perhaps one of the Rabbanim is for his point of view and attempt to counter the proofs brought by his opponent. All of this is perfectly appropriate.

However, human nature being what it is -- and Rabbanim are, after all, human beings -- how can we ascertain whether they are engaging in this back and forth for the right reason? How do we know whether they're doing just being stubborn, because he does not wish to admit defeat. Perhaps, **אמת** has nothing to do with it -- all he wants to do is to demonstrate how much more clever he is (or more learned) than the other Rav.

How is one to know?

I would say that one way to tell would be what happens at the end: Once the dust settles and the decision is reached, do they depart as friends and colleagues? In short, have they left in **שלום**?

This is reminiscent of the gemara in Kiddushin that speaks of a Rav and his student, or a father and his son, who vociferously contend with one another in learning. The gemara says that they do not part until they return to their former state, of having affection one for the other.

This is another reason why the Mishnah says that the world rests upon the foundation of **שלום** ו**דין**, **אמת**. That is, despite the requirement that the *din* be based in **אמת**, the judges must remain **בשלום** with one another. If, on the other hand, the result is needless controversy and hatred, then it is certain that the original *din* was formulated not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of ego. Therefore, it cannot be **אמת**. In fact, it is *shekker* -- a lie. We can now see another reason why the verse from Zechariah (**שלום שפטו בשעריכם אמת ומשפט**) -- *Truth, and a judgement of peace*) was brought.

The very nature of judgement is that there will not be **שלום** *at the time of the deliberations*. After all, how are the Rabbis supposed to get to the bottom of the **אמת** if they are restricted from disagreeing with one another? Therefore, it cannot be that this is what the Mishnah (or the verse) is saying.

Rather, it is telling us that, while the Rabbis are not expected to remain **בשלום** as they debate, they *are* expected to leave that way. If they don't, then we know that the *din* was not **אמת**.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

אמת, דין, ושלום

In the city of Essaouira, the Jews lived with simplicity and sincerity to a great degree. Their community embodied **שלום** ו**דין**, **אמת**. He who had a financial dispute with his neighbor didn't run to hire an attorney, rather he went to the *dayanim*. The *dayanim* would hear the case in all its detail. Then, they would deliberate.

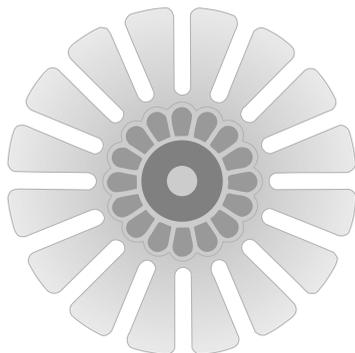
Meanwhile, the complainant would go to the cemetery of his holy ancestors and prostrate himself upon the graves of *tzaddikim*, praying to Hashem that the *dayanim* would be able to see the issue clearly and issue a *din* of **אמת**. Conflict did not rage between the disputants; all that each wanted was that the *din* would come out as **אמת**.

This atmosphere pervaded other spheres as well. For instance, the city had two doctors -- but neither of them had much business from the Jews. The Jews had another doctor: *Emunat Chachamim* - Faith in the Sages.

Whoever needed to be saved from sickness would go to the cometary, to the grave of the tzaddik Rav Chaim Pinto. The Jews trusted that the merit of this tzaddik would protect them. The sick rarely went to the doctor; they went instead to pray -- at the grave of Rav Chaim and in the Beit HaKenesset. And, they went to the tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe Aharon to get his blessing.

They would also light candles in honor of the soul of the departed Rav Chaim. Then, if it was still necessary, they would seek the advice of one of the physicians.

Such was the pattern of life, when it was led according to **אמת, דין, ושלום**.



Chapter Two

רבי אומר

איזורי

דרך ישורה

שיבור

לו האדם

כל שרזיא

לעושה תפארת

ורתפארת לו

מן האדם

ורזוי זהיר

במצוה קלה

כבחמורה

שאין אתה יודע

מרגן שכן של

מצוה והוי

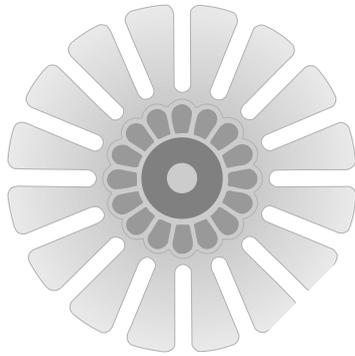
מחשב הפסד מצוה

כנגד שכרה

עברה ושכר

כנגד

הפסדה...



רבי אומר איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם
 כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן
 האדם. והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה שאין
 אתה יודע מתן שכרו של מצות. והוי מחשב
 הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה ושכר עברה כנגד
 הפסדה. והסתכל בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא
 לידי עברה דע מה למעלה ממך עין רואה ואזן
 שומעת וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין:
 משנה אבות ב:א

Rabbi Judah the Prince says: Which is the straight path that a man should choose for himself? That which is an honor to him and elicits honor from his fellow man. Be as scrupulous about a light precept as of a weighty one, for you do not know the reward allotted for each precept. Balance the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a precept against the gain and the accruing from a transgression against the loss it involves. Reflect on three things and you will never come to sin: Know what is above you --a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds recorded in a book.

Our mishnah begins, . . . *Which is the straight path that a man should choose for himself? That which is an honor to him and elicits honor from his fellow man.*

It continues, *Be as scrupulous about a light precept as of a weighty one . . .*

Is there a connection between these two admonitions? In other words, do they have anything more in common than their both being attributed to the same teacher, Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi? I believe so.

Let us have a look at how the author of the *Tur*, the great code of Jewish law written in the early 14th century, begins that massive work. He quotes the famous mishnah in Avoth, that *one should be bold as a tiger . . . to do the will of*

his Father in Heaven. He then notes that, when listing the key traits essential to best serving G-d, boldness was listed first:

This is because it is an overarching principle in serving the Creator, for it sometimes happens that despite wanting to do a mitzvah, some might refrain from doing so, because of those who might ridicule him.

This does not mean, though, that one should have no concern whatsoever for how his religious practice appears to others. On the contrary, Rabbinic writings tell us to take care to not act in ways that appear outlandish, even if we're doing so entirely for the sake of Heaven. This means that, when deviating from the norm -- for instance, when doing something ordinarily reserved for the uniquely righteous -- one should do so privately (or not at all), so as to not invite ridicule.

(The sefer, *Messilat Yesharim*, makes the following distinction: When it comes to normative *halacha*, one must be as bold as a tiger and not be intimidated by what onlookers might think or say. However, when it comes to extra strictures that are done as a matter of *chassidut*, it is best to not do them at all rather than evoke ridicule or create the impression that normative practice is inadequate.)

Similarly, our Mishnah admonishes us to practice each and every mitzvah meticulously, but juxtaposes the parallel admonition to be careful to always glorify G-d's Name. When one's public display of *chassidut* provokes ridicule rather than glory of G-d's name, then one is acting against Hashem's interests, not for them.

It goes without saying that one should not antagonize those around him for the sake of doing something "extra."

For instance, while it's certainly quite praiseworthy to rise early so as to pray with the sunrise, one may not do so at the cost of someone else's sleep. Should one do so anyway, selfishly thinking only about the great reward that awaits him and with no regard for those around him, he will discover that he has gained no reward in heaven whatsoever.

(It is said of the great Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the 19th century *Chatam Sofer*, that, when staying up late into the night to learn, he would remove his shoes - despite the severe cold and frigid ground - so as to not disturb his family's sleep.)

רבי אומר איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבחר לו האדם

Which is the straight path that a person should choose for himself? “To choose” is written in this mishnah as **שיבחר** (that one should choose), and Rabbi Obadiah of Bartenura explains that **שיבחר** is equivalent to **שיבחרור**, the word that is normally used when speaking of selecting the desirable thing out of a variety or mixture. If so, why doesn’t the mishnah simply say **שיבחרור** in the first place? Not everyone who learns *Pirkei Avot* is such a highly accomplished scholar, so why use an obscure term, found only in Mishnaic Hebrew, that leaves the meaning unclear?

It may be that Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi wanted to convey a warning through this choice of wording, that if a person doesn’t keep steadfastly to a straight path, but instead shifts back and forth between different paths, he ends up not gaining what either path has to offer. He won’t get anywhere, and remaining idle will lead him into sin, as it says in *Ketubot* (59b).

To get this message across, Rabi used a word with a double meaning, a word suggesting idleness in addition to choosing. We find this term referring to idleness in the term **שדה בורה**, for example, a fallow field bringing forth no crops. And in the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 104a) we find the same Hebrew terminology in the phrase **אם אוביר ולא אעביר**, and again, Rashi explains that it is talking about leaving a field idle. Our mishnah, then, is hinting to us that if a person does not choose a straight path and keep to it, he will end up being idle, a **בור** (which also means an uncouth, ignorant person). Rabi had a purpose in mind when he used this obscure word instead of a clearer term — he wanted the reader to dig a little deeper and find the full meaning.

Balance the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a precept against the gain and the accruing from a transgression against the loss it involves.

Rabbeinu Bachya wrote, in his introduction to *Parshat Bemidbar*, “All of a man’s deeds are weighed, and the Kaddosh Baruch Hu weighs all transgressions, both major and minor, and he punishes for them according to the magnitude of the major transgression and the pettiness of the minor transgression, and He forgets nothing, and it is impossible for a man to fathom His justice, for the power of the human intellect is weak, and he cannot grasp how Hashem weighs the deeds of the righteous and the wicked.”

The Rambam says something similar in *Hilchot Teshuvah* (3:2): “A person whose sins outweigh his merits dies immediately in his wickedness, and a nation

that has a majority of sins immediately perishes, and likewise the entire world, if their sins outweighed their merits, they would be destroyed immediately. This weighing does not go according to the number of merits and sins, but according to their magnitude. One merit might be equal in weight to many sins, and one sin might be equal in weight to many merits. Only the Lord of All Knowledge does this weighing, for He is the One Who knows how to judge merits against sins.”

We see, then, that no man in the world knows the rewards of mitzvot, and that only the Kaddosh Baruch Hu knows how to weigh mitzvot against transgressions, for a mitzvah’s value increases with the amount of pain a person takes to perform it, and that is something only He knows. A wealthy man who gives thousands of dollars to *tzedakah* may just be giving away his “spare change,” while a poor man who gives fifty might be giving away a significant part of his weekly food budget. The extent of the sacrifice determines the reward, and this is stated plainly in a later chapter of *Avot*: “the reward corresponds to the pain” (5:23).

In the Talmud, Rav Pappa says to Abaye, “In what way did our ancestors differ from us, that miracles were done for them but no miracles are done for us? In Rav Yehudah’s time, when the world needed rain, as soon as he removed one of his shoes out of anguish, rain began to fall, whereas we feel very great anguish and cry out in prayer, and no notice is taken of it — yet we spend more time on Torah study than our predecessors did.” Rav Pappa answered him, “Our predecessors sacrificed themselves to sanctify Hashem, and we do not. Once Rav Ada bar Ahaba, who lived in our ancestors’ time, saw a gentile woman in the marketplace wearing an immodest outer garment, and thinking she was Jewish, he went over and tore it off of her. Then it came out that she was a non-Jew, and he had to pay her 400 *zuz*.” This story teaches us that even though later generations studied Torah more, they didn’t display the same degree of self-sacrifice for Torah, and the Torah of the earlier generations carried more weight with the Kaddosh Baruch Hu.

We can learn a similar lesson from the story of Rabi Elazar ben Dordaya, of whom it was said that there wasn’t a prostitute in the world that he didn’t visit (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). During one of these visits he was suddenly moved to do *teshuvah*. He sat with his head down between his knees, sobbing until he died of grief, and then a *bat kol* issued from the heavens saying, “Rabi Elazar ben Dordaya is summoned to life in Olam HaBa.” Hearing this, Rabi [Yehudah HaNasi] wept and said, one person acquires eternal life over many years, and

another acquires it in one moment. He went on to say, and not only are those who do *teshuvah* accepted, but they are even called Rabi. Due to his self-sacrifice, Rabi Elazar ben Dordaya's mitzvah of *teshuvah* was richly rewarded, although it was but a single act.

Our Sages may have had this in mind when they said that *baalei teshuvah* stand in a place where the perfectly righteous cannot stand (*Berachot* 34b). According to the Rambam's explanation (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:4), this means that a *baal teshuvah* shouldn't think that he is distant from the level of *tzaddikim* because of the sins and errors he has committed. It is not so; he is as beloved and desirable to his Creator as if he had never sinned, and furthermore his reward is great, for he has tasted the pleasure of sin and abandoned it, vanquishing his *yetzer*. He has changed his whole lifestyle, giving up the enjoyments he was accustomed to, and now he sits in the *beit midrash* studying Torah, he puts on *tefillin*, he keeps Shabbat and kashrut. He has transformed himself into a new person — what could be a greater self-sacrifice? And on this account his status is higher than that of the wholly righteous.

Shelomo HaMelech said in *Mishlei* (5:6), “Lest you weigh the path of life, her paths have wandered off and you shall not know.” In other words, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu conceals the reward of mitzvot. Why? Because mitzvot are not rewarded at a fixed rate. The value of each mitzvah is not something that could be written in the Torah, since it all depends on the trouble, pain, and exertion that go into the mitzvah, and this varies according to each individual and the circumstances in which he is placed.

Balance the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a precept against the gain and the accruing from a transgression against the loss it involves.

There is an obvious difficulty here. We've just finished explaining that no human being can calculate the reward of a mitzvah, so how can we consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards?

We have to assume, then, that the mishnah is not talking about calculating the reward a person will receive for a mitzvah on his day of judgment, and weighing it against the punishment he'll get if he transgresses; the mishnah must be talking about another kind of cost. It is clear that a transgression carries a price tag in the here and now: have we ever heard of anyone who did an *aveirah* and didn't come to regret it in the end? Nor do we see people full of joy after committing a sin. So the mishnah is giving us a tool to use when faced with temptation. If

one considers the fact that if he does the *aveirah* he will eventually feel terrible about himself, and weighs that against the fleeting pleasure he stands to gain from the transgression, he will see that the *aveirah* isn't worthwhile (see *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:4).

Balance the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a precept against the gain and the accruing from a transgression against the loss it involves.

Here is another difficulty: are we supposed to weigh mitzvot according to their rewards? In a previous mishnah (1:3) we were enjoined to “be as slaves who serve their master not for the sake of reward.” So why are we now being enjoined to consider the reward?

We can resolve the difficulty through a basic *mussar* concept.

First, let's look at the Gemara in *Eiruvim* (13b) which says that the Sages arrived at a consensus that “man would have been better off had he not been created, but now that he's been created, he should examine his deeds closely.”

The Maharsha elucidates this (*Makkot* 23b). He explains that the Sages framed man's situation in numerical terms: considering the fact that the number of Torah prohibitions is greater than the number of positive commandments, they calculated that man would have been in a better position if he had not been placed in this world, because there is a higher probability that he will lose out. Due to the sheer number of prohibitions as opposed to positive commandments, if he acts randomly he will tend to do more transgressions than mitzvot. Therefore, now that he has been created and faces these odds, he must pick his deeds, that is, the positive acts he does, with great care.

This leads to the conclusion that man was created chiefly for the purpose of doing good deeds — the positive commandments — and he should pay close attention to this aspect of his life. Merely avoiding *aveirot* is not enough. Clearly that is not what man was created for, since the prohibitions in the Torah would have been better kept if he hadn't been created at all.

We learn from this that since man is a physical creature, made from earth, his nature makes it more likely that he will transgress a prohibition than perform a positive act. Viewed that way, it would have been better had he not been created. But if he picks his deeds carefully and places more emphasis on accumulating many positive mitzvot, they will lead him to do yet more mitzvot, according to the principle of *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, which we learn in the fourth chapter of *Avot*.

On the other hand, if he allows himself to be pulled by his desires for the fleeting pleasures of this world, he will transgress and be led to further and worse transgressions — *aveirah goreret aveirah*. In that case, his whole existence is in vain.

So what must a person do to make his existence worthwhile? When faced with a choice between a mitzvah and an *aveirah*, he should consider his situation as described above; he should think of what he'll be bringing upon himself by doing the *aveirah*, and make a calculated choice to do the mitzvah instead.

The Gemara (*Bava Batra* 56b) talks about a situation in which a man can choose one of two routes to his destination. One of these routes will take him past the local women washing clothes in a stream. While doing this chore in Talmudic times, the women would tend to be a little less modestly covered than usual. Of course, if he must pass by this place, a man should avoid gazing at the women, as the Sages learn from the *pasuk* in *Yeshayah* (33:15): “And he shuts his eyes from seeing evil.” If another route is available, however, and nevertheless he chooses to go past the stream, he is considered a *rasha*.

Thus, if a man has two paths before him, one good and one fraught with evil, he is required to choose the good path, and if he chooses the other path he would be better off never having been born. Both the *tzaddik* and the *rasha* are going to the same place, but the *tzaddik* does a mitzvah on the way by keeping a distance from an unsavory situation. He considers the reward of the mitzvah against its cost. The *rasha*, who doesn't bother making that calculation, ends up doing an *aveirah*.

This principle of considering the reward of a mitzvah and the cost of a transgression applies only in those situations where there are two options, one of which involves a mitzvah and the other, an *aveirah*, and one's physical nature inclines him towards the *aveirah* while his *yetzer hatov* is telling him to choose the mitzvah. With this concept in mind the Sages asked, “How would a *baal teshuvah* [that is, someone who has truly repented] be described? For example, if he is confronted with the chance to transgress once and then a second time, and he is saved from the *aveirah*.”

In the same vein, the Sages said, “A man should always stir up the *yetzer hatov* to be angry at the *yetzer hara*.” Rashi explains that this means one should make war with the *yetzer hara*, but this is rather obscure. Why should a person make the *yetzer hara* angry?

When a person resists the *yetzer hara's* enticements to sin, at that moment his scale of merit outweighs his spiritual liability, and he is eligible for eternal life in Olam HaBa. That is what angers the *yetzer*, for he has been vanquished in battle.

We learn the same lesson from David HaMelech, who said in *Tehillim* (119:59), "I considered my ways, and I returned my feet to Your testimonies." Our Rabbis explain in a Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:1), "David said, 'Master of the Universe, every day I would consider and say, "I will go to such-and-such a place or to this or that house," and my feet would take me to *batei kneset* and to *batei midrash*,' and that is the meaning of 'I returned my feet to Your testimonies.' Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Acha, I considered the reward of mitzvot and the cost of transgressions."

Now it becomes clear that these two interpretations are really one and the same. David had two choices before him: he could go to the *beit midrash* or to someplace where Torah was not to be found. He considered the reward of Torah, which is eternal life, against the pleasures of this world, which are short-lived, and he overcame the *yetzer* and chose the *beit midrash*.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

עין רואה ואוזן שומעת

...*Know what is above you -- a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds recorded in a book.*

It once happened that Rav Chaim Pinto zt"l asked a man named Adon Kaddosh for a donation, upon encountering him on the street. This was, after all, Rav Chaim's way: He would be found patrolling the marketplaces and byways seeking to raise money for the city's poor.

Unfortunately Mr. Adon Kaddosh was not able to suppress his *yetser hara* that day: When asked for a contribution, he claimed that he had not even a penny in his pocket.

Well, it was not very long before the man lost the wallet that contained all of his cash.

Frantically, he searched -- but the search was fruitless. The money was nowhere to be found. He looked and looked and looked.

Nothing.

In short order, the man was before Rav Chaim, tears streaming from his face. “Help!”

Rav Chaim immediately recognized what had occurred.

“Hashem Yitbarach entrusts us with money only so that we use it properly and act as its guardian. It is for mitzvoth and good needs. We have it so that we can share it with the poor and orphaned.”

“If it happens that someone has not acted as its trusted guardian, the money will then be confiscated. Hashem will pass it on to an agent who is a more worthy. *The silver and the gold are Mine, says the Lord of Hosts. (Haggai 2:8)*

“לי הכסף ולי הזהב נאם ד' צבאות”

Needless to say, this man who lied to evade Rav Chaim’s request for tzeddakah never saw that wallet again.

Know what is above you.

In *lashon hakodesh*, this is **דע מה למעלה ממך**.

We can link several ideas together here through a *gematria*.

The numerical value of **מה**, “what,” is 45, which is also the numerical value of Hashem’s four-letter Name when each of the letters is fully spelled out (**ה"א, ו"ו, ד"ד, ה"א, ו"ו**). The word **אדם**, “man,” also adds up to 45. This hints to man’s obligation always to keep in mind that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu is above him as well as within him. Furthermore, when the day of judgment comes, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu will give testimony regarding all of a man’s deeds — the word **דע**, “know,” has the same letters as **עד**, “witness” (see *Chagigah* 5b). For He is present both within a person and above him, and He scrutinizes a man’s innermost thoughts and sees his every deed. But if a man does not remember that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu is above him, he will not be able to keep in mind that there is an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and a book in which all his deeds are recorded.

Know what is above you --a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds recorded in a book.

After saying, “Contemplate three things, and you will not come into the hands of sin,” the mishnah doesn’t tell us those three things right away. Instead, the seemingly superfluous words “know what is above you” are inserted in a way that interrupts the flow of the text. Why is this? And why is it important that these three things are “above you”?

A passage in the *Degel Machane Ephraim* can help to explain this. Quoting the Baal Shem Tov, the author writes that *alufo shel olam*, the Leader of the World, is hidden in the word **חטא**, meaning sin, because the letter *alef* in this word is silent. This signifies that when a person transgresses, he forgets the Kaddosh Baruch Hu. In a similar vein he brings an interpretation of a Gemara, also in the name of the Baal Shem Tov: The Gemara says that one who reviews a passage a hundred times bears no resemblance to one who reviews it a hundred and one times (*Chagigah* 9b). This is because that extra one time, the number one or the letter *alef*, represents the Kaddosh Baruch Hu, the *alufo shel olam*. Bringing the Kaddosh Baruch Hu into one's learning puts it on an entirely different level from a mere intellectual exercise.

Here, too, we can employ the *gematria* that equates the word **מה**, “what” in “know what is above you” with the word **אדם**, “man,” which both equal 45. Only when a man observes the Torah's commandments he is fit to be called **אדם**, as the Sages say in the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 114a). When a man transgresses and forgets the Kaddosh Baruch Hu, he loses the *alef*, representing the **אלופו של עולם**, from the designation **אדם**, and what remains is **דם** — blood. In other words, he endangers himself, because the Kaddosh Baruch Hu is the One Who gives him life at every moment, and when a situation of danger arises, the *Satan* will speak against him, recalling the sin he committed, and nothing could be more perilous than that. How can a person remember this vital knowledge at all times?

The mishnah is saying that he must know **מה למעלה ממך**. In *gematria*, **ממך** equals a hundred. Just as a man must learn a Torah passage more than a hundred times — **ממך למעלה** — in order for it to be engraved on his heart, so must he always act in such a way as to be worthy of the designation **אדם**, which is equal to **מה**, staying above the level of **דם** and feeling the presence of the **אלופו של עולם** within him.



רָבֵן גַּמְלִיאֵל בֶּן־שֵׁל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הַנָּשִׂיא אוֹמֵר
 יְפֵה תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה עִם דְּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂיָגִיעַת שְׁנִיָּהֶם
 מִשְׁכַּחַת עוֹן. וְכָל תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵין עִמָּה מְלָאכָה
 סוּפָה בְּטָלָה וְגוֹרֶרֶת עוֹן. וְכָל הַעֲמָלִים עִם
 הַצְּבוּר יֵהִיוּ עֲמָלִים עִמָּהֶם לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם שְׂזֻכוֹת
 אֲבוֹתָם מְסִיעֶתָן וְצַדִּיקָתָם עוֹמְדָת לְעַד. וְאַתֶּם
 מֵעַלְהָ אֲנִי עֲלִיכֶם שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה כְּאִלּוּ עָשִׂיתֶם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּב

Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince says: Great is study of the Torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind. All study of the Torah which is not supplemented by work is destined to prove futile and causes sin. Let all who occupy themselves with communal affairs do so for Heaven's sake, for then the merit of their fathers sustains them and their righteousness endures forever. And as for you, G-d will then say: I count you worthy of great reward as if you had done it all yourselves..

Our Mishnah includes the famous statement by Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi, *Learning Torah together with derech eretz is good, for the effort of them both will make sin forgotten. And any Torah that is not accompanied by work will eventually be nullified and cause sin.*

Why is it that Torah study not accompanied by work is destined to be forgotten? And, why is it that single-minded dedication to Torah study would not banish the possibility of sin?

Rabbi Obadiah of Bartanura is the preeminent commentator on the Mishnah. He lived in Italy in the late 1400's and died in Eretz Yisrael. On this mishnah, he writes, "Lest one say, 'I will study Torah constantly and thereby crush my desire for sin. What need do I have for any other kind of work?' the Mishnah tells us that Torah he learns will ultimately be negated." Why is that? Because it is not possible to live without the physical necessities of life. In desperation, the Torah student will feel he has no choice other than to resort to thievery. The learning will then go by the wayside. Those are the words of Rav Obadiah.

One could add that the intention of this Mishnah was to tell us that a person should also not get it into his mind that he will divide his time between earning a livelihood and learning Torah in the following way: “First, I’ll devote myself exclusively to making money. Later in life, once I’m financially secure, then I’ll do some learning as well.”

Yes, there is another Mishnah that says explicitly what I’ve just read into our Mishnah (Avoth 2:4), “*And do not say “When I free myself of my concerns, I will study,” for perhaps you will never free yourself.*” There, the reason is because, “. . . *perhaps you will never free yourself.*” Here, the reason is different, in my opinion, namely that neither the Torah nor the outside work will be successful unless they are combined with each other.

Although it is important that the outside work and the Torah study be combined with one another, that does not mean that the two should be done at the same time. What I mean is that separate times should be allocated to each, that one should not walk away during the time allocated for Torah learning in order to take care of business matters.

I am reminded here of the comment of Tosafot in Kiddushin 40b where he points out the seeming discrepancy between the gemara that says that man will first be judged as to his Torah study and the gemara that says that the first question asked by the Heavenly Court is, “Did you conduct your business affairs with honesty and integrity?” The question seems to be why one gemara says that the initial judgment will be as to Torah study and the other says that the initial question will have to do with business.

Tosafot’s resolution is that, while the initial question will be about business, the initial punishment will be due to not having set aside fixed times for Torah learning.

These words of our Rabbis carry strong implications. Let us say that one were to designate an hour or two every day to Torah learning, either by attending a *shiur* or by arranging a study session with someone. That’s very fine.

However, let us say that this person were to consistently arrive 10 or 20 minutes late (or leave 10 or 20 minutes early). In and of itself, this might not seem so terrible. However, it is, as it could be considered as if one were “stealing” time from Hashem! Why? Because he has taken time that he had dedicated to Hashem and used it for himself instead.

Perhaps we can now suggest a new perspective on the two gemarot quoted by Tosafot. In reality, the two questions mentioned in the two gemarot are actually

one. At first, one is asked, “Did you set aside times for learning and keep them faithfully? Did you steal from that time, using the time for other things?”

In other words, our initial judgment will be for Torah learning. When we answer, “Yes; I most certainly did set aside fixed times for Torah,” the follow-up question will be, “But, did you keep those times faithfully?”

Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: . . . Great is study of the Torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind.

It seems clear that each of us is obligated to be involved in worldly livelihood. How does this square, then, with what we know of some of the Rabbis of the gemara, like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who studied day and night, apparently with no regard to livelihood? We know, for instance, that they were exempt from having to interrupt their studies for the reading the Shema and for Tefillah, because “Torah was their craft.”

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was also known to have expressed his displeasure at the sight of Jews busily occupied with farming, saying that when the Jewish People are doing the will of their Creator, their work would be done through others.

I believe that it was never our Mishnah’s intent to say that the greatest scholars should partially abandon their learning so as to be involved in work.

Rather, I think that Rabban Gamliel of our Mishnah was advocating the broad adoption of the Yissachar-Zevulun idea, meaning that there would be a division of labor, so to speak. A Yissachar would spend all his time exclusively devoted to study, while a Zevulun would carry the burden of livelihood for both of them. In return, the Yissachar would divide the heavenly reward with the Zevulun.

An allusion to this interpretation is to be found in the concluding paragraph of our Mishnah, which refers to *Those who work for the community*. Perhaps it refers to the Zevuluns of our communities, those who endeavor to support the Torah scholars, the Yissachars. It is the merit of these scholars that sustains the community as a whole.

Those who work for the community . . . for the sake of Heaven could then be interpreted to refer to the businessmen, the Zevuluns, who divide equally with the scholars, the Yissachars. The Mishnah continues, . . . *for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them*, meaning the merit of the Zevuluns and Yissachars who have undertaken this endeavor will endure. This concept is found in the Midrash

Bereishit Rabbah. *And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.* Meaning, that had Zevulun not supported him, Yissachar would not have had the opportunity to dedicate himself to Torah.

I count you worthy of great reward as if you had done it all yourselves.

The Mishnah says that “you” will be rewarded, “as if you had achieved it.”

Why “as if” you had achieved it? Aren’t we referring here to those “who work for the community?” These are the people who do the work. They’ve done it! Why, then, call it “as if?”

A further question: What does this part of the Mishnah have to do with what precedes it, “*Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever.*”?

I would suggest that these statements are being said about those who accept the responsibility of helping others be *chozer b’teshuvah*. The Mishnah serves to remind them to do this work entirely for the sake of Heaven. When working to attract the community to authentic Judaism, they are to do so without regard to their own personal benefit or honor. This is the model we see in our *Avoth HaKedoshim*. Sotah 10a relates that Avraham Avinu, in order to accustom others to make berachot, supplied them with his own food.

Our Mishnah is saying that when their intentions are strictly *l’Shem Shamayim* and for the sake of *Emet*, as opposed to being driven by ego and power, they are thereby emulating the *Avoth*. They will therefore have the greatest chance of success. And, not only will they be successful with the individuals with whom they are directly involved, but they will affect subsequent generations as well.

Regarding Avraham, it is said that he *made nefashot*. The Rabbis explain that because Avraham had converted them and brought them near to the *Shechina*, it is as if he “made” them.

None of us could possibly hope to achieve those kind of results other than by using the *Avoth* as our models. Otherwise, we could never hope to attain the proper measure of selflessness. Not only must we emulate their selflessness, but we have to recognize that it is only through *zechut avoth* (rather than our own prowess) that we achieve anything meaningful at all.



הוּ זְהִירִין בְּרִשׁוֹת שְׂאִין מְקַרְבִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם
 אֲלָא לְצַרְדָּ עֲצָמָן. נִרְאִין כְּאוֹהֲבִין בְּשַׁעַת
 הַנְּאֻתָן. וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחֻקָּו:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּג

*Be careful in your relations with the authorities;
 for they draw no man close to themselves except
 for their own interests. They appear as friends
 when it is to their advantage, but they do not
 stand by a man in his time of stress..*

Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura, the classic commentator to Aboth, says this Mishnah is particularly directed towards those involved with the communal needs: “ even though you need to acquaint yourselves with government officials so as to best take care of the community, *be careful with the government . . .*”

Perhaps this means that, while it is certainly necessary to make a “name” for oneself amongst the authorities, the more discretion the better. And, one should turn to them only when there’s no viable alternative. This is the path to greatest success.

If, on the other hand, the community leaders go straight to government officials -- without trying to first resolve communal problems internally -- the community will wind up dependant upon them. Realizing that, these officials will then seek favors in return. “Vote for me!” they will say. “Don’t worry, after the election, I’ll be there for you!”

Needless to say, once the votes have been counted, the promises to the Jews will be forgotten.

Rather, trust in the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu!* For, He will not forget!

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

הוּ זְהִירִין בְּרִשׁוֹת

Rabbi Hadahn Pinto, son of Rav Chaim Pinto senior, was a giant in Torah and in the wisdom of kabbalah. Far and wide, many turned to him for advice. Even officials from the city of Mogador, national figures, governmental ministers, and foreign diplomats stationed in Mogador would seek his counsel. Needless to say, the Rav was able to utilize these contacts for the sake of his People.

הוא היה אומר עשה רצונו כרצונך כדי
 שיעשה רצונך כרצונו. בטל רצונך מפני רצונו
 כדי שיבטל רצון אחרים מפני רצונך. הלל
 אומר אל תפרוש מן הצבור ואל תאמן בעצמך
 עד יום מותך ואל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע
 למקומו ואל תאמר דבר שאי אפשר לשמוע
 שסופו להשמע. ואל תאמר לכשאפנה אשנה
 שמא לא תפנה:
 משנה אבות ב:ד

He would also say: Make that His will should be your will, so that He should make your will to be as His will. Nullify your will before His will in order that He will nullify the will of others before your will. Hillel would say: Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. Do not say something that is not readily understood in the belief that it will ultimately be understood [or: Do not say something that ought not to be heard even in the strictest confidence, for ultimately it will be heard]. And do not say "When I free myself of my concerns, I will study," for perhaps you will never free yourself.

The Mishnah says, *Do His will like your will in order that He will do your will like His will.* One way of understanding this is to say that we are being told to do the mitzvot with the same level of care that we put into our personal concerns.

A famous Midrash, which appears in Vayikra Rabba, Yalkut Shemoni, Midrash Tanchuma, and other places, could be understood in a similar fashion. The full text, in its original hebrew, may be found in the footnote.

There is a very ancient custom to begin a child's formal study with Sefer Vayikra. The Midrash asks why:

Rav Assi said: ‘Why are young children started with Sefer Vayikra? Surely it is because the sacrifices are all written there and because young children are still pure, not yet having known the taste of sin. Hashem said that they should therefore begin with [studying] the sacrifices. Let the pure ones come and occupy themselves with the pure. I therefore consider it as if they are standing and offering the sacrifices in My presence. And to make know as well that even though the Beit Hamikdash is in ruins, and korbanot cannot be offered, were it not for the the children who read the order of korbanot, the world would not be sustained.

Isn't this puzzling?

The idea that studying the laws of korbanot in our post-Beit Hamikdash era is almost equivalent to having engaged in the actual Temple Service is a familiar one. The talmud mentions it several times. The talmud seems to say that it applies to all those who study these laws in earnest.

Why, then, does our Midrash seem to say that it specifically applies to young children?

One possible answer may be read into the gemara in Massechet Shabbat (83b), which offers two aggadic interpretations of the verse **זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל** *This is the “Torah;” when a man dies in a tent . . . (BeMidbar 19:17)*. Citing this verse, Rabbi Yochanan said that one must never “hold oneself back” from Torah learning or attending the House of Study, even at the moment of death. (He aggadically reads the verse to say that one should be learning Torah even at the moment of one’s death). Reish Lakish said (also based upon this verse) that the Torah “lasts” only due to those who [figuratively] “kill themselves” over it. .

Regarding that last point, Maharal (16th century) asks, “How is it that Torah (which is entirely intellectual and spiritual) could “last” only through Man, who is physicality embodied?” Aren’t these traits opposite and incompatible? He answers, quoting this gemara, that this is precisely why Reish Lakish refers to those who “kill themselves for it.” In a sense, they are thereby renouncing their physicality and transforming it to something ethereal, entirely receptive to spirituality and pure intellect.

I wonder about this Maharal. How is it possible for someone to renounce his physicality? After all, isn’t that what we were created from? It would kill us immediately!

Perhaps Maharal means is that studying Torah with absolute dedication and self-sacrifice causes one to “open up a place” through which Torah may enter his heart. That’s why it says (Berachot 54a), **וּבְכָל נֶפֶשׁ - אֲפִילוּ הוּא נוֹטֵל אֶת נֶפֶשׁ** *With all your nefesh (might) - Even if he takes your nefesh (life).*

This idea could be extended to mean that one must leave all thoughts of livelihood behind him upon entering the Beit HaMidrash. He should consider his business affairs settled and taken care of. His entire focus must be the Torah learning. That means no phone calls, no cell phones, no beeper -- no connection whatsoever to his world of work. This is one understanding of what ridding oneself of his physicality means -- ridding oneself of thoughts of physical livelihood and financial wellbeing when engaged in Torah study. (Incidentally, the punishment for distracting oneself and others during study sessions is grave indeed.)

We are now on the way towards understand the midrash quoted above. However, I would first like to relate what Ramban comments on Vayikra 1:9. He tells us that when offering a korban, one should have in mind that, rather than the korban’s, his own blood deserves to have been spilled upon the altar and his own body should have been consumed upon the altar by fire. It is only due to Hashem’s kindness that a korban is accepted instead. Its blood is in stead of his blood. Its life is in stead of his. And its limbs are in stead of his own.

The korban would not have effected atonement if not for the supplicant’s *messirut nefesh*. So too with Torah study. Being that it is compared to *korbanot*, it requires the same level of *messirut nefesh* that is expected of one who offers a *korban*. If we understand this to mean that one must focus completely and rid himself of thoughts of livelihood, then we can see the comparison to children more clearly.

Children don’t think about livelihood, career, or business affairs.

And, what happens when children are at play? Their thoughts are on the toy, the game, or the sport. Not on anything else -- even for a moment!

When an adult dedicates himself to his learning with the same level of single-mindedness, seriousness and zeal that he puts into his business, then it is as if he has offered himself as a *korban* to Hashem. Just as no one has to remind the responsible adult to wake up each morning to go to work and to be there on time, so should it be with Torah learning. There too, the impetus to be there regularly and on time must come from within oneself. When one’s pull to get to the Beit Midrash is comparable to one’s pull to attend to his financial wellbeing, then one can say that he has successfully internalized “*These are our life and the length of our days.*”

Nullify your will before His will in order that He will nullify the will of others before your will

When a person serves Hashem with total devotion and fights his evil inclination, then the Kaddosh Baruch Hu reciprocates by coming to his aid and nullifying the *yetzer's* power over him. Examples of this are found in the Talmud: the *Yerushalmi* (*Berachot* 9:5) says that David HaMelech slew the *yetzer hara*, and the Gemara tells of several Tannaim who subdued their *yetzer* (*Kiddushin* 81a) and of Plimo, who had the *yetzer* so fully under control that he could say, "An arrow in your eye, Satan!"

I would suggest that here in our mishnah too, when the Tanna speaks of "the will of others," he is alluding to the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer* is also called the *sitra achra*, the "other side," and it is called *elohim acherim*, "other gods," as we find in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 105b): "What foreign god is found in the human body? The *yetzer hara*." But no man can achieve this without the Kaddosh Baruch Hu's direct help, as it says in *Kiddushin* (30b): "If not for the fact that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu helps him, [a person] could not overpower him, for an angel is created from fire and man from gross matter, flesh and blood. But when a person makes a start, mustering up all his powers to subdue his earthly desires, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu comes to his aid, measure for measure, and nullifies the *yetzer's* power completely.

Nullify your will before His will in order that He will nullify the will of others before your will. Hillel says: Do not separate from the community; do not believe in yourself until the day you die.

What does it really mean, to "nullify your will before His will"? And how does this connect to the idea of not believing in yourself until the day you die? One way of explaining it is according to a passage in the *Zohar* (א-ב ז"ח בראשית): "Rabi Shimon went out one day and saw that the world had gone dark. Rabi Eliezer said to him, 'Come and see what is the will of the Kaddosh Baruch Hu.' They went and met an angel who looked like a great mountain, and there were thirty tongues of flame issuing from his mouth. Rabi Shimon said to him, 'What are you doing here?' 'I have come to destroy the world,' he replied, 'because there are not even thirty righteous men in it.' Rabi Shimon said to him, 'Go before the Kaddosh Baruch Hu and tell him that Bar Yochai is in the world.' The angel went before the Kaddosh Baruch Hu and said to Him, 'Master of the Universe, it is revealed before You what Bar Yochai said to me.' the Kaddosh

Baruch Hu answered him, ‘Go and destroy the world, and pay no attention to Bar Yochai.’ When he returned, Rabi Shimon saw him and said to him, ‘If you don’t go up before the Kaddosh Baruch Hu, I decree upon you that you will not be able to return again to Heaven, and you will remain suspended in the place where Uza and Azael are suspended. And when you go before the Kaddosh Baruch Hu, say to him that if there aren’t thirty righteous men in the world, one will suffice, and I am he, as is said, “The righteous one is the foundation of the world”’ (*Mishlei* 10:25).

At that moment a *bat kol* issued forth saying, ‘Happy is your portion, Rabi Shimon, for the Kaddosh Baruch Hu makes a decree on high, and you nullify it below.’”

The question arises, why didn’t the Kaddosh Baruch Hu listen to Rabi Shimon the first time he sent the angel back, but only the second time, when he said that the whole world could be sustained in his merit?

I think the answer is that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu wants the *tzaddikim* to know how great their power is, and does not want them to be excessively humble, as the *pasuk* says of Shaul HaMelech: “Although you are small in your own eyes, are you not the head of the Tribes of Israel?” (*Shmuel I*, 15:17). And in the Gemara it says that a *talmid chacham* must have one-eighth of an eighth of *gaavah*, pride (*Sotah* 5a). Accordingly, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu did not listen to Rabi Shimon’s plea until he mentioned his own merit.

Nevertheless, the mishnah is not endorsing pride, and therefore it goes on to quote Hillel’s warning not to be believed in yourself until the day you die. That is to say, even though the righteous need to have a miniscule measure of *gaavah* in their makeup, they should not think that they are immune to the *yetzer hara*, and they must be aware that until the day they die, the *yetzer* could still entice them into sin.

If this warning applies to the most righteous, how much more must an ordinary person be careful never to think he has perfected himself and completed everything that is expected of him in this world, because this kind of thinking is the first sign of a man’s spiritual downfall. Instead, he should keep his focus on the day of death. The fact that death has not yet arrived means that he has not completed his task, for if he had, he would no longer need to be here in this world.

Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.

The Talmud relates that when Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was ill, his students visited him and found him weeping.

“Rabbeinu, why are you weeping?” they asked him.

“There are two paths before me,” he answered, “one to Gan Eden and one to Gehinnom, and I don’t know which way I will be taken — how should I not weep?”

When he was about to expire he said to them, “Remove the vessels so that they should not become impure, and prepare a throne for Chizkiyahu Melech Yehudah, who is coming.”

This is very surprising. How could Rabi Yochanan have entertained the thought that he might be going to Gehinnom? The fact that Chizkiyahu Melech Yehudah came to escort him was a clear enough sign; surely Chizkiyahu wouldn’t be sent to bring him to Gehinnom! But this teaches us how a *tzaddik* thinks. Even though he has served his Creator devotedly all his life, he doesn’t believe in himself up until the very moment of death, and he still fears that the *yetzer hara* might cause him to sin at the last moment. This is what Hillel is warning against.

Likewise, we find in the Gemara (*Ketubot* 104a) that as Rabbeinu HaKadosh, Rabi Yehudah HaNasi, lay on his deathbed he held up his ten fingers and said, “Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that I exerted myself in Torah study with these ten fingers, and I took no enjoyment for myself even with my little finger. Let it be Your will, then, that there be completeness in my eternal rest. A *bat kol* came forth from the heavens, saying, “He shall come in peace; they shall rest in their resting- place” (*Yeshayahu* 57:2).

Why did Rabbeinu HaKadosh say this on his deathbed? Was he trying to boast about his righteousness? Surely not. Rather, he feared that at the last moment the *yetzer hara* might get the better of him. Far from boasting, he was praying for protection from the *yetzer’s* power. In essence, he was saying, perhaps in my lifetime I was deficient in my fulfillment of a mitzvah; perhaps I failed to serve you to the best of my ability, but I desire to do so as long as I am still alive in this world, so that my final rest should be complete. The heavenly voice brought a message of reassurance to him: you have already completed everything you were expected to do in this world, and now your time has come to depart.

In our times, it was said of Rav Elazar Man Shach that towards the end of his life he said, “Master of the Universe, how I wish I might merit to depart from this world in a state of complete *teshuvah*.” This is the way of *tzaddikim*. Although Rav Shach spent his whole life toiling over his Torah learning and constantly improving his fear of G-d, nevertheless he feared that he might not have done all he could in service of his Creator.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

. . . כְּדֵי שִׁבְטֵל רְצוֹן אַחֲרַיִם מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹן.

. . . *so that He should make your will to be as His will.*

The Pinto family *tzaddikim* were known to be performers of miracles. It seemed that wonders and marvels occurred there on an almost daily basis, all due to their Torah, their righteousness, and the fact that their minds never strayed from thoughts of the Creator, even for a moment.

Rav Chaim Pinto *Hakatan* was sitting outside his home one time and a certain Jew passed by, carrying several chickens. When Rav Chaim asked him to contribute *tzeddakah*, he declined, saying that he had nothing to give. Rav Chaim suggested that he donate one of the chickens, which would be quite welcome on the table of one of the town’s poor.

Once again, the man declined.

With that, the chickens all suddenly expired. Not a single one remain alive.

Back came the man.

“Rabbi, please forgive me! I was on my way to a festive meal -- and these chickens were supposed to have been the main course! I now have nothing to feed my guests! What am I to do?”

“Go to the *shochet*,” said Rav Chaim, “and the chickens will come back to life.”

And so it was.

(This is only one of the thousands of miracle stories told about the saintly Pinto family.)

ואל תאמן בעצמך עד יום מותך

Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.

The Rabbis are telling us to not trust *be'atzmacha*. The plain meaning translation is that one should not trust in himself. One could creatively look at this statement of our Rabbis, though, as if they had said to not trust *be'atzmotecha*. (*Be'atzmotecha* means “in one’s bones.” In other words, to not trust in one’s bones, rather than in oneself.)

This would link our mishnah with the midrashim that associate the 248 positive mitzvot with 248 limbs of the human body and the Zohar’s association of the 365 negative precepts with 365 sinews.

Daily, each limb pleads, “Use me for a mitzvah!” So to speak, they wish to remain alive through the merit of having been used for a mitzvah. This could be said to mean that when we fail to perform one of the mitzvot (or transgresses one of the negative commandments), we thereby damage the limb or sinew that corresponds to that mitzvah.

In the words of Shlomo HaMelech in Mishlei (3:8), רפאות תהי לשרך ושקוי, לעצמותיך. *It will be health for your navel and marrow for your bones.* This could be said to refer to mitzvot: If one merits to perform them, they bring health and wellbeing. If one does not perform them, the opposite will occur.

One could very well collapse, *Chas v'Shalom*.

Following this thought, then we could say that as soon as he sins, one’s bones should crumble. (For, the mitzvot are “*marrow for your bones.*” Lacking mitzvot, the bones have no sustenance.)

Rabbi Menachem m'Ricanatti, contemporary of Ramban and author of a kabbalistic commentary to Chumash, writes that the benefits promised by Hashem for doing mitzvot stem not only from reward, but are the outcome of a natural process. He compares it to planting a seed and then harvesting the crop.

Conversely, when one sins, the pipeline of *chessed* ceases to flow. The “punishment” then becomes the almost “natural” result of this withdrawal.

The sinner generally fails to recognize this. He knows that he sins and he knows what *should* have occurred: collapsed bones and sickness. However, checking himself over, he sees a perfectly healthy specimen, still standing erect.

What conclusion could he come to then? Of course, he’ll say that this proves that *aveirot* do not lead to anything bad!

This is why our Tanna comes along to teach us: “Don’t trust your bones!” Punishment and harm *do* come to those who sin.

You say that this hasn’t been your experience?

Perhaps it’s just that Hashem has been very, very patient with you.

הלל אומר אל תפרוש מן הצבור
ואל תאמן בעצמך עד יום מותך
ואל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע
למקומו

Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community; and do not trust in yourself until the day of your death. Do not judge your fellow until you are in his place.

Three things are reported here in the name of Hillel. Is there a connection between them, other than their having been said by the same Chacham?

Allow me to suggest the following:

It sometimes happens that one must separate from the community, for justifiable cause.

Where disregard of Torah law has become widespread, distancing oneself so as to not become caught up in the group’s behavior makes perfect sense.

However, this is not a step to be taken lightly. Hard thought must first be given to the real motivation. And, hard thought must be given as to whether the evil is so pervasive and to such a great degree that separating from the congregation is justified.

How, though, can one know?

Hillel gives us here one rule that seems quite useful: Know yourself. Don’t believe in yourself, don’t trust your own judgement. Korach shows this, by negative example.

Korach believed in himself, so greatly that he thought himself greater than Moshe and Aharon. He therefore separated from the community. His end was to be swallowed alive into the earth.

One must therefore be quite careful about where this desire to separate oneself is coming from. Be certain that it truly stems from pain, from anguish

over pervasive breaches of halacha (even that which is seemingly minor) -- rather than ego-driven desire to elevate oneself over others.

Additionally, one must be certain to judge his fellows favorably, giving them the benefit of the doubt -- and not the opposite!

This is why the final statement attributed to Hillel in this Mishnah is to not judge someone else “*until you have stood in his place.*” For, one never knows what lies behind the behavior he witnesses with his eyes and thinks he understands. Don’t jump to conclusions when it comes to the Jewish People, the Holy Nation!

ואל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע למקומו
ואל תאמר דבר שאי אפשר לשמוע
שסופו להשמע

Do not judge your friend until you reach his place; do not say something that should not be heard, because eventually it will be heard;

The mishnah says to not judge someone else until you have “stood in his place” and to not say something not readily understood, falsely thinking that it will ultimately be understood.

I’d like to offer a somewhat poetic reading. The gemara tells us in Berachot 31a-b that reproach is obligatory. Perhaps the author of the mishnah is hinting at telling us that when faced with such a situation, we are to not delay. The friend should be rebuked immediately, without making calculations that it would be better to wait until the friend returns to “his place” (למקומו).

Perhaps one would think that it’s better to hold off for awhile: “Yes; I know that I’m commanded to give him reproof. However, it’s unrealistic to imagine that my words will achieve very much. Let me then put the whole thing off.”

Perhaps the mishnah is suggesting that these kinds of thoughts should not be entertained. Even though it might be quite true that there will not be any immediate change in our friend’s behavior, that doesn’t mean that the rebuke will not achieve its purpose some time later. In other words, just because it does not seem to be “heard” right now, that doesn’t rule out its being “heard” some time later.

Why would that be?

Because when one's intent is *l'Shem Shamayim*, his words of reproof will ultimately "sink in." This relates to the famous expression, **דברים היוצאים מן הלב נכנסים בלב**, *that which comes from the heart goes into the heart* as well as the talmud's (Berachot 6b), *Anyone who fears Heaven, his words are heard.*

Therefore, one is obliged to offer immediate rebuke, not to wait until he gets **למקומו**. For, who knows? By that time, either the rebuke will have lost its relevance or the friend will be long gone, never having had the opportunity to hear the sincere reproof that might have straightened his ways.



הוא הִיה אֹמֵר אֵין בּוֹר יֵרָא חֲטָא וְלֹא עִם
הָאֶרֶץ חֲסִיד וְלֹא הַבִּישָׁן לָמַד וְלֹא הַקְפָּדוֹן
מְלַמֵּד וְלֹא כָל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסַחֲוֹרָה מְחַפִּים. וּבְמָקוֹם
שֶׁאֵין אָנָשִׁים הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ:
מְשַׁנָּה אֲבוֹת בֵּיה

He used to say: There is no ignoramus (boor) who fears sin, nor an uneducated person (am ha'aretz) who is pious (a chassid). And a shy person cannot learn nor can a strict person teach. And not everyone who engages excessively in business will become wise. And in a place where there are no men, try to be a man.

The first part of our mishnah says that a boor cannot be sin-fearing and an *Am Haaretz* cannot be exceptionally pious. Rabbi Obadiah from Bartenura explains the distinction between the boor and *Am Haaretz* is that the boor is entirely empty, not even knowing the fundamentals of commerce. The *Am Haaretz*, a “person of the land” “a farmer,” knows at least that. Rav Obadiah therefore says that, while it’s unlikely that the *Am Haaretz* could become exceptionally pious, he could very well be a fearer of sin.

What’s the connection here? Why is it that someone who doesn’t know how to buy and sell could not possibly be a fearer of sin? What does one have to do with the other?

Perhaps it is as follows:

Torah study is the normal prerequisite to *yirat cheit*, the source from which it flows. Unless one studies Torah, he’ll never have the basis for becoming a fearer of sin.

Not everyone can do that, however. In other words, not everyone has the ability, the time, or the opportunity for regular study.

In that case, the least they can do is conduct their business affairs with honesty and integrity. Hopefully, they will avoid all manner of deceit and theft, never seeking to take undue advantage of a customer or vendor. Presumably, having passed that great test, they would extend this adherence to G-d’s Law to all their other activities.

What, though, is to be with he who is involved with neither? This boor has nothing to do with Torah and nothing to do with buying and selling.

How, then, could he possibly cultivate fear of sin?

This fellow is called a בור, a *boor*. This is like the word for cistern or pit, which is “*bor*.” Like the *bor*, this fellow is empty. And, like the open *bor*, he is a hazard to all those who happen to stumble upon him. What’s more perilous to the public’s spiritual welfare than those who lack all semblance of Torah and *yirat shamayim*?

* * *

The Rabbis have a famous explanation to the verse regarding the pit into which the brothers flung Yosef (Br 37:24), והבור רק אין בו מים, *and the pit was empty; it had no water*. They ask, “Why does the verse repeat itself? (Once it says that the *bor* was empty, don’t I already know that it had no water?) Rather, it comes to tell us that, true it had no water, but it did have snakes and scorpions.”

The midrashim add another thought: That when the verse says that it the empty *bor* had no water, it could be looked at as saying that the empty *bor* had no Torah, for water is often said to mean “Torah.”

Of course, it’s possible to conclude quite cleverly, based on a superficial understanding of what we’ve said up to now, “Well, if honest buying and selling will bring me to the all-around level of ‘fearing sin,’ why then should I drag myself to the Beit HaMidrash? Certainly, even if I do spend a small part of my day in the Beit HaMidrash, why should I be striving to one day do so for hours and hours? Aren’t I getting the same results from my work? And, let me ask even more pointedly, ‘Why should *anyone* be studying Torah full-time?’”

Perhaps this is why the mishnah continues, ולא כל המרבה בסחורה מחכים. Although the usual understanding of this is to translate it as saying that all those who are *marbeh b’schora* (excessively involved in commerce) have no chance of becoming wise (as they’re so busy with their business, constantly travelling abroad, etc that they can never establish a regular *shiur*), I’d like to suggest an alternative reading that fits with the thinking behind this discourse: “*Not everyone is cut out to become wise through business.*”

In other words, there are those (but not everyone) who could become wise through dedicating themselves to business.

One might ask, however, how this is possible. Is there any wisdom other than that of the Holy Torah?

Continuing with the approach I am using in this mishnah, I would say that it's telling us that not everyone is cut to one day become a rabbinic authority or a teacher of Torah. Not only that, but I believe that it's also saying that not everyone is cut out for full-time Torah study.

Perhaps this is borne out by the midrash on the verse in Kohelet 7:25, "*One in a thousand have I found*" (Kohelet 7:25). It expounds that the usual pattern is that a thousand individuals begin with Chumash and a hundred will graduate to Mishnah (meaning memorizing Oral Tradition). From this hundred, ten will graduate to Talmud (meaning conceptualization and logical inference). From that ten, one will graduate to authoritatively interpret Jewish Law.

In other words, only one in a thousand.

When one does merit that Torah study is his profession, he is not permitted (in my opinion) to engage in business, even minimally. The gemara, in Kiddushin 70a, says that someone who has been appointed a community "Parnes" is not permitted, in the presence of three others, to engage in work.

This is normally understood to refer to high-level leaders and to mean that they should make sure to maintain the appropriate awe that people should have for those of their position. They should therefore not be seen engaged in mundane commerce, as this would lower the esteem in which they are held.

I would like to suggest that this would extend to significant scholars for whom "Torah is their profession."

Others, however, are obligated to work and to not be idle, lest they come to sin. This is as we have seen earlier in this chapter of Avoth, של רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון וכל עון מלאכה שאין עמה תורה סופה בטלה וגוררת עון. *Torah Study goes well with Derech Eretz (the way of the world, work) for endeavoring in both banishes sin. And, all Torah that does not have with it work will not last and causes sin.*

Still, the work should be kept to its essential minimum. And, while engaged in work, one should strive to join the ranks of those for whom Torah is their profession and for whom work is no longer appropriate.

This is similar to what Rav Nehorai says in Kiddushin 82a, *I have cast aside all the world's crafts and am teaching my son nothing other than Torah. For, all other crafts sustain man during his youth, but leave him to starve in his old age. Torah, however, sustains him both in his youth and his old age.*

I would like to ask (in line with the approach of this discourse), “Doesn’t Rav Nehorai sound as if he’s equating other crafts with that of Torah?” How could this be? Equating Torah with mundane employment?

I’ll answer (again, along the lines of this discourse): Rav Nehorai knows that people are different, that not everyone is cut out for a life of full-time Torah study. Rabbi Meir says in the same Mishnah, preceding what’s brought in Rav Nehorai’s name, that a person should certainly teach his son a craft that is easy and clean. According to my approach, let me say that Rabbi Meir is addressing those not cut out for full-time study. He saying, “Given that you won’t be studying, better to work in business than to be idle, neither learning nor working.”

That doesn’t mean, though, that such a person should drop Torah entirely. Rather, he should still set aside the time, even if his learning brings him neither pleasure nor success. He should trust that his sincere devotion to learning, despite his personal difficulties with it, will ultimately lead to increased wisdom.

The alternative -- commerce and nothing else -- will never lead to any wisdom at all, not even that which potentially comes from honest trade.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

אין בור ירא חטא ולא עם הארץ חסיד

... *A boor cannot be sin-fearing, an Am Haaretz (lit. person of the land, a farmer) cannot be exceptionally pious*

There lived in Turkey’s Istanbul (when it was called Constantinople) a wretchedly poor Jew who went from house to house, collecting that which the homeowners no longer had use for. From Jew and Gentile, he collected the discards; rags, broken and obsolete housewares -- in short, anything that he could get his hands on for a few pennies and hope to resell for a few pennies more.

From the meager profit, he supported his household. This he did for many years.

On a certain occasion, One time, after having acquired a large batch of worn-out clothes and battered housewares from a local non-Jew, he began to sort it at home. Brass went in one pile, iron in another, and clothes in a third.

In the process, he came across a small brass statue, one that had most likely been used for idolatry.

Into the pile it went, together with the other objects of brass.

All of a sudden a strange voice called out to him, as if from some other world, “Yehudi, Yehudi! Why have you abandoned me!”

The Jew was beside himself: Where did the voice come from? Who is calling me?

He was terrified.

After all, no one was there save for himself. Not even his family members were around: “Who is this?”

“I must be imagining things,” thought he.

So, he went back to work, sorting the big heap into smaller ones.

It wasn't long before the sound returned: “Yehudi, Yehudi! Why are you leaving me here, cast to the ground in disgrace? Haven't you any mercy? Get me out of here!”

The man was terrified even more now. Ok, once in a while it can happen that a person starts imagining something. But twice? Where's the voice coming from?

From one corner to another, he searched.

Nothing.

So, back to work he went, sorting the junk.

Then the voice came back, louder and more earnest than ever before: “Have mercy on me! Don't leave me here! I'll pay you well! You won't regret it!”

That did it. No more could he return to his work. No more could he ignore the bizarre sound. He had to find its source -- and he wouldn't be getting any rest until he did.

Search he did, around and around, eliminating one part of the house after another -- until one unexamined place remained: the pile of brass.

So, he poked and poked, lifting one item after another. He came upon the figurine. He raised it from the ground.

This is what he heard: “Don't put me back in the pile!” “Don't discard me!” “Put me on top of the box over there -- and I promise that you will double your profit today as a result!”

The voice was coming from the object he was presently grasping in hand: the figurine.

Convinced by the promise given him by the statuette, the simple Jew placed the figurine on the box and headed out to the marketplace with his wares.

And so it was.

He returned with more profits in hand than he had ever earned in any other single day.

The next morning, the scene repeated itself.

The statue asked to be placed onto a box -- and promised in return even greater profits than what had been seen the day before.

And so it was.

He exceeded the previous day's earnings by far.

The next morning, the request was a bit different: The Jew was to place the figurine on a certain special box, rather than the one upon which he had placed it the two days before. The reward would be even greater, he was told.

The Jew did as he was told and each day, his profits increased.

He was now becoming increasingly wealthy as he danced to the statuette's tune on a daily basis. This simple Jew was blind to the reality that he was accommodating an idol and trusting in its efficacy.

That blindness came from a combination of the intoxicating force of the money and the fact that this Jew had never been exposed to the level of Torah study that would have helped him understand the gravity of what was occurring.

It wasn't long before the Jew, who was now a man of means, elevated the statue as well, constructing a special house, complete with a custom-made pedestal and an "eternal light" for his brass benefactor.

As the man's wealth increased, he told his secret to not a soul, save for his wife.

Of course, he didn't keep the money to himself. As a Jew, he knew what to next: He set up a yeshiva in his home, complete with a minyan's worth of talmidei chachamim and ten more souls to join them in their learning. He supported this single-handedly, capping off each day with a magnificent repast for all concerned. After the meal, each of the scholars would be handed that day's generous stipend.

Tzeddakah was given as well to the town's Beit HaKenneset, its other yeshivot, and to the local poor, all of whom had come to depend on his support.

It goes without saying that the entire city showed this formerly poor man the utmost of honor now.

It was at this time that the Tzaddik Rabbi Yeshaya Pinto zt"l was travelling the land, searching for sources of spiritual contamination. Upon finding any, he would destroy it.

The Rav had heard that in Constantinople there lived an exceedingly wealthy Jew whose home was meeting place to the city's talmidei chachamim and who engaged himself in magnificent levels of *chessed*. The Rif himself, Rav Yitzhak al Fazi, had visited this home and was received with the greatest of welcomes.

The Rif was, of course, requested to bestow upon the house the greatest honor of all, that is, to stay the day to earn in the Beit HaMidrash and to join the other Rabbanim in the feast at day's end.

The Rif accepted the invitation.

However, something was making him very uncomfortable.

Seated at the end-of-day feast, he stared and stared at his host, and the picture did not seem right. It says in Koheleth 8:1, חכמת אדם תאיר פניו, *man's wisdom illuminates his face*.

Since that is the case, why was it that no wisdom whatsoever was there to be seen on the visage right opposite him?

This was the face of *bor*.

"How did this man reach such a station in life?" quietly asked the Rif of the Rabbanim in his midst.

No one could explain it. All offered the same story: That he had been a long-impoverished junk dealer whose wealth suddenly seemed to multiply exponentially from one day to the next. None of them knew anything more than that.

After the meal, the Rif retired to a private room in the house and summoned his host.

After praising the man for his generosity, the Rif said quite pointedly:

"Tell me, dear sir, the circumstances under which you acquired this great wealth. Tell me the truth. Hold nothing back. Do not doubt that even if you try and conceal something, I will get to the bottom of this. All will be revealed."

At this, the man began to tremble.

Immediately, he told the Rif his secret.

Startled, the Rif inquired of him, "And tell me, are you still the kosher Jew you had been prior to attaining your wealth? Do you still have complete trust in Hashem and His Torah?"

"Of course I do!" said the man. "Don't my actions prove this? Daily, I say the Shema and the tefillot. My house is filled with talmidei chachamim, whose Torah study I fully underwrite."

“And if you were promised wealth in return for serving avodah zarah, would you do so?” asked the Rif.

“Absolutely Not!” protested the man. “Promises of all the wealth in the world wouldn’t get me to bow to something formed by the hands of man.”

“If so, then show me the statuette,” said the Rif.

The two then set out for the room where the statue would be found.

They entered -- and there it was, perched on its special pedestal!

Immediately, the Rif cast the figurine to the ground.

“Get a hammer!” he said to the man. “A heavy one!”

Hammer in hand, the Rif proceeded with blow after blow until the brass figurine was nothing more than dust.

The dust was then scattered to the ocean.

Now came the greatest test: The Rif told the man that, given that all the man’s wealth had been acquired through idolatry, it was now incumbent upon him to set everything he owned ablaze.

The Rif told the rich man that Hashem doubtless considers him a *shogeg*, an unintentional transgressor, and not as one who knowingly violated the prohibitions of avodah zarah. After all, everything he did was *l’Shem Shamayim*. And, given that he was completely unschooled in the ways of Torah, he is considered as one who was unaware.

It is absolutely forbidden to derive benefit from Avodah Zarah or its derivatives. The man’s possessions were all gained through idolatry. Therefore, just as it would be forbidden to benefit from the statue, so is it forbidden to benefit from the possessions.

The Rif’s advice was that the man destroy everything he had gained and pray that Hashem “repay” him through “kosher” means.

The man shook when he heard that all of what he had done was considered avodah zarah.

It wasn’t long before he had put the torch to everything and returned to his former trade.

And, as the Rif had promised, despite going back to being just a “rag picker” -- a profession that had previously gained him only the most minimal level of material sustenance -- now, through the reward of having done that which was right in the eyes of Hashem, his “honest profit” was great enough that it enabled him to enjoy material comfort for the rest of his days.

אָף הוּא רָאָה גְּלִגְלַת אַחַת שְׂצָפָה עַל פְּנֵי
הַמַּיִם. אָמַר (לָהּ) עַל דְּאִטְפַּתְּ אֲטָפוּדְךָ. וְסוּף
מְטִיפִיךָ יְטוּפוּן:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בּוֹ

Moreover he saw a skull floating on the surface of the water and he said unto it: Because you drowned others they drowned you; and those that drowned you will eventually be drowned.

The basic sense of this mishnah seems to be that Hillel is reminding us that *haKaddosh Baruch Hu* exacts punishment *midah k'negged midah*, that is, measure for measure. I wonder, though, why it was necessary to teach us this through this particular imagery. I wonder as well why the lesson is taught partially in Aramaic, rather than *lashon hakodesh*.

I'd like to suggest that an answer might be found in a midrash on the verse in Bereishit 27:22: **וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֵּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו**, . . . *And he said, "the voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esau."*

The midrash says (in Yalkut Shemoni 247:116), **שִׁיעָקֵב מִצְפָּץ בְּקוֹלוֹ אֵין**, *when Yaakov would be mitsafsef with his voice, the hands of Esau did not forebear.*

The word **מִצְפָּץ** generally means to whistle. The Rabbis have said, however, that the meaning here is to learn Torah out loud. Thus, it could be understood to be saying that Torah learning only protects when it is done aloud. The talmud, in Massechet Eruvin 54a provides a graphic illustration:

Rabbi Eliezer had a certain student who would learn in a whisper. After three years, he forgot what he had learned. [the text continues] Rabbi Eliezer had a certain student who was liable for death by burning due to an offence he had committed against the Omnipresent. They said in the Great Court, "Leave him alone, for he attended to a great person."

Commentators to this gemara say that the two incidents describe one and the same student. In other words, the great crime he committed was that he forgot his Torah learning because of his own choice, namely his choice to learn quietly rather than aloud.

When the mishnah in the third chapter of Avoth says that one who forgets even one thing of his learning, it is as if they were deserving of the death

penalty, refers to situation where the forgetting was intentional (in Eruvin, the intentionality was that he chose to not learn aloud).

We could say from here, then, that whoever could have learned aloud but chose to learn quietly (and because of this forgot his learning), it is as if he will be judged (from on high) with death through burning.

This is measure for measure. For, the person who did not articulate words of Torah with his mouth is now judged to have his days cut short, which means that he will lose the opportunity to ever use his mouth again. This is despite (in the case of the gemara) his otherwise being a Tzaddik. An allusion to this (meaning the link between death and loss of speech) is found in Talmud Yerushalmi, which says that there is “no difference” between ourselves and the tzaddikim who have died, other than the “speaking of the mouth.”

Matan Torah, the event of Hashem’s giving the Torah to the Jewish People, was accompanied by sound as well, namely *kolot* and *berakim*. This *kol* was tangible, in that it could be seen (not only heard).

We see that the *kol* of Torah (at Matan Torah) is different than all other *kolot*. While ordinary *kolot* may only be perceived aurally, this *kol* had substance, *mamashut*. We can therefore suggest that this shows that the *kol* of Torah, in general, has *mamashut*.

And what can it achieve with this *mamashut*? It can defeat the power of Esau. This is in accord with what we saw before, the midrash that says (in Yalkut Shemoni 247:116), *בשעה שיעקב מצפצף בקולו אין ידי עשו שולטות*, *when Yaakov would be mitsafsef with his voice, the hands of Esau did not forebear*.

The converse would be true as well, that if one does not raise his voice in Torah, then the forces of Esau will forebear.

We can now go back to our original question, which was why the imagery of a skull floating on the water best brought home the message that Hillel wished to teach in our mishnah.

The skull submerged in water indicates not only that someone has died, but that his death was due to an offense committed with the skull, namely the mouth.

The verb for floating used by our mishnah is *tsafah*. You can already see where I’m going with this: the words *tsafah* and *tsaftzef* sound similar. The mishnah is saying, “You, who in your lifetime, was never *mitsaftsef* in Torah, now find yourself punished accordingly: Your skull is *tsafah* upon the water.

Why the water, by the way? Because water is compared to Torah.

Let us now examine the other words of this mishnah. Remember, we noted that the language was peculiar, in that aramaic is normally not found in mishnayoth. The words in question are **יטופון אמר לה על דאטפת אטפוך וסוף מטיפוך**. The root **אטף** normally means to drip. In the mishnah, it was used in the sense of “to drown.”

I’d like to suggest that the root **אטף** is similar to the root **אטם**, which means a stoppage. Someone unable to speak could be said to be **אטם שפתים**, “of blocked lips.”

We can therefore see why this particular choice of verb is quite fitting, now that we are saying that it alludes to one who did not articulate his Torah learning aloud.

The mishnah ends by saying, **וסוף מטיפוך יטופון**, *those who drowned you will themselves be drowned*. To what does this refer? What does it mean that those who were **אטף** you will themselves be **אטף**? Why this word?

Well, if we remember that we wanted to associate **אטף** with **אטם** and that the person is being killed because of having forgotten his Torah due to not having articulated his Torah learning aloud, then we could say that ‘those who were **אטף**’ are those who “shut you up.”

This refers to those who sat with you in the Beit HaMidrash and themselves learned silently. Since they modeled this to you, since they were your “Rabbanim” in this skewed approach, eventually they will join you in the water. Their skulls, too, will float.



הוא הִיה אֹמֵר מְרֻבָּה בָּשָׂר מְרֻבָּה רֵמָה.
 מְרֻבָּה נְכֻסִים מְרֻבָּה דְאָגָה. מְרֻבָּה נְשִׁים מְרֻבָּה
 כְּשָׁפִים. מְרֻבָּה שְׁפָחוֹת מְרֻבָּה זָמָה. מְרֻבָּה
 עֲבָדִים מְרֻבָּה גְזֵל. מְרֻבָּה תּוֹרָה מְרֻבָּה חַיִּים.
 מְרֻבָּה יְשִׁיבָה מְרֻבָּה חֲכָמָה. מְרֻבָּה עֲצָה מְרֻבָּה
 תְּבוּנָה. מְרֻבָּה צְדָקָה מְרֻבָּה שְׁלוֹם. קָנָה שֵׁם
 טוֹב קָנָה לְעַצְמוֹ. קָנָה לוֹ דְבָרֵי תּוֹרָה קָנָה לוֹ
 חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּז

*He used to say: The more flesh the more worms;
 the more possessions the more anxiety; the
 more women the more witchcraft; the more
 maidservants the more lewdness, the more
 manservants the more theft. But the more Torah
 the more life, the more schooling the more wisdom;
 the more counsel the more understanding; who
 increases charity increases peace. If a man has
 acquired a good name he has gained something
 which enriches himself; If he has acquired Torah,
 he has acquired the life of the World to Come.*

The more flesh, the more worms

One of the messages found in this mishnah is that just as one who increases flesh, increases the worms that will consume his body in the grave, one who wishes to decrease his exposure to this fate should work on breaking his drive to eat excessively, and should consume meat only moderately. This is derived from the Hebrew word **בָּשָׂר**, meaning flesh or meat, which is composed of the same letters as **שִׁבָּר**, breakage, while with a change of vowels **רֵמָה**, meaning worms, becomes **רֵמָה**, elevation. This suggests that one who breaks his fleshly desires, bringing them under control, is elevated.

And this is the power of *teshuvah* — a person can take the thing that occasioned him to sin and transform it into something good. In a similar vein, the Sages say that **נָגַע**, affliction, results from **עֲנָג**, pleasure. But the reverse also

holds true: when one does *teshuvah*, pleasure results from affliction. And that is truly *teshuvat hamishkal*, correcting past wrongdoing by counterbalancing it through corresponding good deeds.

The more schooling the more wisdom

Many commentators on the Torah have asked why the Kaddosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu on the heights of Mount Sinai, as he sat there for forty days and nights, neither eating nor drinking. Why didn't the Kaddosh Baruch Hu give Moshe the Torah here below, on earth? The Torah itself says *lo bashamayim hi* (*Devarim* 30:12) — the Torah's place is not in heaven, but here on earth.

Our Sages made certain statements that should shed some light on this matter. In *Eiruvim* (54a), they said: "If a person makes himself like the desert that everyone tramples on, his learning will remain with him, and if he does not, his learning will not remain with him." In other words, someone who learns Torah must be great in humility, for Torah cannot be a lasting acquisition for a person who is proud. They also said, "Torah is compared to water. Just as water leaves high places and flows down to low places, so does the Torah leave haughty, proud people and go down to those who conduct themselves humbly" (*Taanit* 7a).

The comparison of humility to a wilderness is intriguing. What did the Sages mean by it? If they simply meant that a person should make himself like the earth that is trampled underfoot, they could have used the more precise word עפר rather than the word מדבר, desert, as in the expression we use daily in our prayers, ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה (*Berachot* 17a). Furthermore, the word combination בו שהכל דשין, that everyone tramples on, is unusual. The conventional usage would be שהכל דשין אותו.

Evidently, the word בו, which means "in it" as well as "on it," was used intentionally in order to teach another quality that is vital to Torah learning. Just as a desert is distant from settled areas, has few people traveling through it, and is lacking in both water and food sources, so must one who wishes to make Torah a lasting acquisition distance himself mentally from all the bustle of civilized life while he is learning, and banish all his worldly concerns from his mind as if they didn't exist. Then he is assured that his learning will remain with him.

Similarly, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu had to give the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu on a remote mountain so that he should be on a proper level to receive it, distant

from worldly affairs and elevated. Then, he in turn could teach the Jewish people that they, too, must rise above the things of this world while studying Torah.

So when the Sages said that a person should make himself like a desert and then his learning would remain with him, they meant that while learning, he should put himself in a state of mind comparable to being in a desert, remote from civilization. How does one put himself in such a state of mind? By learning in a yeshivah or a *beit midrash*. If he tries to learn in a place that is not removed from the bustle of worldly affairs, he will be distracted and his learning won't be successful.

When the Sages used the word **בו**, rather than the direct object **אורתי**, they were hinting at a marvelous idea. People may travel through a desert, but it remains a desert all the same, unaffected by the travelers. And a man who learns in the *beit midrash*, removing his thoughts from the outside world and immersing himself in learning, will not even notice what is going on around him. The “travelers” may come and go, but he remains unaffected.

This sheds light on another one of our Sages' statements: “Since the days of our patriarchs, the Jewish people have never been without a yeshivah, a particular place where men sat and learned Torah together. They had a yeshivah in the Egyptian exile and in every other place where they lived” (*Yoma* 28b). We need to understand why our Sages point this out. Why was it so important to have *yeshivot* — couldn't they have studied Torah in their homes?

We learn from the Chumash that Yaakov Avinu established a yeshivah before he even went down to Egypt. The *pasuk* says, “He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to direct him” (*Bereishit* 46:28), and the Midrash interprets this to mean that Yaakov instructed Yehudah to set up a meeting place where he would teach Torah, and the Tribes would study there. Again, why was this necessary, when Torah can be learned anywhere? Why did a yeshivah have to be set up before Yaakov would even go there?

Clearly, our patriarchs wished to teach us that Torah can only become a lasting acquisition if one studies it in a place removed from worldly affairs, a *beit midrash* or yeshivah. The Torah is spiritual, and this material world is full of distractions and worries. A man must do something for a livelihood, but if his mind is on business even when he is learning, the learning will not remain with him. This is why the Sages advised, “If that lowly one confronts you, drag him to the *beit midrash*” (*Kiddushin* 30b), for that is a place that is cut off from the transient matters of this world, and the *yetzer hara*'s domain is not there.

This also explains why the mishnah uses the word “yeshivah” in the phrase, **מַרְבֵּה יְשִׁיבָה מַרְבֵּה חִכְמָה**, translated as “One who increases study, increases wisdom.” It does not say **מַרְבֵּה תּוֹרָה מַרְבֵּה חִכְמָה**, “One who increases Torah, increases wisdom,” because Torah makes a person wise only if he learns in a yeshivah-type setting and detaches himself from worldly matters.

מַרְבֵּה צְדָקָה מַרְבֵּה שְׁלוֹם

The mishnah says, **מַרְבֵּה צְדָקָה מַרְבֵּה שְׁלוֹם**, *one who increases charity increases peace*. This could be understood on both a mystical and a practical level.

By personally handing out tzedakah to the poor and accompanying it with a pleasant smile, one could be said to be “building the world” through *chessed*, somewhat akin to the verse in Tehillim 99:3, **עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה**, which is generally understood to describe Hashem’s relationship to Creation. Some understand it as meaning that the initial Creation was an act of *chessed*. Others understand the verse to mean that it is due to Hashem’s *chessed* that the world is sustained. In this second sense, then, he who does *chessed* on this earth could be said to be emulating Hashem.

And, he brings **שְׁלוֹם** to the world as well.

How is that?

Well, the answer is quite practical, and it especially applies to increasing **שְׁלוֹם** between man and his wife.

For, the poor will now be better able to have the material necessities of life. And that leads to more **שְׁלוֹם** in the marriage.

קָנָה לוֹ דַבְרֵי תּוֹרָה קָנָה לוֹ חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

The mishnah says, **קָנָה לוֹ דַבְרֵי תּוֹרָה קָנָה לוֹ חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא**, *If he has acquired Torah, he has acquired the life of the World to Come*. It is telling us that it is possible to be **קוֹנֵה** Torah.

Shlomo HaMelech as well uses the language of **קוֹנֵה** in relationship to Torah. Mishlei 23:23 says, **אִמֶת קָנָה וְאֵל תִּמְכַר**. The verse says **אִמֶת קָנָה**, that one should be *koneh Emett*. The commentators tell us that **אִמֶת** here means “Torah.” Exactly what does it mean to be **קוֹנֵה** Torah? Why this particular verb?

I would like to suggest that in order to fulfill all the mitzvot of Torah, one must first feel as if they had been **קוֹנֵה** Torah. What I mean to say is that he must feel as if Torah is something upon which he had expended great personal wealth so as to acquire.

Let me explain further.

One cannot compare that which is handed over as a gift to that which is acquired through personal sacrifice. That which one has paid vast sums so as to acquire, will be guarded quite differently than that which was received by gift.

Torah works the same way.

If one's relationship to it is as something that had simply been handed over, he will not value it. On the other hand, if he looks at it as something for which he had sacrificed greatly, then he will treasure it just as he would anything else he had similarly acquired.

In order for this to happen, one must, in fact, sacrifice greatly for it. When one does attain that level of connection to Torah, he will thereby merit the World to Come (as it says in the continuation of our mishnah, **קנה לו דברי תורה קנה לו חיי העולם הבא**).

Let us say, though, that a person will come to treasure the Torah so much that he will actually become outright possessive of it. He'll say, "It's mine! I've acquired it -- and I'm not sharing!"

Perhaps that is why the very next mishnah begins,

רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי הוא היה אומר אם למדת תורה
תחזיק טובה לעצמך כי לכך נוצרת,

He used to say: If you have learned much Torah, do not think well of yourself, because it is for this that you were created.

This is being said by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, a student of Hillel's.

Perhaps this means to say that the Torah is not the property of any one individual, but the joint property of the group, meaning *Clal Yisrael*. Each individual, then, must view it as having been entrusted to himself on behalf of the *Clal*.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

מרבה נכסים מרבה דאגה

It once happened that Rav Chaim Pinto zt"l found himself unable to sleep. He stepped from his bed and asked his wife whether she might have taken any of the money he had set aside.

She replied that, in fact, she had. She said that she had used the money he had set aside for the poor and used it for Shabbat expenses.

Rav Chaim cried out: “Because you took money I had set aside for the poor, a foul smell has entered our home -- the odor of *olam hazeih!* This is what kept me from falling asleep!”

Immediately, he took the money from her hand and returned it to where it could be hidden, for the poor.

Within moments, he was fast asleep.

Rabbi Chaim was even accustomed to rinse out his money purse before retiring to bed at night. He would say that even though he knew that there was no money left in it, as he had distributed all he had to the poor, the “dust” of the coins remained. He therefore wanted to rid himself of even that “dust” and that “odor.” For, the “stench” of materialism unsettled him to no end.

מַרְבֵּה צְדָקָה מַרְבֵּה שְׁלוֹם

When it came to collecting tzeddakah, Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt”l was a powerful force to contend with. All the townspeople knew that when Rabbi Chaim passed their way, they absolutely *had* to give him tzeddakah. With that money, Rabbi Chaim supported the city’s poor. This does not mean, however, that he did so through intimidation (as we shall soon see).

One of the sayings of our Rabbis that Rav Chaim kept in mind was, **בְּנֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּהוּ עֵינֵי שְׂמֵחַן תְּצַא תּוֹרָה הַזֶּהוּ**, *take care as to the descendants of the poor, for Torah will come from them* (Nedarim 81a). This is normally understood to mean that, as compared to various other types of people, they are the most likely source from whose midst will develop the next generation’s *talmidei chachamim*. Rabbi Chaim would sit with them and strengthen them with pleasant words of encouragement. But it was not only words, but deeds as well. Their daily sustenance was often little more than a few vegetables and some bread accompanied by a glass of beer. Rabbi Chaim would eat with them, as if to demonstrate that the dried crusts of their meals were more appealing to him than the meats and delicacies of the higher classes.

At meal’s end, Rabbi Chaim would bless the entire household, especially its head, assuring them how much he preferred their company and their food to that of the wealthy. He would add that *Yirat Hashem*, fear of Heaven, is best acquired through struggle, poverty, and deprivation. The talmud tells us that, amongst all the students of Torah, *Yirat HaShem* was best embodied by the generation of Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Ilaye. It is said of them that six students of his shared a single garment, continuing to learn Torah.

All of this, Rabbi Chaim did with cleverness and discretion. The donors knew not the identities of the recipients, nor did the recipients know the identities of their benefactors.

This is not to say that things always ran smoothly.

In Rabbi Chaim's day, Morocco was frequently visited by all sorts of people who were coming to collect tzeddakah for the poor of their own communities. Many of them happened to be distinguished Rabbanim and Talmidei Chachamim.

The collecting style of some of them would often be somewhat heavy-handed. They would seek to intimidate and invoke fear, in order to persuade Moroccan Jews to give them money. Not only that, but some of them would also seek to undermine the authority of the local Rabbanim, as a way of subverting the local channels of tzeddakah and diverting the funds to their own causes.

Unfortunately, their tactics were sometimes successful, and some of them were able to build themselves up through cutting down the local Rabbanim.

But, as for Rav Chaim, his approach was not theirs. Never did he seek to intimidate or frighten. Never was there a harsh word or threat.

Instead, there was pleasantness, love, and compassion. For his was the way of Peace.

It once happened that a certain Rav came to town, in pursuit of honor. He managed to have some local townfolk invite him to a local Brit Milah, at which Rabbi Chaim would be present as well.

Rav Chaim saw him at the meal and noticed him reaching for a glass of wine, which he then downed with the proper *beracha*. Rav Chaim noticed that, although the *beracha* was correct, the visiting Rav had failed to ask the host's permission to drink the wine in the first place.

Rav Chaim let him know, in no uncertain terms, that his actions were incorrect.

The man answered back, quite sharply, that someone as prestigious as himself needn't ask permission from *anyone*, especially not in a community as insignificant as this one.

He proceeded to insult Rabbi Chaim directly.

And Rav Chaim gave it back to him in return.

The end results were not pretty. Within days, the Rav was no longer alive and Rabbi Chaim's legs had been stricken.

Once he had healed, Rabbi Chaim recited the *piyut*, "*I will elevate you, oh G-d, the G-d of Yisrael, who saves רגלי (lit. my legs) of the one redeemed from rejection.*"

רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי. הוא
 היה אומר אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תחזיק
 טובה לעצמך כי לך נוצרת. חמשה תלמידים
 היו לו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי ואלו הן רבי אליעזר
 בן הרקנוס ורבי יהושע בן חנניה ורבי יוסי
 הכהן ורבי שמעון בן נתנאל ורבי אלעזר בן
 ערד. הוא היה מונה שבחן. רבי אליעזר בן
 הרקנוס בור סוד שאינו מאבד טפה. רבי יהושע
 בן חנניה אשרי יולדתו. רבי יוסי הכהן חסיד.
 רבי שמעון בן נתנאל ירא חטא. ורבי אלעזר
 בן ערד מעין המתגבר. הוא היה אומר אם יהיו
 כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ואליעזר בן
 הרקנוס בכף שניה מכריע את כלם. אבא
 שאול אומר משמו אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל
 בכף מאזנים ורבי אליעזר בן הרקנוס אף
 עמהם ורבי אלעזר בן ערד בכף שניה מכריע
 את כלם:
 משנה אבות ב:ח

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai received from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say: If you have learned much Torah, do not think well of yourself, because it is for this that you were created. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, Rabbi Yosse HaCohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He used to list their praises. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus is a cemented cistern that does not lose a drop. Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah?—?fortunate is the mother who bore him. Rabbi Yosse HaCohen is a chassid. Rabbi

Shimon ben Nesanel fears sin. Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is an overflowing spring. He used to say: If all the Sages of Israel were on one side of a scale and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus was on the other side, he would outweigh them all. Abba Shaul said in his name: If all the Sages of Israel were on one side of a scale, with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus included, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach was on the other side, he would outweigh them all.

The mishnah tells us that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai would say: If you have learned much Torah, do not take credit for yourself--it is for this that you have been formed. Then it tells us that he had five disciples.

I wonder: Five disciples? And not more?

I wonder as well as to why the mishnah then proceeds to sing their praises. Is that what Pirkei Avot is for? Not only that, but why devote an entire mishnah to it, not describing their teachings until the following mishnayoth?

I have another question: When Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai sang the praises of his *talmidim*, wasn't he concerned that this might lead to their becoming conceited? I think that this is a particularly curious in a tractate like Avot, which is devoted to cultivating *middoth tovoth*.

In answer to my questions, let me say as follows: Doubtless, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had many more than five *talmidim*. Perhaps, what set these apart, however, was that -- despite their greatness -- they never saw themselves as anything other than *talmidim*.

In other words, despite being *chachamim* of the absolutely highest rank, they never viewed themselves as such. Thus, they personified Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's "If you have learned much Torah, do not take credit for yourself--it is for this that you have been formed."

I would suggest as well that they learned Torah from one another all their lives, and never hesitated to relate to one another as **אנוש כערכי אלופי** **אשר יחדו נמתיק סוד בבית אלהים נהלך ברגש ואתה ומידעי**, *But it is you, a man of my measure, my guide, and my intimate friend; together we would take sweet counsel; in the House of G-d we would walk in company.*

This was because, aside from Torah, they learned *middoth tovoth* from one another.

I would suggest as well that when the mishnah says that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai not only said these praises of them, but he did so in the presence of all five. He did so in order that these great *talmidim*, all of whom had such wonderful *middoth*, would each be better able to see the special quality that exemplified each of the other four.

Needless to say, what he was doing as well was to reveal to each talmid the *shoresh nishmato*, that is, the “root” of his particular neshama.

The Rabbi knew that no harm could come of this, that it would not lead to conceit, as these *talmidim* were such models of humility as well.

One benefit of revealing to them the roots of their neshamoth is so that they would each comprehend the particular reason they were placed on this earth. Many *sefarim* write that the reason why individual neshamoth are brought to earth is in order to be *mitakken*, to “correct”, a specific *middah*. And, when a person dies, he asked by Hashem to offer an account: Did he engage in self-reflection and consider why he was brought to this world in the first place.

According to this approach, then, we could say that what Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai is doing here is to allow these *talmidim* to better discover the answer to that question.

That is why the next mishnah continues, **צאו וראו**, *lit.* “go out and see . . .”

Given that these *talmidim* were so filled with humility, they were best able to be receptive to the type of lesson that their Rabbi wished to teach them, namely which *middah* they need to most focus upon. This is because he who is conceited and egotistical will never acknowledge that he has anything to work on at all. Those types think themselves already perfect, not lacking perfection *anywhere*.

The humble, however, are much better off, for they allow themselves to see the *tikkunim* they need make in their *neshamoth*. They, unlike the haughty, can fulfill the dictum of the next mishnah, **צאו וראו**, *lit.* “go out and see . . .”

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students

I would now like to offer a different explanation of this mishnah, which will also serve to explain mishnah 9, which follows. As I already pointed out above, it is puzzling that a whole mishnah is spent naming five *talmidim* of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. And furthermore, are we supposed to think that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had no other *talmidim* but these five? Surely he

had hundreds of *talmidim*. What, then, was so special about these five that their names were listed for all posterity in *Masechet Avot*?

First of all, we need to remember that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai lived during the period of the Second Temple and witnessed its destruction. Ben Sikra, the leader of the zealots who violently opposed surrendering to the Roman legions, was his nephew (*Guitin* 56a). The heretical Jewish sect that eventually gave rise to a new religion called Christianity also came into being in his day, and he battled against them and their claims that the laws of the Torah were no longer binding, *chas veshalom* (*Shabbat* 116 a-b). And at the time of the destruction, he succeeded in saving Yavne and its sages (*Guitin* 56b). We see, then, that much of his life was dedicated to keeping the Torah from fading into oblivion, whether through the destructiveness of heretics within the Jewish people, or through the onslaught of Vespasian's army.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's teacher was Hillel the Elder, who said, "When they bring it in, disseminate it, and when they disseminate it, bring it in" (*Berakhot* 63a). Rashi explains the meaning of these cryptic words: during times when the great Torah scholars of the generation are not disseminating Torah, each man must take it on himself to go out and teach Torah. This is similar to another idea expressed by Hillel, which we find in mishnah 5 of this chapter: "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." His *talmid*, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, fulfilled this directive at the time of the *churban*, when the number of scholars learning and teaching Torah diminished. He taught his students that they must not be excessively humble at this time, but should go out and teach to the extent of their capability, lest the Torah be forgotten.

In order to strengthen their resolve to go out and disseminate Torah, he told each *talmid* what particular strengths he saw in him. The future of the Jewish people depended on his disciples, and he wanted everyone to learn from them what a *ben Torah* should be and how his learning is expressed through his character. He was not concerned that they would become conceited because of his praise. This was a time of crisis, a time when Torah was being "brought in," and his master had taught that this was the time to disseminate it.

One of the qualities Rabban Yochanan wished to emphasize was that of being "a cemented cistern that loses not a drop," like his *talmid* Eliezer ben Hurkenus. In other words, a man must review his learning constantly, so that he will never forget what he's learned. And he must raise his sons to be Torah scholars, too, like the mother of Joshua ben Chananya, who placed his cradle

in the *beit midrash* so that he would hear the sound of learning from infancy — “fortunate is she who gave birth to him.” The quality of *chassidut*, for which Yossei HaKohein was praised, is basic to a life of Torah and mitzvot, as is the quality of *yirat cheit*, in which Shimon ben Netanel excelled. And Rabi Elazar ben Arach, the “ever-increasing spring,” exemplified the mitzvah of constantly finding new ideas in the sacred texts so as to keep one’s learning fresh and not to forget it.

Surely, after Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai publicly proclaimed the excellent attributes of each disciples, the others wanted to develop these qualities, too, for that is the way of *talmidei chachamim* — when they see a good trait in someone, they set out to acquire it for themselves. This is the concept of *kinat sofrim*, envy among scholars (*Baba Batra* 21a).

As a result, all of Rabban Yochanan’s disciples acquired all of these traits. And this was Rabban Yochanan’s purpose in handing out such lavish praise to begin with. He wanted to encourage the positive energy of *kinat sofrim*, which stimulates the drive to grow in wisdom, and not the undesirable trait of lowly envy, which only decreases wisdom and engenders *sinat chinam*, the unfounded hatred that caused the Jewish nation to lose the Beit HaMikdash, as the Gemara teaches. (*Yoma* 9b)

Rabban Yochanan wasn’t afraid that his praise would backfire and make his disciples overly proud, because his master, Hillel, whose teachings he was acting upon, had been more modest and forbearing than anyone in his generation. A well-known story is told in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 31a) about a man who tried hard to make Hillel angry in order to win a bet, but all his obnoxious tactics were to no avail, and the Talmud points to Hillel as a role model of humility to be emulated by all. But for all his humility, Hillel directed his disciples to go out and spread Torah when the need arose, and not to be concerned about pride, as Rashi explains. And in the knowledge that the terrible days of the *churban* were certainly a time to disseminate Torah according to Hillel’s teaching, Rabban Yochanan set the process in motion by praising the virtues of his *talmidim*.

For this reason our mishnah begins by saying, “If you have learned much Torah, do not take credit for yourself,” or, in a more literal translation, “do not keep the good for yourself.” In the days of the *churban*, Torah scholars couldn’t afford the luxury of holding back from teaching Torah because they were worried about *gaavah*. Anyone who had Torah to teach had to go and teach

it, otherwise it might be lost to the Jewish people, *chalilah*, and the same applies in any period of history when times are hard.

The mishnah goes on to say, ***“He used to say: If all the Sages of Israel were on one side of a scale and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus was on the other side, he would outweigh them all.”*** It seems that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had a special fondness for Rabi Eliezer ben Hurkenus, whose story is well known: Rabi Eliezer’s father was not a *ben Torah*, and Rabi Eliezer worked in his father’s fields together with his brothers. One day he ran away to Jerusalem, taking nothing with him, and went into the yeshivah of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. Having no food, he swallowed handfuls of dirt to quiet his hunger, which caused him to have foul-smelling breath. Rabban Yochanan found out about this and blessed him, “Since you sacrificed yourself for Torah, and your breath became foul for its sake, one day the fragrance of Torah will issue from your mouth, and it will waft from one end of the world to the other.”

And because he sacrificed himself for Torah to such an extent, not even caring what he ate, his intellectual capacity became enormous, and he forgot nothing that he learned, and his master held this quality up before all his students as something to emulate: even if a person has nothing, not even bread and water, he must study Torah, and the more he sacrifices himself to learn, the more the Kaddosh Baruch Hu rewards him with ability to retain what he learns. Rabban Yochanan held that such a degree of self-sacrifice outweighs all other virtues, because it precedes all else. A person has to be willing to sacrifice himself before he even begins to learn, for only then will he retain his learning, as our rabbis said: “Torah learning is a lasting acquisition only if a person kills himself over it” (*Berakhot* 63a). And in the Midrash they said, “Why is *Megillat Ruth* read on Shavuot, the time of *Matan Torah*? To teach you that Torah is given only through suffering and poverty.”

Our mishnah continues, ***“If all the Sages of Israel were on one side of a scale, with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus included, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach was on the other side, he would outweigh them all.”*** In other words, Abba Shaul learned from Rabi Yochanan that Rabi Elazar ben Arach would outweigh all the sages of Israel due to his particular virtue of being “an ever-increasing spring.” How so? As I’ve mentioned, all five of the *talmidim* possessed all of the traits that Rabban Yochanan praised. And that being so, Rabi Elazar ben Arach, who stood out especially as “an ever-increasing spring,” must have been constantly

increasing in all the virtues, including that of being like “a cemented cistern that loses not a drop,” and this is how he could outweigh all the others.

But the first Tanna in this mishnah, who did not receive the saying in this form in the name of Rabi Yochanan, held that even though the quality of being “an ever-increasing spring” brings about an increase in all other good qualities as well, nevertheless Rabi Eliezer ben Hurkenus outweighed the others. This was not necessarily due to his being like “a cemented cistern,” but due to his personal achievements. Rabi Eliezer began to learn Torah at a much later age than the others, and despite that, he made something great of himself. While acknowledging the truth of Abba Shaul’s reasoning, the Tanna still maintains that because of what he achieved, Rabi Eliezer ben Hurkenus outweighed the others.

If you have learned much Torah, do not think well of yourself.

If we look at this admonition in the original Hebrew, אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך (literally, don’t hold the good for yourself) it could be understood to mean that one is obligated to teach Torah to others and to help his peers with their learning, and one shouldn’t say, “When will I get a chance to learn for myself if I’m always giving my time for other people’s learning?” A hint to this can be found in the *pasuk*, “Say to the priests, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: Let none [of you] defile himself for a dead person among his people” (*Vayikra* 21:1). The repetition of the verb אמור, say, is striking, and our Sages inquired into it. Another question: the verse says, “you shall say to them,” so why doesn’t it go on to say “Do not defile yourselves,” or, “that they should not defile themselves”? Instead, it switches from the plural to the singular: “Let none defile himself.”

These peculiarities in the verse are there for a reason; they hint at the idea we’ve been discussing. The repetition of the verb “to say” means first say it to yourself, so that you will then be able to say it to others. And the shift from plural to singular qualifies that directive: but do not study alone, without a *chavruta*, even if you think you will learn more that way, since you won’t have to spend time explaining your reasoning to your study partner. If you do, your Torah is liable to become defiled and lead you to sin, *chas veshalom*, because a person studying alone might get things wrong and end up believing that something is permitted when it is in fact prohibited, or *tahor* when it is really *tamei*.

Our Sages (see *Makot* 10a) found a similar idea in the *pasuk*, “חרב על הבדים, ונואלו — A sword is upon the imposters (בדים) and they shall become foolish”

(*Yirmiahu* 50:36) — A sword is upon those who hate *talmidei chachamim*, who study Torah together (בד בבד), and what's more, they become stupid, as it says, ונואלו, and furthermore they come to sin, as we learn from the verb נואלו, which appears elsewhere as אשר נואלנו ואשר חטאנו — for we have acted foolishly and we have sinned” (*Bemidbar* 12:11).

In the *pasuk* from *Iyov*, “אדם לעמל יולד” — Man is born for toil” (*Iyov* 5:7), there is a *notarikon*, an acrostic of the word לעמל — ללמוד על מנת ללמד. Someone who teaches others, giving up his time for their sake, is rewarded measure for measure. The Kaddosh Baruch Hu sees to it that the Torah he learns is retained within him, as if he were studying all the while when he teaches others.

These ideas shed light on the story of Rabi Akiva's *talmidim*. In the Gemara (*Yebamot* 62b), our rabbis relate, “Rabi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of *talmidim*, from Gevat to Antiparas, and they all died within one short period of time because they did not behave with honor towards one another.” This is puzzling. Their master, Rabi Akiva, constantly stressed the mitzvah of “You shall love your fellowman as yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:17), calling it a great overriding principle in the Torah. How is possible that his students failed to practice the rule their master inculcated in them so persistently? An idea in the final chapter of *Avot*, *Perek Kinyan HaTorah* (*Mishna* 3), helps to explain the apparent anomaly. The mishnah there says, “One who learns from his fellow a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single word, or even a single letter, he must treat him with honor.” What is meant by “honor”? Torah, as we learn from the verse in *Mishlei*, “The wise shall inherit honor” (*Mishlei* 3:35).

Apparently the fatal flaw in Rabi Akiva's *talmidim* was that they did not take the time to learn with a colleague who needed a friend's input, because they did not want to lose time from their own learning. Thus, since honor means Torah, they were punished for not treating each other with honor, although they did treat one another with respect and courtesy.

In the case of Rabi Chiya, too, we find that out of all his good deeds, what he was particularly praised for was the fact that he learned with others. He said of himself, “I acted to prevent Torah from being forgotten among the Jewish people. How? I sowed flax, and I spread out nets and caught deer in them. With the meat I fed orphans, and from the skin I made parchment. Then I went to a town where there were no teachers for the children, and on the parchment I wrote the five books of the Torah, and I gave them to five children, and I wrote out the six *sedarim* of the Mishnah and handed them out to six children, and

I said to each one of them, when you finish learning your scroll, teach it to your friend.” And regarding this, Rabi said, “How great are the deeds of Chiya” (*Ketuvot* 103b).

Our Sages also said, “What was the glory of Rabi Akiva? He was forty years old and had learned nothing. Once he was standing by a spring, and he saw that a large hole had formed in the stone. He thought to himself, who made this big hole in the stone? The water, falling on it continually. Suddenly Rabi Akiva saw that here was a lesson he could apply to himself. If this soft substance, water, could carve out a hole in hard stone, then all the more so can words of Torah, hard as iron, penetrate my heart of flesh and blood! And with no further delay he went to learn Torah” (*Avot de Rabbi Nathan* 6:b).

Surely Rabi Akiva understood from his own experience that each person must learn Torah with others despite the drain on his time, for he himself learned Torah from his rabbis when he was forty years old, and of course it is hard to teach Torah to a forty-year-old who has never learned before. Yet his rabbis were concerned for him and they generously gave of their time to learn with him, making this student a higher priority than their own learning.

And in the end he established 24,000 students of his own and was hailed as one of the greatest Sages of all time. And surely when he expounded on the overriding importance of loving one’s fellowman as oneself, this also included the obligation to help others with their learning. But apparently Rabi Akiva’s *talmidim* did not carry out their master’s directive to this extent. They were overly concerned about progressing in their own learning, and they failed to understand that their teacher had become Rabi Akiva only because others had learned with him.



אָמַר לָהֶם צֵאוּ וּרְאוּ אִיזוֹהִי דֶרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּדְבַק
 בָּהּ הָאָדָם. רַבִּי אֶלְעִזָּר אָמַר עֵין טוֹבָה. רַבִּי
 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אָמַר חֵבֵר טוֹב. רַבִּי יוֹסִי אָמַר שָׁכֵן
 טוֹב. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אָמַר הַרוֹאֶה אֶת הַנוֹלָד. רַבִּי
 אֶלְעִזָּר אָמַר לֵב טוֹב. אָמַר לָהֶם רוֹאֶה אֲנִי אֶת
 דְּבָרֵי אֶלְעִזָּר בֶּן עֶרְךָ מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם שֶׁבְכָלֵל דְּבָרָיו
 דְּבָרֵיכֶם. אָמַר לָהֶם צֵאוּ וּרְאוּ אִיזוֹהִי דֶרֶךְ רָעָה
 שֶׁיִּתְרַחֵק מִמֶּנָּה הָאָדָם. רַבִּי אֶלְעִזָּר אָמַר עֵין
 רָעָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אָמַר חֵבֵר רָע. רַבִּי יוֹסִי אָמַר
 שָׁכֵן רָע. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אָמַר הַלוֹהַ וְאִינוּ מְשַׁלְּמִים.
 אֶחָד הַלוֹהַ מִן הָאָדָם כְּלוֹהַ מִן הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ
 הוּא' שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לו) לֹהֵה רָשָׁע וְלֹא יִשְׁלַם
 וְצַדִּיק חוֹנֵן וְנוֹתֵן. רַבִּי אֶלְעִזָּר אָמַר לֵב רָע.
 אָמַר לָהֶם רוֹאֶה אֲנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֶלְעִזָּר בֶּן עֶרְךָ
 מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם שֶׁבְכָלֵל דְּבָרָיו דְּבָרֵיכֶם:
 משנה אבות ב:ט

He said to them: Go and see which is the good a man shall cherish most. Rabbi Eliezer said, a good eye; Rabbi Joshua said, a good companion; Rabbi Yosi said, a good neighbor; Rabbi Shimon said, foresight; Rabbi Elazar said, a good heart. He said to them: I see the words of Elazar ben Arach for your words are included are included. He said to them: Go and see which is the evil way which a man should avoid. Rabbi Eliezer said, an evil eye. Rabbi Joshua said, an evil companion. Rabbi Yosi said, an evil neighbor. Rabbi Shimon said, he that borrows and does not repay. He that borrows from a man is as one that borrows from God, for it is written (Psalm 37:21) "The wicked borrow, and do not pay back, but the righteous

are generous and keep giving.” Rabbi Elazar said, an evil heart. He said to them: I “see” the words said by Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, for his words include your own.

The mishnah says that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai challenged his five famous *talmidim*, “Go out and see which is the straight path to which man should cling.” Each of the *talmidim* then responds with their own insight. This is followed by his challenging them to determine which is the *worst* trait that one could acquire, the one that one should flee from, rather than cling to. Once again, the *talmidim* each come back with their own perspective on the matter.

It is often understood that the previous mishnah has Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai recounting the praises of each of the five *talmidim*, in some cases describing their unique talent (not forgetting even one drop of their learning, etc) and this mishnah has him challenging them to come up with the singular trait from whose mastery all the other essential traits would be best acquired.

I, however, would like to explain it in a way that is consistent with the approach I used in the previous mishnah, that the previous mishnah is describing *middoth* rather than reciting praises or capabilities. I said that these *middoth* represent Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s insight into the “root” of each of these *talmidim*’s souls. In line with that, I have a question here: Why would Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai be asking them to name a particular *middah* when he has already done this for them, having seen into the root of their souls?

I’ll ask further (in line with my reading the previous mishnah): Once someone has been praised for for a certain *middah*, wouldn’t it be obvious that he would say that this one is the most praiseworthy? For someone who has been described as the *middah* of *yirat cheit*, for instance, wouldn’t it be obvious that he would consider *yirat cheit* a good *middah*?

When someone has been described as a *בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה*, a *sealed cistern that loses not a drop*, this is not an empty praise coming from nowhere or from good fortune, but is the outgrowth of absolute dedication to Torah study, including total dedication to constant review of one’s learning.

When the mishnah says, *רבי יוסי חסיד*, to me this means *להתחסד עם קונו*, to be pious with one’s Maker, meaning to work at cultivating one’s piety towards

Hashem, which could also mean to consistently go beyond the letter of the law. And what could be a better *middah* than that?

Similarly, when the the mishnah says **רבי יהושע אשרי יולדתו**, happy is the one who gave birth to Rabbi Joshua, it is not just praising him, but saying that he is “*shaleim*” in every matter and that all of mankind is blessed through him (or blesses him). All say to one another, regarding him, happy is the mother who gave birth to this torah scholar. The Name of Heaven is thereby sanctified through him.

Similarly, when the mishnah says of Rabbi Elazar ben Arach that he is a **מעין המתגבר**, *an ever-increasing wellspring*, this is describing a *middah*. The *middah* I have in mind is that he exemplified torah learning *lishmah*, for in the final chapter of Pirkei Avot it says that becoming a **כמעין המתגבר וכוהר שאינו פוסק** is one of the rewards for torah *lishmah*.

Therefore, I ask why Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai would be asking them to chose a *middah*. According to the way I am learning these two mishnayoth, haven't they already done that, by personifying the *middoth* I described? Also, what is the meaning of **צאו וראו**? Where, exactly, should they be exiting from? By way of an answer to my questions, I'd like to suggest something I find endearing. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai most certainly knows the *middah* of each of his *talmidim*. And, he most certainly knows which are the *middoth* one should cling to, as well as the ones from which he should flee. What is he is doing here, though, is to challenge the *talmidim*, to see if they are able to master other *middoth tovoth* as well.

This, then, is the meaning of **צאו וראו**. He is saying, “Break away from the *middah tovah* that you have already mastered. Consider yourself as one has not mastered even a single *middah tovah*. Then, go see if there is a *middah tovah* other than the ones you've already mastered, which you can master now.

The *talmidim* therefore responded that it is always possible to increase one's service to Hashem and it is always possible as well to add to the *middoth tovoth* one has already acquired.

Each *talmid* identified one particular *middah*, other than the one they had been known for until now.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's goal was to show us, once again, the greatness of his *talmidim*. For, they were always eager to increase their *avodath HaShem*. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had just ascribed to each of them the *middah* they exemplified. This is the one they had totally internalized. This was the one

that they had “clung to.” Still, once their Rebbi said to them, “Go out and find another *middah*,” they did so immediately, without hesitation.

What they were doing was to seek out the one *middah tovah* that the average Jew would be best advised to strive for.

Perhaps they were thinking as well that their Rebbi had determined that their *middoth* had slackened from what they had been previously and that it is consequently imperative that they acquire some other *middah*.

By not hesitating, by not questioning even for a moment the request of their Rebbi, these *talmidim* fulfilled what is written in a subsequent mishnah in Avoth (4:12), רבי אלעזר בן שמוע אומר יהי . . . מורא רבך כמורא שמים, *Rabbi Elazar said . . . that the awe towards your teacher should be like the awe [you have] towards the Heavens.*

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai sought to test them further.

After having put the challenge to his *talmidim* and listening to what each had suggested, he told them, רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך שבכלל דבריו דבריכם, *I “see” the words said by Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, for his words include your own.*

Why say it to them?

He was trying to see if they would thereby become jealous or resentful towards their fellow *talmid*, the one who their Rebbi apparently just announced he was favoring.

Needless to say, no such reaction occurred. For, as expected, these *talmidim* who exemplified *middoth tovoth*.

Why did he do it, then? Didn’t he know the outcome? Did he have any doubt as to how his *talmidim* would react?

Of course, he knew *exactly* what would happen; he never had a doubt.

Rather, he did it in order to teach *us*. This whole section, from beginning to end, was included in Avoth in order to show us just how *kaddosh* and just how great these *talmidim* were of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and how they excelled at *middoth tovoth*.

In other words, this was included in Avoth not for the sake of teaching the five *talmidim*, but for the sake of teaching you and me.



הם אמרו שלשה (שלשה) דברים. רבי אליעזר
 אומר יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך ואל
 תהי נוח לכעוס. ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך. והוי
 מתחמם כנגד אורן של חכמים והוי זהיר
 בגחלתן שלא תכנה שנשיכתן נשיכת שועל
 ועקיפתן עקיפת עקרב ולחישתן לחישת שרף
 וכל דבריהם כגחלי אש:
 משנה אבות בי

*They each said three things. Rabbi Eliezer said:
 Let the honor of your fellow be as dear to you as
 your own. Be not easily moved to anger. Repent
 one day before your death. Warm yourself before
 the fire of the sages, but be heedful of their
 glowing coals for fear that you be burned, for
 their bite is the bite of a jackal and their sting
 the sting of a scorpion and their hiss the hiss of a
 serpent, and all their words are like coals of fire.*

יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך ואל תהי נוח לכעוס
 ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך והוי מתחמם כנגד אורן של
 חכמים

The mishnah says that you should consider your fellow's honor precious, just as you would your own. It also says that one should not be easily angered. It adds that one should do teshuva the day before he dies. And it says that one should warm themselves opposite the fire of the sages.

I would like to suggest a connection between these statements.

Various Rabbinic sources tell us that anger shortens one's life. As shortening one's life would be prohibited, it follows that activities that lead to it would be prohibited as well. One reason for this is that the sooner one dies, the less time he will have to do teshuvah.

Since one will therefore have to be careful about not getting oneself angry, it follows that he will be more forgiving of his friends.

Similarly, he will show greater honor to his Rabbi and not ridicule the Rabbi's words. Rather, he will be cautious here as well.

ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך

The mishnah says that the day before one dies, he should do *teshuvah*.

Why the day before -- rather than the day of his death?

Perhaps this has to do with what is written in Koheleth 8:8, **ואין שלטון ביום המות**, *there is no "shilton" (dominion, power, control) on the day of death*. This could be understood mean that on the day of death, one no longer has the ability to control his *yetser hara*. Given that *teshuvah* inherently involves conquering the *yetser hara*, once one arrives at the day of death, it will be too late. The last chance, therefore, is the day before.

Some kabbalistic sources write that the day of death is a particularly vulnerable time, as the *satan* endeavors to entice one to be *kofer b'ikar*, that is, to renounce the very foundations of our faith.

For this reason, it is essential to begin that day armed with the *teshuvah* done the day before, the better to fight that battle against the *satan*.

ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך

Once again, I'd like to comment on the mishnah's exhortation that one should do *teshuvah* the day before he dies.

The gemara (Shabbat 153a) asks the obvious question: Are people actually aware of which day they will die? In other words, lacking the foreknowledge as to whether the following day is about to be his last on this earth, how is a person supposed to know that the present day is the "one" to do *teshuvah*?

The gemara's answer is (and I paraphrase) "True; you can't know. One should therefore treat every day as the one before his last. It will then turn out that he spends all of his days (each of his days) in *teshuvah*."

Another gemara says as well that we are not privileged to know in advance the day of our demise: "Seven things are hidden from man. The day of death is one of them."

David HaMelech praised the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* for concealing the day of death, for if man were to know when in the future he would die, then he would spend his life in sin, figuring that he will always have the few days prior to his death to spend in *teshuvah*.

Tzaddikim know that any day could be their last. they therefore spend *every* day in fear -- and conduct themselves accordingly. Every day is spent in *teshuvah*.

The *reshayim* wind up “inheriting” *geheimom* they deserve, as they are not given the opportunity to “game” the system by doing a quick *teshuvah* the day before dying -- while living the rest of their lives in complete abandon.

When David HaMelech did request that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu reveal his day of death, the heavenly response (as recorded in the gemara) was: **גזרה היא דם מלפני שאין מודיעין קצו של בשר ודם** *It is My decree to not reveal the day that flesh and blood (man) dies.*

I know of a man who visited the doctor for a mid-life checkup, having just reached his fiftieth birthday. After checking his heartbeat, the doctor declared, “You’re just like a youngster!”

That night, the man sat down to eat and promptly had a heart attack. Nothing helped; for his time to die had arrived.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

והי זהיר בגחלתן שלא תכנה

The Gaon Rabbi Avraham Koriyat was a member of Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt”l’s Beit Din.

In Rabbi Chaim’s city, there were people who greatly feared having to appear in front of Rabbi Chaim’s court, for they knew just how strongly he reacted to those who had been proven to have acted improperly. Rabbi Chaim spoke the unvarnished truth -- and for some this was quite painful.

Rabbi Avraham, on the other hand, was less intimidating. Some of the townspeople therefore requested of Rav Chaim that he appoint Rabbi Avraham to fill in as *dayan* on occasion. Rabbi Chaim consented to this and Rabbi Avraham, who was relatively young, sat on many cases, to the community’s satisfaction.

As the years went by, Rabbi Chaim, who was considerably older than Rabbi Avraham, began to weaken from old age. However, it was Rabbi Avraham who wound up dying first, at the age of 45.

It is said that Rabbi Avraham, who had “warmed himself by the fire” of Rabbi Chaim, had become victim to having been “*burned by its embers.*”

Rabbi Chaim wept greatly for Rabbi Avraham, tearing his clothes and declaring in his eulogy, “What an upside-down world! Instead of this young man being here to eulogize me, his elderly colleague, it is I, the old one, who is eulogizing the young one.” At that, he became overwhelmed with emotion.

And then, Rabbi Chaim revealed a numerological secret.

Tehillim 31:20 says **מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך**, *How abundant is Your goodness that you have stored away for those who fear you*. The verse begins with the word **מה**, which is equivalent to 45, the number of years in Rabbi Abraham's lifetime. Hashem had set aside 45 years for the life of one who feared Him, Rabbi Avraham.

וכל דבריהם כגחלי אש

The mishnah compares the words of our Sages to fiery coals. Why?

One answer would be that this imagery is consistent with the association between words of Torah and fire, as we see in Yirmiyahu 23:29, **הלוא כה דברי** **קאש נאם יקוק**, *Behold, My word is like fire - the word of Hashem . . .* The *yetzer hara* is compared to fire as well, for it “burns” within man. It, however, is a small fire while the holy Torah is a great fire that can never be extinguished. This is seen in Shir HaShirim 8;6,7, **רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה** and **מים רבים . . .** *its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of -d. Many fires of heathen tribulation cannot extinguish the fire of this love.*

The smaller fire of the *yetzer hara* is negated through the greater fire, that of Torah. The *tzaddikim* fight an ongoing battle with the *yetzer hara* (to extinguish and negate it) and their tool is Torah (a great fire that renders the smaller one inconsequential). This shows why their words of Torah are compared to fiery coals. Not only that, but through Torah study, man himself becomes fire, ignited through the fire of Torah.

A further idea (based upon a midrash): Because the *tzaddikim* do not listen to the *yetzer hara*, the flames of *geheimom* do not affect them.

And all their words are like fiery coals.

Why are the words of *tzaddikim* compared to fiery coals? Because Torah is compared to fire, as in the *pasuk*, “Is not My word so like fire, says Hashem” (Yirmiahu 23;29). And the *yetzer hara*, too, is like fire; it burns inside a person. But there is a difference. The *yetzer hara* is like a small fire, and the holy Torah is like a great fire that can never be extinguished, as it says in *Shir HaShirim*, “Its coals are coals of fire of a great flame! Many waters cannot quench the love.” The flames of the *yetzer hara* are overwhelmed by the roaring fire of Torah and fade into insignificance in its presence. Since *tzaddikim* battle the *yetzer* constantly, all their words are like fiery coals. And what's more, Torah study turns the scholar himself into fire, as our rabbis said in the Midrash: “Because the *tzaddikim* do not listen to the *yetzer hara*, the fire of Gehinnom has no power over them”.

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ אָמַר עֵין הָרַע וְיֵצֶר הָרַע
 וְשִׂנְאָת הַבְּרִיּוֹת מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּינָא

*Rabbi Joshua says: The evil eye, the evil desire
 and hatred of his fellow creatures put a man out
 of the world.*

The Rabbi Joshua mentioned in this mishnah is the same as the one mentioned in the earlier mishnah, where he says that the *straight path that man should choose* is **טוב חבר** a good friend while the *דרך רעה האדם* *straight path that man should flee* is **רע חבר** an “evil” friend. In our mishnah, when stating which are the things that “drive a person from this world,” he says, *the evil eye, the yetser hara, the hatred of one’s fellow.*”

I’d like to focus on why in the prior mishnah he said an “evil” friend, while in our mishnah he said the “evil” eye. In other words, it would appear superficially that he was responding to the same question both times, but giving two different answers.

It seems to me that Rabbi Joshua is expanding upon what he said in the prior mishnah and that he is saying something quite fundamental.

I believe what he’s saying is that there are two kinds of “evil” friend.

One type is “evil” because he is filled with heresy and expresses it freely. It is a mitzvah to hate one like this, as we see in Tehillim 139:21, **ובתקוממך אתקוטט, משנאיך יקוק אשנא**, *I hate those who hate You, Hashem, and I quarrel with those who rise up against You.*

Another type of “evil” friend is one whose actions might very well be “bad,” but the person himself is not to be branded as absolutely “evil,” due to his never having been educated in the ways of Torah. In the eyes of the Law, this type of *rasha* is not considered culpable and we are not allowed to hate him. Rather, we should endeavor to help him return to the ways of Torah and mitzvot.

Let us say, though, that someone were to confuse the rules regarding how to relate to the two types described above. He would hate the one who should be befriended and befriend the one who should be hated.

One could say that this confused fellow is not seeing things correctly, that he has distorted perception. In other words, he has a bad “eye.”

Such a person would thereby lose his portions in both this world and the next. The *rasha* will introduce him to unbecoming behavior and beliefs, exciting the friend's *yetser hara* and dragging the friend down to the depths. And all that will be due to the friend's distorted perception of how to relate to the ideology-driven *rasha*.

This is why the avowed heretic is so dangerous; there is no *mitzvah* to love him, for his *intent* is to do evil and to draw others to his ways.

We see that, in the end, the friend has been *driven out of the world* because of his *ayin hara* (his distorted perception), which was responsible for exciting his *yetser hara* -- just as stated in our mishnah.

The other side hold true as well. If one hates the type of Jew that he's supposed to befriend and draw near, and because of this the far-away Jew does not return in *teshuvah* (and winds up dying before doing *teshuvah*), then the converse of the Rabbis' statement will come to fruition: Hatred of another Jew led to someone's being "driven out of the world."

Had the friend known to value, love, and draw close the faraway Jew, despite that Jew's improper behavior, then this Jew would have been *chozer b'teshuvah* and gained entry to the World to Come.

That is the second part of our mishnah, *the hatred of one's fellows drives a person from the world*. In the situation I described, it is the wayward Jew who has been driven from the world -- by his fellow's hatred.



רַבִּי יוֹסִי אָמַר יְהִי מָמוֹן חֵבְרֵךְ חֵבִיב עֲלֶיךָ
 כְּשֶׁלְּךָ. וְהִתְקַן עֲצֻמְךָ לְלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה שְׂאִינָה יְרֵשָׁה
 לְךָ. וְכֹל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ יִהְיוּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בֵּיב

Rabbi Yosi says: Let the property of your fellow man be as dear to you as your own. Prepare yourself for the study of the Torah, for the knowledge of it is not yours by inheritance. Let all your deeds be done for the sake of Heaven.

Our mishnah contains several statements from Rabbi Yossi. I'd like to concentrate on the first two: That one should value his fellow Jew's property just as he does his own and that one should perfect himself for the study of Torah, for it is not an inheritance.

I was wondering what the connection was between these two statements.

I wonder as well how one could square what's written here with the famous gemara in Bava Metziah 85a:

"כל שהוא תלמיד חכם, ובנו תלמיד חכם, ובן בנו תלמיד חכם, - שוב אין תורה פוסקת מזרעו לעולם"

Whoever is a talmid chacham, his son is a talmid chacham, and his son's son is a talmid chacham, Torah will not cease from his descendants forever. Doesn't our mishnah say that it's not an inheritance?

One answer I could suggest to both of my questions is that the mishnah is saying that whoever lacks *middoth tovoth* is unworthy of learning Torah. (Not being concerned with the property of others is just one example of a lack of *middoth tovoth*).

It is said that the Torah was not given until the Jewish people were "as one man with one heart." Although it's certainly possible that Torah could be passed down as an inheritance, that it is not true of *middoth tovoth*. Theoretically, a family of talmidei chachamim could pass their Torah learning down to one another, but *middoth tovoth* are highly individual and can only be developed by the individual's working on the unique needs of his particular *neshama* and his physical self.

As I mentioned before, when the mishnah mentions the *middah* of caring for others' property, it is giving only one example of *middoth tovoth*. Everything else that has to do with interpersonal relations is included.

Concern for others' property is used as the prime example because it is known that for many people, their possessions are more important to themselves than even their physical wellbeing.

Another reason for using property as the example is that money is known in lashon hakodesh as **דמים**, *damim*. The word *damim* has two meanings: money and blood (*dam* is blood). All of life depends on the blood. It could therefore be said that when one worries about the other's money (*damim*), he is worrying about his blood (*damim*) as well. He is therefore concerning himself with the very basis of the other fellow's life.

I would like to add an additional thought.

The mishnah says that your fellow's money should be **חביב** to you. The gematria of **חביב** is 22, which is equivalent to the number of unique letters in the hebrew alphabet (which is the language that the Torah was written in). Now, we had said earlier that a prerequisite to learning Torah is that a person conduct himself in solidarity with his fellow Jews. That means that he would care about the other's property and physical wellbeing just as he would his own. As we said before, if someone lacks that trait, then it won't matter how many generations of *talmidei chachamim* preceded him in his family -- Torah will not remain in his hands; it is not an inheritance. Perhaps we could see this as *middah k'negged middah*, measure for measure.

Just as he doesn't look at the others, so will the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* not look at his others. In other words, just as he does not look at the others, so will the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* not take into consideration the *talmidei-chachamim*-others in his family (his father, his grandfather, great-grandfather, etc) and allow the Torah to remain in his hands despite his bad *middoth*.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

והתקן עצמך ללמוד תורה שאינה ירושה לך

It sometimes happens that individuals not quite as mitzvah-observant as they should be walk in to see *Rabbeinu*. Often, they will ask, “Does the Rabbi recognize me?”

The reply is generally, “No! I don’t know who you are!”

The visitor will be somewhat incredulous: “The Rabbi doesn’t know me? I’m the son of Rabbi *ploni* and grandson of *Chacham ploni!*”

Still, a blank stare: “No; I don’t know you.”

“Your father, the Rav, I know him. And your grandfather, the *tzaddik*, yes; I remember him as well. They are *tzaddikim*. You, however, are not following their path in Torah and mitzvot. What do *you* have to do with *them*? What does your *yichus* have to do with *you*?”



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 ונחם על הרעה. ואל תהי רשע
 בפני עצמך:
 משנה אבות ביג

Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful in the reciting of the Shema and in prayer. When you pray do not make your prayer a form of routine but a plea for mercy and supplications before G-d, for it is written (Joel 2:13), "For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." Do not be wicked in your own mind.

Rabbi Shimon says in our mishnah that we should take special care as to how we say the *Sh'ma* and the *tefillah*. Why these mitzvot in particular? Is there some reason why these demand a degree of meticulousness greater than all other mitzvot?

The question becomes more intriguing when one considers the gemara in Shabbat 11a that says that Rabbi Shimon -- the same Rabbi Shimon as the one in our mishnah -- considered himself (along with his colleagues) exempt from *tefillah*, as they did not interrupt their learning even to pray! And, in the Talmud Yerushalmi, it says that they did not interrupt their learning for *Sh'ma* either.

In order to understand this question, we have to remember who Rabbi Shimon was. You might know him better as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and you will recall what is described in Massechet Shabbat 33b, which recounts the story of how Rabbi Shimon and his son, Rabbi Elazar, were fleeing the Romans and forced to hide in a cave.

They emerged only after twelve years. The first thing they encountered was the sight of two men plowing a field and sowing crops. This angered Rabbi Shimon, for he felt that these people were forsaking the life of the World to Come and occupying themselves instead with the transitory, physical world.

The gemara says everything they laid their gaze upon was promptly incinerated. Finally, a heavenly voice called out to them, “Have you emerged in order to destroy my world? Back to your cave!”

They went back to the cave and stayed there twelve more months passed, at which point Rabbi Shimon told his son that since the maximum sentence in *geheinom* is no more than 12 months, it would follow that they had completed their term of punishment.

To this, a heavenly voice cried out to confirm that it was time for their return to the world.

They emerged and once again came upon people actively involved in affairs of this world. This time, it was Rabbi Elazar whose gaze destroyed through fire. However, each time that happened, Rabbi Shimon would heal the one who had been damaged. He explained to his son that the world has enough full-time learners in the two of them; it was not right to expect that same standard from everyone else.

The story continues.

Close to erev Shabbat, they saw a certain old man carrying two bundles of myrtle. Approaching him, they asked why he needed them. The man answered that they were in honor of Shabbat.

“But, why two?” they asked.

“One is for *zachor* and one is for *shamor*.” (Both *zachor* and *shamor* were said to the Jewish People at Mt Sinai in relation to Shabbat. They represent two independent obligations. *Zachor* means to mention the Shabbat, which is the aspect of Sabbath observance that requires positive action. Making *Kiddush* is one example of its fulfillment. *Shamor* means to refrain from doing things that are counter to the nature of Shabbat. Not turning on lights and not driving one’s car are examples.)

Witnessing this, meaning the old man’s devotion to Shabbat by having not just one bunch of myrtle, but two, Rabbi Shimon declared, “Look how cherished the mitzvot are to the Jewish People!” And they were pleased.

As we go back and consider the meaning of this story, we must ponder what it was that Rabbi Elazar found so disturbing and why the sight of a single Jew carrying myrtle bushes caused him to reconsider. After all, this was only one man; many others were actively involved in worldly endeavors, which from his perspective, was a waste of time that should have been spent learning.

It would seem that Rabbi Elazar had in mind the teaching of his father, Rabbi Shimon, who had said (as recorded in Berachot 35b):

A person could plow at the time for plowing, seed at the time of seeding, harvest at the time of harvest, thresh at the time of threshing, and winnow at the time when it's windy. But, what will be of the Torah?

Therefore, when Rabbi Elazar saw so many people involved in labor -- not as his father, Rabbi Shimon, had thought best -- he was unrelenting and judged them through fire.

Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, had at this point changed his opinion.

Rabbi Shimon now realized that it was unrealistic to expect that everyone would be sitting and learning all day. The question he had asked initially, before having entered the cave, “*But, what will be of the Torah?*” now had an answer.

That answer was: The work that these farmers were investing into their crops would lead to the wheat that would be used for baking the bread upon which the Jewish People would be blessing *HaMotzi*. Not only that, but the work itself includes many mitzvot, like the leaving of the corners of the field and the dropped sheaves for the benefit of the poor. There was also *terumoth* and *ma'aserot*, the required tithes. The farmers were therefore not forgetting the Holy One, even as they engaged in physical work that could have been considered mundane.

A midrash in Vayikra Rabba 27:2 beautifully describes how the mitzvot are inextricably tied to the material world:

Who has made for me a parapet (there's a mitzvah to build a fence around one's roof, so that no one falls) before I gave him a roof? Who placed for me a mezuzah before I gave him a house? Who made for me a sukkah before I gave him a place? Who made for me a lulav before I gave him money? Who made for me tzitzit before I gave him a garment? Who set aside for me the corner of the field before I gave him a field? Who separated for me a terumah and ma'aser before I gave him a threshing floor? Who separated for me challah before I gave him dough? . . .

Rabbi Elazar, however, did not share his father's perspective. “Abba; is it really possible that Man could intend to do Hashem's will while engaged in physical labor? After all, they are working at the time. It therefore turns out that they will not be involved in mitzvot.”

Upon meeting the old man, though, things changed.

Rabbi Shimon told his son that they now have a logical disproof to what Rabbi Elazar had previously thought.

Here was an old man, joyfully carrying his two bundles of myrtle, above and beyond what was expected from him by Hashem. (There is no mitzvah to bring even a single myrtle, let alone two.) How much more so, will we expect that this Jew will perform with joy that which is not voluntary, but actually a mitzvah obligation!

True, these Jews don't have the chance to do full-time Torah learning, but whenever they have the opportunity to do a mitzvah, they do so, even going beyond the letter of law!

Upon hearing this logic, Rabbi Elazar was satisfied.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

וכשאתה מתפלל אל תעש תפלתך קבע אלא רחמים
ותחנונים לפני המקום ברוך הוא

The Jews of Agadir tell of a story that occurred in their city one day, right in the middle of Yom Hakippurim. The tzaddik, Rabbi Kalifa Malka, brother-in-law of Rabbi Shlomo Pinto, deeply immersed in fasting and prayer on that day heard the news that several ships laden with goods had just arrived in port --- and the recipient was himself. This was merchandise that he had paid for and ordered; he owned it.

Fearing that his non-Jewish clients would seek him out in the Beit HaKenesset and disturb his prayers on this holy day, Rabbi Kalifa Malka added an additional prayer: That the boats should sink, taking the merchandise with them.

That prayer was answered on that day. All that he had paid for was lost.

With that, Rabbi Kalifa Malka instantly become a pauper. He never recovered financially; he remained poor for the rest of his life.

And all that was because this tzaddik did not wish that his Yom HaKippurim prayers be disturbed.

According to legends told by the Jews of Agadir, when the tide is low, one can still see Rabbi Kalifa Malka's ships sitting on the seabed of the port. Not only that, but there is even a legend that every year on Yom HaKippurim, that

the tide rises precisely as the Jews are saying the prayer, **אל נורא עלילה**, *the fearsome G-d עלילה*. At precisely the time that they finish, the tide lowers once again.

It is said that the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto once travelled to Agadir, expressly to see these ships with his own eyes.



רבי אלעזר אומר הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה
 (ודע) מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס. ודע לפני מי אתה
 עמל. ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר
 פְּעֻלָּתְךָ:
 משנה אבות ב"ד

Rabbi Elazar says: Be diligent in the study the Torah. Know what to answer a heretic. Know before whom you toil and who is your employer who shall pay you the reward of your labor..

The mishnah says that we should be diligent in our study of Torah, to know what to answer a heretic, and to know before Whom we toil. As is my way in commenting on Pirkei Avot, I'd like to ask what the connection is between these seemingly disparate statements.

Let us consider what is written in Tehillim 119:18, **גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות**, מתורתך, *Unveil my eyes so that I may perceive wonders from your Torah.*

This could be understood to mean that the secrets of Torah are revealed to those who pray to Hashem that their eyes be opened to these secrets. Those who, on the other hand, do not pray that these secrets be revealed and do not immerse themselves in trying to discover these secrets, will not find great success. They could be poring over the exact same text and the exact same interpretations that their friend had studied, but the results will be different. If the friend was the type to pray that had his eyes be opened to the secrets and this fellow was the type to not offer that prayer, then the first fellow will have insights entirely more profound than those of the second.

Let us consider as well what Shlomo HaMelech wrote in *Mishlei 2:4,5*:
אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה: או תבין יראת יקוק ודעת אלהים תמצא
If you seek it as if it were silver, if you search for it as if it were hidden treasures -- then you will understand the fear of Hashem and discover the knowledge of G-d.

Here, too, the idea seems to be that those who seek it will find it, while those who do not will not.

Our mishnah could be interpreted in a similar fashion.

When it says *be diligent in the study of Torah. Know what to answer a heretic*, I suggest that one leads to the other. Here is what I mean: Only if you are diligent in your Torah study, could you then hope to achieve great levels of clarity in your learning. If you are exceptionally diligent, you could then hope that you will have such great clarity that you will even know how to effectively answer a heretic. In other words, even the heretic will be unable to deny the truth in your words.

And how is one to attain this level of diligence?

The mishnah goes on to tell us. It says, *ודע לפני מי אתה עמל*, *Know before Whom you toil*. This is reminiscent of one of the Rabbinic comments to Vayikra 26:3 . . . *אם בחקותי תלכו*, *If you will follow my decrees . . .* To this, the Sifra says, *אם בחוקותי תלכו, מלמד שהמקום מתאוה שיהו ישראל עמילים בתורה*, *If you will follow my decrees: this teaches that that Divine Presence yearns that Yisrael will be עמילים, ameilim in Torah*. Note that the mishnah uses the same word, *עמל*.

Knowing how much it means to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* should most certainly inspire you to be *עמילים בתורה*, which will, in the end, inevitably lead to greater clarity.

By way of example, this is like the situation of one who is distraught over having lost something precious. He become preoccupied with thoughts of how and where to find it. He goes here; he goes there. One thing is certain: he won't get it back simply by sitting at home.

So it is with Torah. You will never discover the pearls contained within it unless you actively seek them out.

Megilla 6b says:

ואמר רבי יצחק, אם יאמר לך אדם: יגעתי ולא מצאתי - אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי - אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי - תאמן. הני מילי - בדברי תורה.

Rabbi Yitzhak said, "If someone tells you that he toiled but did not achieve, don't believe him; that he achieved without toil, don't believe him. That he toiled and achieved, believe him." The gemara immediately qualifies: *This only applies to Torah* (but not necessarily to worldly endeavors, like business).

There is another reason why those who are *עמילים* in Torah will inevitably be more successful at effectively responding to heretics. Those who struggle mightily to understand Torah will come closer to comprehending its essence.

And, they will come closer to internalizing it, to the extent that it almost becomes second nature. Torah is pure truth; it does not contain falsehood or fakery.

Those who internalize Torah by learning it sincerely and with great effort will also rid themselves of fakery. And, their Torah will be a Torah of truth.

On the other hand, those who are not sincere, who learn without investing much effort or desire, will never develop themselves to the extent that they will be able to counter the heretic's theories. Their grasp will remain superficial because they never sought to go to the depths in their learning. Their superficial answers to the heretic's questions will never be effective or convincing.

Their answers will not only be ineffective, but will fuel the opposition and desecrate G-d's Name. For, the heretic will think that the fellow before him is a *Ben Torah*, the real thing. When he hears the shallowness of the reply to his questions, he'll come away thinking that this fellow's responses are the best that the Torah has to offer. He'll think that the logical failing is not due to the student's failings, but to the Torah's inability to address the questions. He does not realize that the person he sees before him is not a *Ben Torah*, but only a pseudo *Ben Torah*.

That is why the only ones who should be responding to the heretics are those who have truly been **עמל**, not those who are simply going through the motions.



רְבִי טַרְפוֹן אָמַר הַיּוֹם קָצֵר וְהַמְּלָאכָה
 מְרֻבָּה וְהַפּוֹעֲלִים עֲצֵלִים וְהַשָּׂכָר הַרְבֵּה וּבַעַל
 תְּבִית דּוֹחֵק:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בְּטוֹ

Rabbi Tarfon says: The day is short, The work is great, the workmen are lazy, the wage is abundant and the master is insistent.

The mishnah says that the day is short.

Is it?

Not to those who sometimes work eighteen-hour days.

Rabbi Obadiah from Bartenura tells us that the “day is short” expression is a metaphor for the amount of time we are destined to spend in the physical world: **הַיּוֹם קָצֵר - חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה קְצֵרִים הֵם** *The day is short - Life in this world is short.*

If we go with Rabbi Obadiah’s explanation, then I wonder why, when the mishnah wanted to refer to the brevity of our time on this earth, it did not use as a metaphor something that was consistently brief.

In order to bring out an important lesson-for-life, I’d like to use a bit of creativity and respond to my question somewhat poetically.

Berachot 21a says **רְבִי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר: וְלוֹאֵי שִׁיתְפַּלֵּל אָדָם כָּל הַיּוֹם כּוֹל.** *Rabbi Yochanan says, “If only man would pray all day long!”*

I would like to tie Rabbi Yochanan’s statement to that of Rabbi Tarfon in our mishnah.

Let us say that someone would do nothing but pray the entire day. Would we say that, given all that time, he could have expressed all of Hashem’s praises in totality -- each and every detail? Of course not. Not even one hundred millionth of the miracles and wonders that He did for us, does for us, and will do for us.

In other words, **הַמְּלָאכָה מְרֻבָּה**, *The work is great.* Meaning: The sheer quantity of acknowledgement owed Hashem is great; it would be impossible to “complete” it.

The mishnah says that **הַפּוֹעֲלִים עֲצֵלִים**, *the workmen are lazy.* Given how we explained what the **מְלָאכָה** is in the mishnah, let us be consistent and say that

הפועלים, *the workmen*, refers to those whose “work” is *tefillah*. Those workmen, then, are all of us. That is, all of us who pray daily. Unfortunately, most of these “workmen” are somewhat lacking in the attention they pay to their daily “work.” The Talmud Yerushalmi in Berachot brings one *Chacham*’s admission in this regard: “I am indebted to my skull. For, when I arrive in my prayers to the blessing *modim*, it bows on its own; I myself don’t feel a thing.”

Now, if that is the way things are described in the time of the talmud and it was a great *Chacham* who was saying this about himself, one can only imagine what the state of things is today.

The Shulkhan Arukh (*Rama*) codifies that, even if one does not have minimal intent, he is not permitted to repeat the first *beracha* of *tefillat ha’amidah*. On the surface, this would seem difficult to understand, as according to the letter of the law (*Mechaber*), one should have to repeat a *tefillah* said without minimal intent. The explanation, though, is that it is the norm (not the exception) for us to not have minimal intent when we pray. It is therefore forbidden to repeat it, as if the second time would be an improvement.

A person could get discouraged from all this. He could say that since he is not going to even come close to ever praising the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* properly, why should he even begin? Why start a job that you can’t even do half-way?

This is why it says in the mishnah that *the reward is great*.

Even if you were to pray a minimal amount, meaning that amount set by our *Chachamim*, your reward will still be great. This is why the following mishnah says that *It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task*. In other words, although you cannot possibly “finish” the task of praising Hashem’s Goodness, which is infinite, do not give up!

Begin the job; you will be rewarded just for the fact that you started!



הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמּוֹר
 וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה. אִם לְמַדַּת
 תּוֹרָה הַרְבֵּה נוֹתְנִים לָךְ שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה. וְנֶאֱמַן הוּא
 בְּעַל מְלָאכְתְּךָ שְׂיִשְׁלֶם לָךְ שְׂכָר פְּעֻלָּתְךָ. וְדַע
 מִתֵּן שְׂכָרְךָ שֶׁל צְדִיקִים לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּטּוֹ

He used to say: It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it. If you have studied much in the Torah much reward will be given you, for faithful is your employer who shall pay you the reward of your labor. And know that the reward for the righteous shall be in the Future to Come.

The mishnah says that it is not incumbent upon us to “finish the work” and that we are not free to absolve ourselves from it.

I wonder how this could be reconciled with Sotah 13b, which says that in a situation where someone begins something but doesn’t complete it, and it is completed by someone else, the one who completed it gets credit as if he had done the entire thing.

Our mishnah says that “it is not up to you” to complete. Yet, the gemara in Sotah says that the one who doesn’t complete it is not rewarded with having done anything (in a situation where someone else had come to complete it).

I will give an answer “in the way of *mussar*.”

There is a beautiful image in the midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba.

The Kaddosh Baruch Hu said to the Jewish People: “My sons, open for me [even] one opening of teshuvah [as small as] the eye of a needle and I will open for you openings that even oxen and wagons would be able to pass through.”

That was said in the name of Rabbi Yissa. The midrash afterwards brings a statement in the name of Rabbi Levi: *If the Jewish People would do teshuva for even one day, they would be immediately redeemed and the son of David would come immediately.*

From the above, it would certainly seem that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* requests of man only one thing, that they begin the process of *teshuvah* and good deeds. Once man has initiated that process, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will immediately assist him, which allows him to withstand the *yetser hara*.

We also see this concept of beginnings from Makkot 10b: **בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו**. *Whichever path man chooses, that is the way he will be lead*. In other words, the beginning is critical and decisive.

One can see this as well in Tehillim 111:10, **ראשית חכמה יראת יקוק**, *The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem*. This could be understood to mean that fear of Hashem is the prerequisite, the sine qua non, of wisdom. It could be understood as well to be saying that one should “begin” his study of wisdom with fear of Hashem. “Beginning” it that way will lead to its “lasting.”

The Sefer Ha Roke'ach that nothing in this world is as strong as initial enthusiasm for *chassidut*. As a person becomes accustomed to it, however, he begins to slacken. The initial enthusiasm wanes and he becomes not only less zealous, but less meticulous.

That is why our Rabbis have told us, in the Sifra, that we should endeavor to look at Torah the way we would a fresh announcement from the king. As soon as the king publishes a new communication, everyone runs to see what it says. Once the decree is old, it becomes familiar. People know what it contains and don't feel the need to read it again. It sits pasted to the wall, no longer generating interest or excitement.

Of course, no one doubts that the king's decree remains the binding law. However, as it becomes second nature and people follow it from force of habit, they are no longer interested in reading what the original announcement. It's old news.

So, too, with Torah. Once its mitzvot become second nature to us (our having assimilated them, as we should), we lose interest. We cease thinking about the “original bulletin” from our King.

The Rabbis' advice, then, is to not allow ourselves to fall into this malaise. Rather, we must strive every day to recapture the initial spark of excitement. We must seek to rediscover our Torah and its mitzvot -- as if they were not familiar to us at all.

We therefore see that the most critical factor is the way that the mitzvah is *begun*, its initial stage. This allows us to bring new perspective to the words of

our mishnah, **לא עליך המלאכה לגמור**, earlier translated as *it is not incumbent upon us to "finish the work."* We could now say it a bit differently -- that rather than think about when the mitzvah will be completed, we should be imagining that we had only now begun.

Of course, this is not so easy. The *yetser hara* will be whispering in our ears: "How could you be satisfied with always being 'at the beginning?'" "Don't you yearn to see some results already? After all, you've worked so hard! You deserve it! Go ahead, finish it up already!"

The mishnah's **לא עליך המלאכה לגמור** is the response.

Tell the *yetser hara*, "Who says that there is a *mitzvah ligmor*?"

"The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* commanded us to begin the mitzvah, not to finish it."

"If we finish, we finish. If not, not."

"We are not **בני חורין** to exempt ourselves from beginning. And even if we remain at the beginning all of our lives, so be it."

Just as the defining aspect of the mitzvah is its beginning, so too with other things as well.

How often do we see arguments, conflict, and needless dispute? Often, it boils down to someone having "gotten off on the wrong foot" with someone else, with having made a poor first impression or being misunderstood? People "jump to conclusions" and then "fly off the handle."

What if we would exercise patience instead? What if, at the first sign of anger boiling up inside, we would simply take a breath? Think about how much controversy and conflict could be avoided!

A story is told in *Sefer Chassidim* about someone who honored his father to the highest degree.

One day, his father told him, "Just as you have honored me during my lifetime, so should you honor me after I pass on. I therefore command you to withhold your anger one night and refrain from speaking as well."

After the father had died, the man travelled to a far away land, not realizing that the wife he was leaving behind was pregnant.

He wound up being delayed greatly, not just for months but for many years.

Finally returning home one night, he went up to his wife's room and heard the sound of two voices: his wife's and that of a young man! Not only that, but he could hear that the young man was kissing her!

The man drew his sword, intent on killing both of them.

However, he recalled the promise he had made to his father and returned the sword to its sheath.

He tried to hear what the two were saying. He heard his wife speaking to the man:

“My son, it is many years since your father left. Had he known that I was pregnant and had given birth to you, he would have already returned to find you a wife.”

Upon hearing this, the man said, “*Open your heart to Me, My sister, My love* (Shir HaShirim 5:2). Thank you, Hashem, for stopping my anger! Bless my father, who ordered me to hold my anger one night. That I have not killed you and my son!”

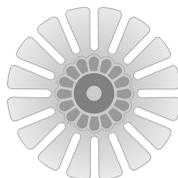
They joined in great rejoicing and made a celebratory feast for one and all. The joy was truly great!

One of the things that the Chacham is praised for, in Avot 5:7, is that he is not **נבהל להשיב**, *quick to respond*. It means that instead of immediately saying the first thing that comes to mind, he composes his thoughts beforehand, so that he can respond with equanimity.

The simple person, however, is **קופץ בראש**, *leaps with his head*.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the great teacher of *Mussar*, famously said that until the point that speech has left one's lips, man remains the master of his words. It's within his power to say them or to not say them.

Once he allows the words to pass through his lips, however, he cannot bring them back -- even if he regrets them. Once they are out, they are out.



Chapter Three

עקביא

בן מהלאל
אומר הסתכל
בשלשה

דברים

ואין ארצה בא

לידי עברה

דע מאין באת

ולאן אתה הולך

ולפני **מי** אתה עתיד

לתן **דין וחשבון** מאין באת

מטפה סרוחה

ולאן אתה הולך
למקום עפר

רמה ותולעה

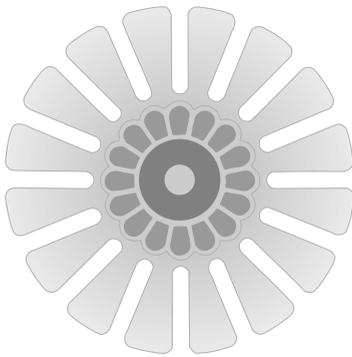
ולפני מי אתה עתיד

לתן **דין וחשבון**

לפני מלך מלכי

המלכים

הקדוש ברוך
הוא



עֲקִבְיָא בֶן מַהֲלַלְאֵל אוֹמֵר הִסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה
 דְּבָרִים וְאִין אַתָּה בָּא לְיַדֵּי עֲבֵרָה. דַּע מֵאִין
 בָּאתָ וּלְאֵן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ וּלְפָנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד
 לִתְּנוּ דִין וְחֲשׁוֹנוֹן. מֵאִין בָּאתָ מִטְּפָה סְרוּחָה וּלְאֵן
 אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ לְמָקוֹם עֶפְר רִמָּה וְתוֹלְעָה. וּלְפָנֵי מִי
 אַתָּה עֹתִיד לִתְּנוּ דִין וְחֲשׁוֹנוֹן לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי
 הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:
 משנה אבות ג:א

Akavya ben Mahalalel says: Look at three things and you will not come to sin. Know where you came from, and to where you are going, and before Whom you will give a reckoning and accounting. Where did you come from? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. Before Whom will you give a reckoning and accounting? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He.

עֲקִבְיָא בֶן מַהֲלַלְאֵל אוֹמֵר הִסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה
 דְּבָרִים וְאִין אַתָּה בָּא לְיַדֵּי עֲבֵרָה

This mishnah is taught in the name of **מהללאל בן עקביא**. I was wondering why he is called simply by name, without the title **רבי**. As we know, the Tannaim are generally quoted with **רבי** before their names. This is because they lived in Eretz Yisrael at the time of the second Beit HaMikdash, when it was still possible to be included in the chain of “original *semicha*.”

Rather than look at this question historically, I would like to use the approach of *remez*. I suggest that the answer is to be found through considering the name of this Tanna and his father.

The son’s name is **עקביא**, which can be broken down to **יא עקב**, *the heel of יא*, meaning *the heel of Hashem*.

The father’s name is **מהללאל**, which can be broken down to **אל מהלל**, *the one who praises א-ל*, meaning the one who praises *Hashem*.

The son's name could be said to represent "The one who sees himself as an עקב, a heel, compared to *Hashem*.

The father's name could be said to represent "It is fitting that all men praise *Hashem*."

Remember what it says in Tehillim 22:7, ואנכי תולעת ולא איש חרפת אדם ובזוי, *עם*, *But I am a worm and not a man, scorn of humanity, despised of people*. It was only after having said this, that David continued (22:23), אספרה שמך לאחי, בתוך קהל אהללך, *I will proclaim Your Name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You*.

This is why our Tanna was not called רבי.

For, he had truly fulfilled the *remez* contained within his name. Always, he saw himself as an עקב, negated before *Hashem*.

This mishnah, then, is advice to his talmidim as to how they, too, could attain this level of עקב in relation to *Hashem*. The advice is: Remember where you came from, where you are going, etc.

Then, only once they have achieved this degree of self-negation, of insignificance, in relation to *Hashem*, could they begin to praise Him. Only then could they appreciate His greatness. Only then could they grasp "Before whom you are destined to render an account: The King of kings."

Only then could they turn to Him and prayer and to sing His praises. For, it is not possible that one full of pride and inflated self-worth could ever appreciate His greatness.

דע מאין באת ולאן אתה הולך ולפני מי אתה עתיד ליתן דין וחשבו

After stating his basic principles, *Know where you came from, and to where you are going, and before Whom you will give a reckoning and accounting*., Rabbi Akabia ben Mahalalel next goes into specifics. *From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. Before Whom will you give a reckoning and accounting? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He.*

I would like to know why he organized his instructions in this fashion, first giving the principles and then restating them, the second time with the specifics. Why not just go directly into the specifics and forego the introduction?

I would like to suggest that he is doing this so as to help us better remember how to fight the *yetser hara*. Obviously, it is easier to remember succinct advice than it is to recall that which is more detailed. This is consistent with the gemara's often prefacing complex self-contained passages with a type of acrostic that serves as a mnemonic device for helping to remember a series of arguments.

Aside from being a memory tool, this also helps us strategically, for the *yetser* must be fought directly and simply, without long explanations.



רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה איש את רעהו חיים בלעו. רבי חנינא בן תרדיון אומר שנים שיושבין ואין ביניהן דברי תורה הרי זה מושב לצים שנאמר (תהלים א) ובמושב לצים לא ישב. אבל שנים שיושבין ויש ביניהם דברי תורה שכינה שרויה ביניהם שנאמר (מלאכי ה) אז נדברו יראי יי איש אל רעהו ויקשב יי וישמע ויכתב ספר זכרון לפניו ליראי יי ולחשבי שמו. אין לי אלא שנים. מנין שאפלו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה שהקדוש ברוך הוא קובע לו שכר שנאמר (איכה ג) ישב בדד וידם כי נטל עליו:

משנה אבות ג:ב

Rabbi Chanina, the deputy Cohen Gadol, says: Pray for the welfare of the government, because if not for the fear it instills, man would swallow his fellow man alive. Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion says: If two people sit together without conversing in Torah, they are a gathering of mockers, as it says, "and he did not sit in a gathering of mockers." But if two people sit and learn Torah, the Divine Presence rests among them, as it says, "Then those who fear God spoke to one another, and God listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear God and those who give thought to His name." This is only about two people. From where do we know that if even one person sits and learns Torah, God determines great reward for him? As it says, "Let one sit in solitude and be silent, for he has received for it."

הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות

It seems to me that when the mishnah tells us to be pray for the government's welfare, we are being asked to do so discreetly. This means without the government's being aware that we are doing so.

Specifically, it means that the individual should not curry favor with the government through making sure they know he prays on their behalf and thinking that something good will thereby result for the Jewish people. I have already explained this in my commentary to the mishnah in the first chapter of Avoth (1:10), **ואל תתודע לרשות**, *avoid intimacy with the government*.

As I said there, the proper approach is that one should pray to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and ask Him to tip the government scales in the Jewish people's favor. One should not, however, become too close to the authorities thinking that this is the best way to influence them.

This idea is hinted to in Mishlei 21:1 **לב מלך ביד יקוק**, *the heart of the king is in the hands of Hashem*. There is another hint, I believe, when combining the above verse with what the Rabbis tell us in Ta'anit 2a, **שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח**, that three "keys" remain in the "hands" of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and not transferred to any agent. The verse in Mishlei says that the hear of the king is also in the hands of Hashem.

Therefore, there is nothing man can do to influence the king other than appeal to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will take it from there (if He see's fit). just as He does with the three things mentioned in the gemara.

My father, my teacher, followed this practice in Morocco. Daily, he would pray to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* for the Moroccan king's welfare. However, he never made that known to the king, even though it is likely that the king would have taken kindly to this and rewarded him in some way.

This was father's way of fulfilling the mishnah, **ואל תתודע לרשות**, *avoid intimacy with the government*.



**רבי חנינא בן תרדיון אומר שנים שיושבין ואין
ביניהן דברי תורה הרי זה מושב לצים שנאמר
(תהלים א') ובמושב לצים לא ישב**

Rabbi Hannanya ben Tradyon says that when two people sit and there is no Torah spoken between them, this is called a **מושב לצים**, a session of scoffers.

His proof comes from Tehillim, which says **אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים** וּבִדְרֹךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשֵׁב לְצִים לֹא יֵשֵׁב: *Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners.*

I was wondering what Rabbi Hannanya ben Tradyon sees in this verse that makes it a proof text for the principle he wishes to teach in the mishnah. Nothing in the verse says that it refers to two who sat and never exchanged words of Torah.

One way of answering my question is to look at the verse in Yimiyahu 50:36, **חרב אל הבדים ונאלו**: *A sword against the sorcerers; let them shown to be fools!* Berachot 63b says,

**מאי דכתיב חרב אל הבדים ונאלו: - חרב על שונאיהם של
תלמידי חכמים שיושבים בד בבד ועוסקים בתורה.**

What is the meaning of חרב אל הבדים ונאלו? There will be sword against those who are alone, v'noalu (translation follows Artscroll Gemara). There will be a sword of those Torah scholars who sit each one alone and engage in Torah study! And not only that, but they (meaning those who study alone) become foolish as well. And not only that, but they sin as well.

The explanation for the above gemara is that someone who learns alone, that is, without a *chavruta*, deserves to be punished by sword, for it is inevitable that he will err (as we all do), but there will be no one there to correct him.

Corresponding to the three punishments for the one who learns alone, David HaMelech said (Tehillim 1:1), **אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים**, *Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners.*

The three correspond as follows: 1) **חרב אל הבדים** corresponds to **רשעים**, because the *reshayim's* craft is the sword. We see this from Tehillim 37:14

חרב פתחו רשעים, *The wicked drew a sword.* 2) חוטאים is said because they are חוטאים. חוטאים is said because they are מטפשים (in the words of the gemara).

This is consistent with Shlomo HaMelech's equating לצים with fools (Mishlei 1:22), עד מתי פתים תאהבו פתי ולצים לצון חמדו להם וכסילים ישנאו דעת: *How long, O simpletons will you love folly? Scoffers covet mockery for themselves, and fools hate knowledge.* We see that David said the entire verse regarding the one who learns alone. This is why Rabbi Hannanya ben Tradyon was able to extend it to the teaching of this mishnah, whose subject is those who sit together and fail to exchange words of Torah.

I would like to give it a novel reading, though. It's not about those who sit together wasting their time, involved with all kinds of nonsense, but about those who spend the entire time immersed in Torah.

How could that be?

Well, I am referring to those who spend their time in Torah, but do so alone, even ignoring the fellow sitting right across from them. This is what is called a "session of scoffers." These two will wind up fulfilling the talmud's reading of the verse; they will be חוטאים and מטפשים.

Now, what if someone were to read this and come to the conclusion that, given that he cannot find a study partner, he might be best off not learning at all? (And we are talking here about someone who actually *does* want to learn and *does* want to learn with a *chavruta* -- it's just that he can not find one.) Given what we have just written, would it not be perfectly logical that a person in this situation come to the conclusion that it would be best for him to not learn at all? Absolutely not! Just look at the mishnah's conclusion:

**מנין שאפילו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה שהקדוש
ברוך הוא קובע לו שכר שנאמר (איכה ג') ישב בדד
ויזום כי נטל עליו:**

From where do we know that if even one person sits and learns Torah, God determines great reward for him? As it says, "Let one sit in solitude and be silent, for he has received for it."

We see that while it is best to learn with a *chavruta* and that learning alone could lead to problems, learning by oneself is still preferable to no learning at all. One should just remember that his goal is to join with a *chavruta* at the earliest possible opportunity -- and to not get too used to learning by oneself.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות

When rebel forces attempted an overthrow of the Moroccan government in 5634 (1877), a group of them were positioned near Mogador and began an attack on its walls. The gates were set afire and the rebels prepared to invade the city, loot it, and murder its inhabitants.

Under siege and surrounded, the local governor ran to the Beit Hakeneset named for Rav Chaim Pinto and asked that the Jews there pray, in the merit of Rav Pinto, that the rebels not break through.

The Jews did so, appealing to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* that they be saved from the rebels. As the Jews completed their prayers, the soldiers on watch saw a group of white-clad cavalymen galloping on white horses, emerging from the Jewish cemetery, from the spot where the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim was buried.

They rode straight for the city walls and engaged the rebels in battle.

They dealt the rebels a heavy blow, forcing the remaining soldiers to flee far from the city.

Once the great salvation and the *Kiddush Hashem* became known, the local governor visited Rabbi Hadaan, the son of Rav Chaim, to request of him that the Jews establish a daily prayer for the government. In return, he promised to protect the Jews and released from prison the many Jews who had been unjustly incarcerated. Furthermore, he granted the Jewish community a reduction in taxes.



רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׂאֲכָלוּ עַל שֻׁלְחָן
 אֶחָד וְלֹא אָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה כְּאִלוּ אֲכָלוּ
 מִזְבְּחֵי מֵתִים שְׁנֵאמַר (ישעיה כח) כִּי כָּל
 שֻׁלְחָנוֹת מְלֹאוּ קִיא צֹאֵה בְּלִי מְקוֹם. אָבֵל שְׁלֹשָׁה
 שְׂאֲכָלוּ עַל שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְאָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה
 כְּאִלוּ אֲכָלוּ מִשֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא
 שְׁנֵאמַר (יחזקאל מא) וַיִּדְבֵּר אֵלַי זֶה הַשֻּׁלְחָן
 אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי ה':
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיג

Rabbi Shimon says: If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken over it words of Torah, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, for it is written (Isaiah 28:8) "All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean." But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, for it is written (Ezekiel 41:22) "He said to me, "This is the table that stands before the Lord."

**שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׂאֲכָלוּ עַל שֻׁלְחָן אֶחָד וְלֹא אָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבַרֵי
 תוֹרָה כְּאִלוּ אֲכָלוּ מִזְבְּחֵי מֵתִים**

Rabbi Shimon be Nethanel says that three who eat at a single table without sharing words of Torah are considered as if they ate idolatrous sacrifices. His proof text is Yeshiyahu 28:8, *For all tables are full of vomit, filth, with no clean place.*

I wonder as to what not sharing Torah at mealtime has to do with rendering the meal "idolatrous sacrifices."

Let us look at Bereishit 25:24.

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי וְתִלְךְ לָדַרְשׁ אֶת יְקוֹק:

The children agitated within her, and she said, "If so, why am I thus?" And she went to inquire of Hashem.

To this, the Rabbis said in Bereishit Rabba 63, *She would pass by houses of idolatry, and Esau would stir to leave [the womb] . . . pass by the houses of Jewish prayer and study, and Yaakov would stir to leave.*

I wonder how the Rabbis knew that the “agitation” “running” “jostling” occurred only at the particular times that Rivkah was passing either a house of idolatry or one of Jewish prayer and study. How do they know it wasn’t constant? After all, the verse says “and they agitated within her,” without qualification.

I wonder as well as to the scenario. Is it really possible that our mother, Rivkah, walked past places of idolatry? Mishlei 5:8 says, **מעליה דרכך ואל תקרב אל פתח ביתה הרחוק**, *Distance your ways from it, and do not approach its door.*

To this, the gemara in Avodah Zarah 17a says, **הרחק מעליה דרכך - זו מינות, ואל הרשות. תקרב אל פתח ביתה - זו הרשות**, *Distance your ways from it - this refers to minut (sectarianism associated with idolatry) and do not approach its door - this refers to governmental authorities.*

The first part of that gemara clearly says to distance oneself from *minut*, a term associated with idolatry.

Accordingly, it seems to me that the various midrashim quoting the *derasha* regarding Esau’s movements could not mean to say that Rivkah passed by actual places of idolatry. (For that would be prohibited, according to the gemara quoted above.) Rather, when they say **בתי עבודה זרה**, they don’t mean actual **עבודה זרה**, but “places bereft of Torah.” Any place bereft of Torah, according to this interpretation, could just as well be called a place of idolatry.

Our Rabbis tell us that the *shekhina* hovered in the house of Yaakov. Because of this, as long as Rivkah was in her home, Esau did not wish to leave the womb. Yaakov, by the way, did not wish to leave either, but the two had different reasons.

Yaakov didn’t wish to depart because he was already in a special environment, Rivkah’s womb, where he lacked nothing and the *shekhina* doubtless dwelled as well.

Esau didn’t wish to depart because he did not wish to be in a home where the *shekhina* was present.

When Rivkah went outdoors, however, things changed. Outside the home, it was the *yetser hara* that had dominion. This was what Esau was looking for, so it was there that he wished to depart the womb.

When they passed the places of Torah study, however, it was Yaakov that wished to depart. For, this would be his protection from the *yetser hara*, whose domain they were now traversing.

Upon birth, therefore, their paths diverged. Yaakov went to the Beit HaMidrash; Esau to the fields, to hunt. Yaakov's attraction to the Beit Midrash was understandable. But, why was Esau drawn to the fields? Obvious! It was a place *bereft* of Torah and Fear of Heaven! And therefore, as we said earlier, it could be considered like a place of idolatry.

Now, what happened to Esau in the fields? The *yetser hara* exercised its powers over him. The result was that he, the son of Yitzhak, committed murders.

That is what the Tanna meant here, when he said that three who shared a meal and did not exchange words of Torah are considered as if they ate from the carcasses of idolatrous sacrifices.

**שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי
תורה כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים**

I think it curious that three who eat at one table without sharing words of Torah are considered as if they ate from idolatrous sacrifices, while two or one who did the same thing are not subject to the same judgment. In other words, why must it be three?

Let us suggest that the Tanna had in mind Berachot 8a, which says that from the day that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* destroyed the Beit HaMikdash, He has nothing in the world other than the four *amot* of halacha. This was said in the name of Rav Chiya bar Ami in the name of Ulla. Abaye said that originally, he would study in the Beit HaMidrash and pray in the Beit Hakennesset. Once he heard the statement of Rav Chiya bar Ami, however, he would always pray in the place where he learned.

This, then, is why three are not the same as three, in respect to the mishnah's teaching. For, three who eat at the same table are obligated in the *zimun* preceding *Birkat HaMazon*; two are not.

Let us not forget that the *zimun* is a prayer.

Now, let us also remember that one doesn't pray except in the place where one learns Torah (Of course, the *peshat* is that Abaye is only saying that the place where one learns is the *best* place to pray, not that it is the *only* place where one is allowed to pray). Now let us point out that only three are obligated in the prayer of *zimun*; two who ate together do not say it.

I would like to point out as well a gemara in Sanhedrin 3a that says that one is allowed to bring his court case to three "who sit in the corner." (In other

words, ordinary individuals who do not happen to be Rabbanim). The reason given is that amongst the three, it is statistically likely that a least one will know something about the appropriate laws.

With two, apparently, one cannot make that assumption.

The burden of saying words of Torah increases when there are three, rather than two, for it is assumed that at least one would have been capable of sharing Torah. It is therefore a group of at least three that is chastised, but not two.

**שְׁלֹשָׁה שֶׁאֵכְלוּ עַל שֶׁלֶחַן אֶחָד וְלֹא אָמְרוּ עָלָיו דְּבַר י
תּוֹרָה כְּאִילוּ אֵכְלוּ מִזְבַּחַי מֵתִים**

The gemara (Berachot 55a) says that as long as the Beit HaMikdash was standing, the altar “atoned” for Yisrael. That is, post-destruction, man’s table atones for him.

How is it that the table one eats from could help him atone for his sins?

Perhaps the idea is that when one conquers his lust for eating (eating purely for the pleasure of eating, that is), then one’s sins are atoned for. And, whoever engages in Torah learning while eating, thereby separates himself from craving his food. This is because he is distracted; his focus is not entirely on his plate. Not only that, the learning itself tempers his enjoyment of the taste.

I can add some more reasons. Were it not for his having separated himself from thoughts of bodily pleasure, the learning itself would not be possible. We see this from the episode of the manna. Regarding the manna, our Rabbis taught us that it was the “bread” that was “eaten” by the angels themselves. In other words, it was (of necessity) a non-physical food.

We learn from here that when Yisrael were busy with Torah learning, they refrained from involvement with worldly pleasure. This is why the “bread” they ate emanated specifically from the heavens. This amounted to an open miracle.

Although the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* ordinarily cloaks His miracles, preferring to do them in ways that make them appear as *teva*, this was not the case when it came to the manna. Quite the opposite, he caused it to rain down from the heavens, in full view of one and all. Some opinions say that before eating the manna, Yisrael in the *midbar* recited the blessing: “. . . *Who brings forth lechem from the heavens*” (or variations thereof).

All this, I believe, was to teach all generations that a pre-requisite to success in Torah learning is that one separate from worldly pleasures. Our Rabbis tell

us that creativity in Torah teaching is the provenance of only the *ochlei haMan* -- those who “eat the manna.”

When someone learns at his table, it shows that he has broken his desire for the pleasures of food. Consider the gemara that says “Make yourself holy through that which is permitted you.” Through using his mundane table for learning while eating, one is *mekadesh* himself and that very table becomes his vehicle of atonement. This is no different than what happened at Hashem’s own table, when the Holy Temple was still standing. For the table one learns upon is akin to the “the table that is before Hashem,” that is, the altar.

Regarding Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa, it is said that a heavenly voice rings out every day in his honor, declaring that, due to his merit, all the world is “fed.” Noteworthy about Chanina ben Dossa is that he limited his own “food” to a single measure of carobs per week. His merit was so great because he declined to benefit from this world, wishing to avoid incorporating within himself the physical -- and to thereby be optimally prepared to study Hashem’s Torah.



רַבִּי חַנִּינָא בֶן חַכִּינָאי אוֹמֵר הַנְּעוֹר בְּלַיְלָה
 וְהַמְהַלֵּךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ יַחֲדֵי וְהַמְפְּנֶה לְבוֹ לְבַטָּלָה הָרִי
 זֶה מִתְחַיֵּב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּזְרֵי

Rabbi Chanina ben Chachinai says: He who stays awake at night and goes on his way alone and turns his heart to idle thoughts is liable for his life.

The mishnah lists three who “forfeit their life:” He who remains awake at night, he who travels on the road alone, and he who turns his heart to idleness.

What do these three share in common?

Rather than respond using the plain meaning of the text, I would like to use a homiletic approach. In other words, I will answer by way of *mussar*.

There is a midrash that says that one who says *Kriyat Sh'ma* both morning and evening is considered as if he had toiled day and night in Torah study. And whoever reads two *perakim* in the morning and two *perakim* in the evening has fulfilled (*Tehillim* 1:2) *ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה*, and you shall toil in His Torah day and night.

It seems to me that the above only applies to those who are absorbed all day with trying to make a living and whose nights are needed for rest, so that they will have the strength to labor once again come morning. Of others however -- like the ones who do not have that kind of pressure and have the luxury of spending their evenings awake and of their days in idleness -- much more is expected. They cannot fulfill their obligation -- even minimally - simply by reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* or learning just two *perakim*.

Night is an especially precious time for Torah learning, as we see in Eiruvim 65a, *lit. the moon was not created other than for learning*. Other sources tell us that there is “no joy in Torah other than nighttime.” The Zohar tells us that nighttime is the time for optimal clarity in learning. We learn as well that “whoever learns Torah at night, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* extends for him a thread of *chessed* during the day.”

The Rambam writes:

Although there is a mitzvah to learn both by day and night, one does not learn the majority of his wisdom except in the night time. Therefore, he who wishes to merit the “crown of Torah” should be careful with his nights and not waste even one of them with sleep, food, drink, and conversation (and things similar), rather [he should use them] for Torah study and words of *chochma*.

We now see why someone who keeps himself awake all night (and does not learn Torah during that time) “forfeits his life.”

What, then, is the connection to “He who walks alone at night,” which is also listed in our mishnah?

Well, the same answer can be given: Here, too, we could say that we are referring to one who neglects his learning.

What I mean is as follows: The Torah says, **ובלכתך בדרך**, *When you go upon the way*. This is normally understood to refer to the mitzvah of *kriyat sh'ma*, but could be extended to refer to Torah learning in general. While it is certainly possible to learn when travelling alone -- and it is an obligation to so -- the learning is not as good as it would be were he accompanied by a study partner.

The talmud says in Sotah 49a that two Torah scholars who walk “along the way” and fail to exchange words of Torah deserve to be burned through fire.

Worst of all is the one who idles away his time, turning his attention away from Torah. In the end, he will come to sin. Presumably, this fellow wasting his time does not need to be occupied with business at this moment, for otherwise he would do so. So why isn't he using the time to learn?

Because he could have occupied himself with Torah and chose not to, he is judged as one who has “forfeits his life.” Not only that, but we know that idleness leads to boredom. Boredom typically leads to transgression.

Furthermore, one who “walks alone” has no one there to push him to fulfill **ובלכתך בדרך**? So, what does he do? He looks to the left, looks to the right, and everywhere else, simply “killing time.”

Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura explains that the reason he is “sacrificing his life” is because nighttime is naturally fraught with all sorts of danger. One who walks alone is especially vulnerable to being attacked by bandits and any other

danger that the night has to offer. Had the person at least been thinking words of Torah, that Torah would help protect him.

To sum up, all three types mentioned in the mishnah have in common that they could have been using their time for Torah, yet did not. They are therefore considered as having “forfeited their lives.”



רבי נְחוּנְיָא בֶן הַקָּנָה אָמַר כָּל הַמְקַבֵּל עָלָיו
עַל תּוֹרָה מְעַבְרִין מִמֶּנּוּ עַל מַלְכוּת וְעַל דְּרָדָךְ
אֶרֶץ. וְכֵן הַפּוֹרֵק מִמֶּנּוּ עַל תּוֹרָה נוֹתֵנִין עָלָיו עַל
מַלְכוּת וְעַל דְּרָדָךְ אֶרֶץ:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיה

Rabbi Nechunia ben Hakanah says: One who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah will be freed from the yoke of government and the yoke of derech erez. And one who throws off the yoke of Torah will be burdened with the yoke of government and the yoke of derech erez.

כל המקבל עליו עול תורה מעבירין ממנו עול מלכות ועול דרך ארץ

The mishnah says that whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah has the burdens of governmental authority and the day-to-day inconveniences of practical life removed from him.

In a sense, this is “measure for measure,” for man was not created so that he would just pluck things from the world “ready-made.” Rather, he must work, earn, and become worthy of whatever he receives.

In other words, he may take only due to **העשיה**. I use this term because the kabbalistic works commonly refer to the physical world we live in as **העולם** **העשיה**, which connotes a world where man earns through doing, making -- but not simply taking from that which is ready-made.

The kabbalists call this world **העולם העשיה** and not **העולם העשוי**, the world of doing” rather than the world of already “done.” The world-to-come, however, is called **העולם העשוי**. This is because it has neither mitzvot nor *avodah*.

The talmud in Avodah Zarah 3a says, **מי שטרח בערב שבת יאכל בשבת**, He who prepares prior to Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. This could be understood to mean that only the “preparations” we do in this world allow us to “eat” in the next one. For in that world, **העשיה** is no longer possible.

Whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah and fulfills the **עשיה** of Torah, does not have to do anything else. As the mishnah says, governmental burdens and the day-to-day struggles of practical life are removed from him. This relates to Berachot 35b, **בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום - מלאכתן נעשית על ידי אחרים**, *when Yisrael does the wishes of Hashem, their labor is performed by others.*

Those who refrain from accepting the yoke of Torah, must do practical work. The burdens of governmental authority and the day-to-day inconveniences of practical life are fully upon his shoulders.

Man was not put into this earth for any reason other than to toil. If he merits, his labor will be in Torah. If he doesn't, it will be in the mundane.

We see this in Iyov 5:7, **כי אדם לעמל יולד**, *For, man was born to labor*, which our Rabbis have expounded upon in (Sanhedrin 99b):

אמר רבי אלעזר: כל אדם לעמל נברא, שנאמר (איוב ה) כי אדם לעמל יולד, איני יודע אם לעמל פה נברא אם לעמל מלאכה נברא

*Rav Elazar said: All men are created for toil, as it says in Iyov 5:7 **כי אדם לעמל יולד**. [From the verse itself], I do not know if it is for the sake of verbal toil or for the sake of physical labor.*

If he merits, he will toil in Torah. If not, it will be in the mundane, or, as it is called in the words of our mishnah, **דרך ארץ**. That is to say, he will toil in practical livelihood.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל המקבל עליו עול תורה מעבירין ממנו עול מלכות ועול דרך ארץ

The holy Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto did not leave the courtyard of his home for a period of almost forty years, as per the directive of his holy father, Rabbi Chaim. The Beit Hakennesset named for his father was within the walls of his home and it was there that he prayed and received visitors. This was in the city of Essaouira.

He relocated to Casablanca during this time.

The question was: How could he both move to another city and still not violate the directive of his holy father that he remain in seclusion? The solution was that he would leave late at night, when the streets were deserted, the women were all at home, and he would not have to encounter anyone at all.

In addition, he took another precaution: The men accompanying him were to surround him as he walked to the car, so as to block his view of the streets.

The period of isolation continued in Casablanca and came to a close there as well.

In the year 5720 (1960), an earthquake shook Agadir, which is in the vicinity of Essaouira, and the city was largely destroyed. Thousands died, amongst them

many Jews. (In 1960 the city was virtually destroyed by two earthquakes, a tidal wave, and fire, which killed about 12,000 people. (“Agadir.” (Encyclopedia Britannica from Encyclopedia Britannica 2007 Deluxe Edition. (2008))

Several days later, rumors circulated in Essaouira that an earthquake was expected there as well, and that people had to evacuate their homes. The Rav, however, decided that he would not leave his house.

He instructed his Rabbanit to take the children and flee together with the other townspeople, but that he would remain. He explained that he did not wish to violate his holy father’s directive that he remain in seclusion. Better that he die inside the house, he said, than not fulfil his father’s directive.

Despite the many pleas to change his mind, the Rav remained steadfast. He was the only one left in the city.

All this occurred on Erev Shabbat.

In the end, the Rav survived and no earthquake occurred. It seemed that the entire story was a scheme by local thieves, that they would spread rumors of an earthquake, cause the Jews to flee, and then loot their homes. The thieves knew that they could take advantage of the Jews’ piety; being that it was Erev Shabbat, they would leave their *muktzah* items, no matter how valuable, behind.

The houses were never broken into, the possessions were not looted, and the Rav was able to gain the satisfaction of not having had to end his period of isolation prematurely.

Who knows? Perhaps there actually was a decree from heaven that Erev Shabbat and it was only due to the Rav’s holiness, his *bitachon* in the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, the merit he had in accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven, and the merit of his ancestors that a miracle occurred and nothing bad occurred in the town.

Recalling the earthquake in Agadir, the Rav would tell the story that the night before that city’s destruction, the Rav saw in a dream his father, Rav Chaim, sitting upon the floor, in tears. Startled, Rav Moshe Aharon arose in the middle of the night to awaken his household. He told them of what he had seen and said that he believed that Rav Chaim zt”l was greatly anguished and seemed to be in mourning over some kind of destruction.

Rav Moshe Aharon remained awake the rest of the night, sitting on the floor reciting *tehillim*. When morning came, he went up to the Beit HaKenneset that was in his house and heard from those arriving for prayers that an earthquake

had occurred in Agadir, destroying the city and killing thousands, many having died in their homes' collapse. All the yeshiva students and their Rabbanim perished as well.

It should be noted that shortly before the disaster, Rav Moshe Aharon had sent to the city of Agadir books containing various legends told about Rav Chaim zt"l. He urged the community members to purchase the books, bring them into their homes, and read them there. He promised that they would thereby bring blessing to their houses.

The books were returned within a few days. Rav Moshe Aharon's representative told him that not only was there no one willing to act as the sales agent, but that not even a single household had purchased a copy.

With that, the Rav sighed:

"I had wanted to bring *beracha* to that city, but they refused the *beracha*. I fear greatly for them."

Disaster struck Agadir only a few days later.



רבי חלפתא בן דוסא איש כפר חנניה אומר
עשרה שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה שכינה שרויה
ביניהם שנאמר (תהלים פב) אלהים נצב
בעדת אל ומנין אפילו חמשה שנאמר (עמוס ט)
ואגדתו על ארץ יסדה. ומנין אפילו שלשה
שנאמר (תהלים פב) בקרב אלהים ישפט. ומנין
אפילו שנים שנאמר (מלאכי ג) אז נדברו יראי
ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וישמע וגו'. ומנין
אפילו אחד שנאמר (שמות כ) בכל המקום
אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתיד:
משנה אבות ג:ו

Rabbi Chalafta of Kefar Chananiah says: If ten people sit and engage in Torah study, the Divine Presence dwells among them, as it says, "God stands in the Divine assembly." How do we know that this is so even of five? From the verse, "His group is founded on earth." How do we know that this is so even of three? From the verse, "He will judge in the midst of judges." How do we know that this is so even of two? From the verse, "Then those who fear God will speak one to another, and God will listen and hear." How do we know that this is so even of one? From the verse, "In every place where My name is mentioned I will come to you and bless you."

רבי חלפתא איש כפר חנניה אומר עשרה שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה שכינה
שרויה ביניהם... אפילו חמשה... ומנין אפילו שלשה... ומנין אפילו שנים
כו ומנין אפילו אחד כו:

The mishnah tells us that the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence, rests upon all those who occupy themselves with Torah, whether they be ten

individuals, five, three, or even one. I was wondering why it was necessary to spell this out, going from ten to five to three to one in declining order. We eventually learn that the Shechina rests even upon one. Since that is the case, would it not be quite obvious that It would rest upon three, five, and ten as well? Let the mishnah simply state that it rests even upon one individual who studies Torah -- and allow us to figure out the larger groupings ourselves! And, even if the mishnah wished to list each set individually, why in declining order?

Perhaps one could understand this in light of the gemara in Makkot 10a: **חַרְבַּ עַל צוּאֵרֵי שׁוֹנְאֵיהֶם שֶׁל ת"ח שׁוֹשְׁבֵינ וְעוֹסְקֵינ בַּתּוֹרָה בַּד בַּד**, *A sword on the necks of those talmidei chachamim who sit and busy themselves with Torah, isolated one by one* (without a study partner).

Furthermore, there is a gemara in Yerushalmi Berachot 5:1 that says that those study in the Beit HaKenesset are not likely to quickly forget their learning.

These sources speak to the superiority of learning amongst others, rather than alone. This is despite the fact that (as we know from other sources) both receive reward.

Another saying of the Rabbis (Massechet Derekh Eretz) is that whoever has a *Beit HaMidrash* in his city and does not go in there, is liable for death.

The underlying reason, I think, is that when someone learns exclusively at home, all by himself rather than together with a study partner in a *Beit HaMidrash*, he appears to be as one who acts with conceit. It is as if he is announcing to one and all that it is beneath his station to join the community's other *talmidei chachamim* in learning.

Regarding one like this, the talmud says in Sotah 5a, **כֹּל אָדָם שִׁישׁ בּו גִּסּוֹת הַרוּחַ**, אמר הקב"ה: אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם, [As regards to] *whoever has an inflated ego, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu says: I and he cannot [both] dwell in this world.*

If the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* cannot dwell with someone in this world, then this means that there is no place in the world for him, which means that he is now subject to a sentence of death.

Another gemara, in Massechet Shabbat 83b, says: **אַל יִמְנַע אָדָם אֶת עַצְמוֹ**, מבית המדרש ומדברי תורה ואפילו בשעת מיתה לעולם, *One should certainly never hold himself back from the Beit HaMidrash or from words of Torah, even at his moment of death.*

Chagiga 3a adds, **אי אפשר לבית המדרש בלא חידוש**, *A Beit HaMidrash with not even a single innovative thought is "impossible."*

One could therefore say that there is no comparison between the quality of what one learns in the Beit HaMidrash to what one accomplishes alone at home.

In addition, the mere fact of visibly leaving one's home to join the rest of the community's *talmidei chachamim*, and then learning with and teaching community members earns him great reward. Aside from the higher quality of learning and the merit of teaching others, he is rewarded as well for setting a positive (rather than a negative) example.

Rather than showing the community that being in the Beit HaMidrash is not so important, he is showing them its preciousness. By not only going there, but going on time and maintaining a learning schedule, he further elevates the esteem in which attending the Beit HaMidrash is held.

The converse is true as well: His not attending the Beit HaMidrash holds him accountable not only for the lower quality of his own *talmud Torah*, but for the effect that his negative example has upon others. The punishment for their laxity can be traced back to him.

Now, back to our mishnah.

I had asked earlier why the mishnah lists the ten, five, three, and the one -- and in declining order -- when it is self-evident that if the Shechina rests upon he who learns alone, It should most certainly be there for a group of ten learners (and every increment higher than one).

I believe I have an answer.

Think about it: How did the ten get there? Most likely, they came because of the five that preceded them. And the five? Because of the the three that preceded *them!*

And the three?

They came because of the solitary individual who picked himself up from the comfort of home and headed for the Beit HaMidrash!

And what does our mishnah say about this individual -- and not about any of the others mentioned in our mishnah? **בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך**, *Wherever I permit My name to be mentioned, I shall come to you and bless you.*

This lone person was the cause for the three, the five, and the ten ultimately coming to the Beit HaMidrash. Therefore, his reward is the greatest and it is fitting that only he receive this special *beracha*.

We see this as well with *tefillah* (Berachot 47b):

לעולם ישכים אדם לבית הכנסת כדי שיזכה וימנה עם עשרה הראשונים,
שאפילו מאה באים אחריו - קבל עליו שכר כולם. שכר כולם - סלקא
דעתך? אלא אימא: נותנין לו שכר כנגד כולם

One should always arrive to the Beit HaKenesset early, so that he merit and be counted amongst the first ten. For, even if one hundred were to follow, he receives the reward of them all. The reward of all of them? Is that what you are saying? Rather; I mean that he receives a reward equal to what they receive collectively.

This is consistent with our idea. The first ones are rewarded for the hundred because by setting the right example, they motivated the hundred to come as well. Had those first ones not come, than neither would the others. In other words, there might never have been a “hundred” -- or a *tefillat tzibur*, for that matter.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתך

The Tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt”l was a model of *hachnasat orchim*, the “bringing in” of guests. Never did it occur that he said, “Sorry; no room” when the opportunity arose to host a fellow Jew.

One day, an individual appeared in town, an emissary from Eretz Yisrael. His name was Rav Yitzhak Shapira and he was a renowned *talmid chacham* whose reputation had preceded him. Upon news of his arrival, Rabbi Chaim immediately went to greet him warmly, in a manner befitting a guest of such stature.

This occurred in the time leading up to Erev Pesach. The guest remained to spend Pesach with Rav Chaim.

Sitting together with Rav Chaim at the seder, Rav Yitzhak suddenly began to weep, tears streaming from his eyes. As much as Rav Chaim tried to comfort him, the Rav continued weeping and weeping.

Rav Chaim spoke to him, asking what had made him cry at a time like this, when Jews are gathered together on such a holy night, to celebrate being free. “Tell me what troubles you,” said Rav Chaim, “perhaps I could help.”

“How could we sit here in joy,” he continued, “when one of our fellow Jews is amongst us in tears?”

As much as Rav Chaim implored, nothing helped.

“Whatever you are lacking, let me try and help you. Please, tell us, what is troubling you so greatly?”

At last, the man began to open up.

“I departed from Eretz Yisrael by myself. Year after year, my family and I are together for Pesach, sitting in joy and reciting stories of *yetziat Mitzrai'im* until morning time. As I sat here and saw the *matzoth*, the wine, and the *haggadot* opened before each and everyone, my thoughts went back to my family. Are they sitting at the *seder* in joy? Or, G-d forbid, are they saddened, due to my absence?”

The tzaddik listened intently. “*Salvation from G-d can come within the blink of an eye. Come with me, to my study.*”

The two went to the Rav’s study. The Rav entered first, urging Rav Yitzhak to follow and said, “Look inside.”

Rav Yitzhak was puzzled. The room was completely dark. What could possibly be there for him to see?

“Look into the darkness,” urged Rav Chaim.

Rav Yitzhak did as Rav Chaim asked; he peered into the darkness.

And there he saw -- quite clearly -- the images of his family members, as they sat at the Pesach seder. The family was full of joy, just as they were every Pesach previously.

As Rav Yitzhak began to recover from the shock of seeing his family sitting at their Pesach table thousands of miles away, joy returned to Rav Yitzhak as well. He was now able to return with Rav Chaim to Rav Chaim’s Pesach table and the two continued the seder with shared *simcha*.

Afterward, Rav Chaim told him, “Don’t think that all that you saw was nothing more than an illusion, a figment of your imagination. When you return home, ask your family how their seder was and whether anything of particular

interest happened to occur. And, please do me the favor of writing a letter to let me know what they said.”

Once Pesach had concluded, Rav Yitzhak took leave of Rav Chaim, thanking him effusively for the wonderful hospitality shown over such a long period. How they had made him feel right at home!

Upon Rav Yitzhak’s return to Eretz Yisrael, he greeted his family warmly and, after the initial exchanges of conversation, asked them how the time had been for them, in particular, *Chag HaPesach*.

The family told him that, in fact, the first days were quite difficult, their feeling as if he had abandoned them. Then, the evening of the seder, their mood brightened. Quite suddenly, the gloom was lifted and they wound up having a wonderful seder and a wonderful meal.

With that, Rav Yitzhak wrote to Morocco, telling Rav Chaim that, just as he had stated, the vision in the room was no illusion. Rather, it was reality.

This story illustrates that the *Shechina* dwells wherever the tzaddik studies Torah. It depicts how the tzaddikim can see things that others cannot; for there is no barrier that blocks their holy eyes.



רבי אלעזר איש ברתותא אומר תן לו משלו
 שאתה ושלך שלו. וכן בדוד הוא אומר (דברי
 הימים א כט) כי ממך הכל ומיידך נתנו לך. רבי
 שמעון אומר המהלך בדרך ושונה ומפסיק
 ממשנתו ואומר מה נאה אילן זה ומה נאה ניר
 זה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו:
 משנה אבות גז

Rabbi Elazer of Bartosa says: Give Him that which is His, for you and everything that is yours is His. And so it says of David: "For everything is from You, and from Your Hand we give to You." Rabbi Yaakov says: One who walks along the road reviewing his learning and stops and says, "How beautiful is this tree!" and "How beautiful is this plowed field!" is considered as if he is liable for his life.

רבי אלעזר איש ברתותא אומר תן לו משלו שאתה ושלך שלו

The mishnah says that we should give Him what is His, for we and what we “own” are really His.

The mishnah’s wording here is somewhat cryptic. I would like to suggest that we could interpret the mishnah to be telling us that one must donate his money to needy *talmidei chachamim*. The reason is that whatever one earns ultimately came to him due to the merit of those who learn Torah full-time despite poverty. This is hinted at in Berachot 17b, in regards to Chanina ben Yehudah.

This is why Rabbi Elazar says in our mishnah that the money earned by the one who gives tzedakah rightfully belongs to its recipient, the impoverished *talmidei chachamim*. It is therefore only honest that a portion of it be given to the class of people who are ultimately responsible for the *ba'al tzedakah*’s having it in his pocket in the first place. This will then enable them to continue their learning and continue the flow of merit and protection that comes to the world through their learning.

Following through with the same idea, we will visit two additional sources from the words of our Rabbis. The first is Ketuboth 111b, which says **המהנה**

תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה, *He who allows talmidei chachamim to benefit from his possessions, the Torah counts it for him as if he attaches himself to the Shechina.*

כל המארח תלמיד חכם בתוך ביתו ומהנהו, מנכסיו - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מקריב תמידין *Whoever hosts talmidei chachamim in his home and allows them to benefit from his possessions, the Torah considers it as if he offers (daily offering) sacrifices.*

The first source compares sharing one's possessions with talmidei chachamim to attaching oneself to the Shechina. The second compares it to offering the daily sacrifice. I was wondering what the sharing has to do with either of them -- and I wonder what the both of them have to do with each other.

I believe that the answer demonstrates a profound concept in Torah.

It is a fundamental principle of Torah that everything, including temple sacrifices, belong to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. We see it, for instance, in Chagai 2:8, *לי הכסף ולי הזהב נאם יקוק צבאות; Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold -- the word of Hashem, Master of Legions.*

Yet, He still wishes that we bring temple sacrifices -- despite the fact we are essentially "offering" Him something that never left His possession.

And, this offering is for Him, a *ריח ניחח*, a pleasing aroma.

Perhaps it's a *ריח ניחח* because He sees that we thereby acknowledge that, ultimately, everything we have is really His. The Midrash reminds us, in Vayikra Rabba *מי הפריש לפני קרבן עד שלא נתתי לו בהמה? Did anyone offer sacrifices before Me before I gave [them] to him?*

He who contributes money to *talmidei chachamim* fulfills the principles behind these midrashim as well, for he acknowledges that all the world is sustained through the Torah that they learn. So too with he who allows *talmidei chachamim* to benefit from his possessions and he hosts them in his home.

When he gives of his money, he is like the one who offers a sacrifice. Just as the latter demonstrates that he recognizes that his animals are really Hashem's, so too with the one who recognizes that the source of his livelihood is the *talmidei chachamim*.

There is something else which is hinted to in the words of our mishnah, *שאתה שלו ושלך שלו*. Perhaps it is also saying that it is not only your money that belongs to the *talmidei chachamim* who receive a portion of it from you, but your body as well.

What I mean is that man himself was not created other than to serve *talmidei chachamim*. This is expressed in Berachot 6b:

What is meant by the expression, “for this is all of man?” (Koheleth 12:13) Rabbi Elazar says, “The Holy One, Blessed is He, said that the entire world was created for the sake of this person [the person who fears G-d and keeps His commandments]. Abba bar Kahan says it means: The person who fears G-d and keeps his commandments is equal in importance to the entire world. Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai says -- and some say that it was Rabbi Shimon ben Zomma -- who said that the phrase means that the entire world was created only to serve as an accompaniment for this person.

My interpretation of this gemara is that it is saying that the entire world was created for the sake of those with *Yirat Shamayim*, fear of heaven, which I interpret to refer to *talmidei chachamim*.

My approach to this mishnah is quite different from that of Rabbi Obadiah from Bartenura. However, it is well known that **כי שבעים פנים לתורה** *there are seventy facets to Torah*.

רבי שמעון אומר המהלך בדרך ושונה ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר מה נאה אילן זה ומה נאה ניר זה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מתחייב בנפשו:

The mishnah says that one who is learning while taking a walk and interrupts his learning so as to exclaim his admiration for a particular tree's beauty or for the beauty of a plowed field, is considered as if he had done something that forfeits his life.

When Yisrael made the golden calf, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* said to Moshe (Shemot 32:7), **וידבר יקוק אל משה לך רד כי שחת עמך אשר העלית מארץ מצרים**, *And Hashem spoke to Moshe, “Go, descend -- for your people that you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt.”*

To this, Berachot 32a says,

וידבר יקוק אל משה לך רד: מאי לך רד? אמר רבי אלעזר, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: משה, רד מגדולתך! כלום נתני לך גדולה אלא בשביל ישראל, ועכשיו ישראל חטאו - אתה למה לי?

And Hashem spoke to Moshe, “Go, descend. . .” What does it mean: “Go, descend?” Rabbi Elazar says that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe: “Moshe, descend from your [position of] greatness.

Have I given you greatness for any reason other than Yisrael? Now that Yisrael has sinned -- what do I need with you?"

The gemara's text ends with the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* saying to Moshe, "Now that Yisrael has sinned -- what do I need with you?" One of the commentators (*Bach*) reports an alternate version, which says rather than.

"What do I need with you?" "Why do you still deserve elevated status?" My explanation of this gemara will follow that alternative reading.

Another source says that the Heavenly Court issued a writ of excommunication against Moshe at this time. That is to say that, already before Moshe Rabbeinu had completed his 40 days Up Above, he was lowered from his exalted status and excommunicated.

I would like to suggest that due to his status having been lowered, Moshe Rabbeinu was forced to interrupt the "learning" he was conducting with the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. This interruption caused him to then forget all he had learned during that 40-day period. It was therefore necessary for him to "re-learn" that which he had forgotten. Hence, he needed to go back up Above for an additional 40 days.

All of that, only because he had interrupted his learning.

If my interpretation is valid, we have here a vivid illustration of the principle taught in our mishnah. Moshe Rabbeinu's interrupting his learning occurred due to *oneis*; it was not by choice -- he was compelled. Yet, he forgot his learning. He had to re-learn everything, from the beginning.

How much more so in the case of those who intentionally divert their attention away from learning (while in the midst of learning!).

רבי שמעון אומר המהלך בדרך ושונה ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר מה נאה
אילן זה ומה נאה ניר זה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מתחייב בנפשו

Rabbi Shimon says of one who interrupts his learning while walking so as to remark on the beauty of a tree or row of plantings, that he is to be considered as if he had thereby forfeited his life.

Does this not seem quite extreme?

Actually not, when one considers that man was placed into this world for no purpose other than to learn Torah and to know the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. There is no way this can be accomplished other than through extreme dedication to Torah.

Think of one who wishes to succeed in a given profession. Before he ever begins to enter the profession, is it not incumbent upon him to study it beforehand? So too with Torah.

Whoever wishes to know Hashem -- that is, to sense some purpose in His mitzvot and in serving Him -- should head for the Beit Hamidrash. If one is to merit knowing Hashem, this is the way.

I would now like to propose another approach as to how this mishnah might be understood.

Note that Rabbi Shimon of our mishnah speaks of one who walks along the way and is learning. Why doesn't he state his rule generically, that it applies to whoever interrupts his learning -- under any circumstance, irrespective of whether or not he happens to be "walking along the way" at the time? What if he was learning at home and interrupted his learning to remark about a beautiful tree just outside the window? Is this not called being **מפסיק ממשנתו**?

By way of poetic interpretation, let me suggest that the two situations are one and the same. When Rabbi Shimon says "**המהלך בדרך**," he was not specifically referring to one who was actually travelling. Rather, he refers to anyone engaged in learning -- even those who are not walking at all.

Perhaps **מהלך בדרך** could be taken to mean **המהלך בתורה**, for Torah is also a *derech*. Consider the verse (Shemot 18:20): **והזהרת אתה את החקים ואת התורת**

והודעת להם את הדרך ילכו בה ואת המעשה אשר יעשו. The verse speaks of a *derech yeilchu bam*. What is this "*derech*"? According to the Mechilta, *derech* here means "Talmud Torah."

Another *derasha* along this line corresponds to Vayikra 26:3, **בחקתי תלכו אם**. What is meant here by "*b'chukotai taylaychu*"? The Midrash halacha (Sifra) says that 'this teaches us that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* longs for Yisrael's being immersed in His Torah.' The connection is between Talmud Torah and "*b'chukotai taylaychu*" immediately apparent. Perhaps the connection is that when one is engaged in "*taylaychu*," he is not -- by definition -- standing still. The same is true of one who engrosses himself in Torah. Rather, then "staying in one place," he is constantly progressing spiritually, to higher and higher levels.

He who is engrossed in Torah should view himself as if he had been given the opportunity to collect gold for a certain length of time -- and does not know at what point they will be telling him he has to stop. No doubt, he will work as quickly as possible to fill up his sack. At any moment, they could be telling him:

“Your time is up!” Would you think for a moment that he will stop to ponder and remark upon the beauty of a certain tree or of a passing animal? No way!

He knows that each and every moment could be used accumulating more gold. Is there anything more valuable in his mind?

That is how it is with he who truly devotes himself to learning. No knowing whether the present moment might be his last, he does not allow himself to become distracted. Any time he stops, he is losing out on “gold.”

Were the Torah student to interrupt himself so as to admire a beautiful tree, it is as if he were making it known that he cares more about temporal objects of this world than he does about that which is eternal. This is why he is to be considered as if he has forfeited his *nefesh*. For, he has shown that his eternal *nefesh* matters less to him than does that which is trivial and mundane.

Another way of looking at this mishnah is to say that Rabbi Shimon is in fact talking about Torah scholars who continue their learning even as they travel.

This -- in a poetic sense -- is in accordance with **ובלכתך בדרך**. Were an individual like this to interrupt his learning, surely his punishment would be severe, for one may assume that one who makes the effort to learn even while travelling must certainly be the type of person who recognizes Torah’s worth.

If not, why would he be doing the studying-as-you-travel in the first place?

Concentrating while traveling is difficult for anyone. Using the time to focus on Torah means this individual must be someone quite exceptional.

So, if despite being an individual of extraordinary commitment, he nevertheless allows himself to turn away from his learning so as to remark about a tree, he is showing himself as self-contradictory. That is why he is judged so harshly.

Were it not that he was engaged in learning in the first place, we would give him the benefit of the doubt. We would say, “Perhaps this chattering fellow is the type that has not a clue as to the value of Torah. How, then, can we judge him? He barely engages in Torah at any time, whether walking or sitting!”

In other words, when there is nothing particularly remarkable or inconsistent about a particular individual’s not learning as he travels, we can be forgiving. When, however, we are dealing with an individual whose learning as he walks shows him to be the type who knows the Torah’s worth, his neglect of it -- indeed, his conscious turning away from it -- is looked upon with severity.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כי ממך הכל ומיידך נתנו לך.

It once occurred that Rav Chaim Pinto HaKattan went to collect funds for *hachnassat kallah*, as was his custom. Along his route, he entered the shop of the gold and silversmith, asking for a donation. “I have nothing to give,” said the gold and silversmith.

“One is not permitted to speak this way!” answered Rav Chaim HaKattan. “I am going to wait right here. A woman will soon enter your shop, to buy up all the gold you have. You will then be able to contribute from the proceeds.”

Sure enough, a stately woman appeared and proceeded to purchase most of the inventory.

“You now have the means to donate for *hachnassat kallah!*”



רַבִּי דוֹסְתַאי בְּרַבִּי יָנָאִי מְשׁוּם רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֹמֵר
 כָּל הַשּׁוֹכַח דְּבַר אֶחָד מִמִּשְׁנֵתוֹ מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו
 הַכֶּתוּב כְּאִלּוּ מִתְחַיֵּב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ שְׁנֹאמֵר (דְּבָרִים ד'
 רַק הַשְּׁמֵר לָךְ וְשָׁמַר נַפְשְׁךָ מֵאֵד פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת
 הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ. יְכוּל אֶפְלוּ תִקְפָּה עָלָיו
 מִשְׁנֵתוֹ תִלְמוּד לֹאמַר (שֵׁם) וּפֶן יִסּוּרוּ מִלְבָּבְךָ כָּל
 יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הֵא אֵינּוּ מִתְחַיֵּב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ עַד שְׂיֵשֵׁב
 וְיִסִּירֵם מִלְבוֹ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ג'ח

Rabbi Dostai bar Yanai says in the name of Rabbi Meir: One who forgets a single thing from his learning is considered as if he is liable for his life, as it says, “Only guard yourself, and guard your soul greatly, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw.” You might think this applies even if what he was learning was too difficult for him. Therefore, the verse continues, “Lest you remove them from your heart.” This teaches that he is not guilty until he sits and intentionally removes it from his heart.

Rabbi Dusta'i ben Rabbi Yannai would say in the name of Rabbi Meir that anyone who forgets even a single word of his learning, the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life.

This sounds a bit hard to believe. Because a person has forgotten even one word of his learning, he forfeits his life?

After all, memory is not something that is in our hands! One can try and try to remember a certain thing, yet not be successful.

The concluding paragraph is quite curious as well: *Hence, one does not forfeit his life unless he deliberately removes them from his heart.* What is the mishnah referring to? Why would someone take the trouble to understand something in Torah and then deliberately wipe it from his memory?

If there is such a person, surely he is an absolute *rasha*! And, it cannot be that the mishnah is teaching us laws intended solely for *resha'im*. A gemara (Kiddushin 33a) specifically excludes this possibility: **אטו ברשיעי עסקינן?**, *Are we dealing here with resha'im?*

One approach to understanding this is found in Sanhedrin 106a, referring to Amalek's war against Yisrael. It is based upon the verse in Shemot 17:8: **עמלק וילחם עם ישראל ברפידם ויבא**, *And Amalek came and waged war against Yisrael in Rephidim.*

The gemara asks why was the place called "Rephidim," in other words, whether the name had any significance. The gemara's first answer is that this just happened to be the name (in other words, this was its name already, prior to the incident described in the Torah). The second opinion, though, is that the name was directly related to what occurred there: **שריפו עצמן מדברי תורה**, that they had "weakened" themselves (**שריפו עצמן**) from words of Torah. (Meaning, presumably, that they had "weakened" their adherence to words of Torah).

The gemara's second answer is difficult indeed. Simply because they had "weakened themselves" in Torah, Amalek should attack them, killing multitudes?

To put this in context, let us look at Massechet Berachot 63a, which says that whoever weakens themselves in Torah -- even in a single mitzvah -- will not have the strength to stand at a time of trouble.

The gemara's proof is from Mishlei 24:10, **התרפית ביום צרה צר כחכה**, *If you were weak in another's day of affliction, your strength will become limited.*

My interpretation of this verse, applying it to our mishnah, is that it refers to someone who relies entirely on his own wisdom and the power of his own memory. His inflated self-confidence (and self-importance) is akin to Devarim 8:17, **ואמרת בלבבך כחי ועצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה**, *And you might say in your heart, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!"*

This type of individual greatly admires his own abilities. He confidently feels that he knows vast amounts of Torah and that he will not forget any of it. He does not consider it necessary to review, due to his unfailing memory.

Neither does he see the need to strengthen himself in *mitzvoth*.

What happens is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will punish him; He will cause him to forget his learning. His "*strength will become limited*," meaning that his memory will become "afflicted," "weakened," and "limited."

On the other hand, he who recognizes his own limitations and constantly reviews what he learns, as well as consistently strengthening himself in *mitzvoth*, will find his capabilities expanded. For, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will act with him as is said by David HaMelech in Tehillim 119:32, **כִּי תִרְחִיב לִבִּי, דֶּרֶךְ מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲרוּץ**, *I will run in the way of your commandments, for You will broaden my heart.*

Similarly, in the same chapter of Tehillim (verse 45), it says **וְאַתְּהִלְכָה בְּרוּחָהּ, כִּי פָקְדִיךָ דַרְשָׁתֶיךָ**, *And I will walk in broad pathways, for I have sought your precepts.*

But, one who does not act in this fashion, meaning he does not run after the *mitzvoth* and he does not yearn for Torah, will not find his “heart” broadened (enlightened), but will instead find it constricted by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. He will forget what he has learned.

Therefore, since Yisrael had become weak, lax, in “words of Torah,” they were now vulnerable to Amalek. He now had the capability of pursuing them and of killing them.

And, it was not by accident that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* used Amalek in particular for this task. For, the gematria of “Amalek” is “Ram” (**עמלק** equals **רם**). “Ram” means “high” “lofty.”

The use of Amalek (**רם**) therefore showed them why they were being attacked: It was because they had thought so “highly” of themselves. They were so swelled with pride and self-confidence that it caused them to deprecate the role of *mitzvoth*. They therefore did not have the strength to stand at the time of their challenge, when faced with Amalek.

This was despite their never ceasing from learning Torah.

This was despite their counting the days towards *Matan Torah*, the day when Torah would be given to them on Mount Sinai.

Still, they weakened themselves in it. They were lax, lackadaisical.

Amalek therefore got the “green light” to wage war against them.

Returning now to how this applies to all of us, if a person weakens his dedication to Torah, becomes filled with self-confidence and pride, and does

not retreat from his faulty path, then slowly but surely his memory will weaken and he will forget his learning. This will happen to the extent that he will forget everything that he has ever learned.

Pesachim 66b supports this idea that conceit leads to forgetting one's Torah: **מנו חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו - כל המתיהר, אם חכם הוא**, *Whoever has excessive pride - if he is a chacham, his chochma will depart from him.*

We are commanded to “destroy” memories of Amalek. That is to say, we are commanded to annihilate not only Amalek's physical person, but “memories” of him as well. This means that we should eradicate from ourselves that which Amalek represents: conceit, excessive pride, and haughtiness. The reason why this “destruction” is so important is spelled out in my approach to our mishnah: Conceit leads to Torah's being forgotten.

Let us have a look at the verse in the Torah that serves as the source for this mitzvah of “destroying” Amalek. **תמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים לא תשכח**. . . . *you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven -- you shall not forget!* (Devarim 25:18).

I would like to read the verse somewhat creatively: It says that only through eradicating the memory of Amalek (whose gematria equals **רם**, which could be said to connote “haughtiness”), will we protect ourselves from **לא תשכח**, “*Do not forget!*”

Of course, I will need to explain this a bit further.

Here is what I mean: Only through eradicating our own **רם**, haughtiness, will we protect ourselves from the **לא תשכח**, the “*Do not forget your Torah learning.*”

Let us now return to our mishnah.

Our original question was, “Because a person has forgotten even one word of his learning, he forfeits his life? After all, memory is not something that is in our hands!”

We asked as well, as regards to the mishnah's final paragraph, which says that the above rule only applies to those who forget their learning intentionally: “Why would someone take the trouble to understand something in Torah and then deliberately wipe it from his memory? Such a person would surely be an absolute *rasha!*”

In order to understand the mishnah's intent, we have to modify its application.

It is not referring to someone who sweats over a gemara and then consciously works on wiping it from his memory. Nor is it referring to one who "just happens" to forget something that he has learned. That is only natural. After all, we are only human.

Rather, it refers to one who is filled with Torah, but is also filled with pride.

Once he becomes lax in even a single mitzvah as a result of his haughtiness, this causes him to forget Torah learning. If he does not act upon this, meaning that he does not seek to eradicate the inner pride that is causing his memory problem and to strengthen himself in mitzvot, it is as if he had made a conscious decision to accept the consequences of his corrupt attitude.

Such a person has indeed "forfeited his life." Not only has he not "wiped out" the memory of "Amalek," but he has prepared a dwelling place for Amalek, namely his own heart!

Such a person will not have the strength to "stand" during a time of distress. He has brought the *yetser hara* upon himself. And, he has left no place within himself from where to do *teshuvah*.



רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר כל שיראת חטאו
 קודמת לחכמתו חכמתו מתקימת. וכל
 שחכמתו קודמת ליראת חטאו אין חכמתו
 מתקימת. הוא היה אומר כל שמעשיו מרבין
 מחכמתו חכמתו מתקימת. וכל שחכמתו מרבה
 ממעשיו אין חכמתו מתקימת:
 משנה אבות ג:ט

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says: One whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. And one whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure. He would say: One whose actions exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. And one whose wisdom exceeds his actions, his wisdom will not endure.

The mishnah says regarding one whose wisdom takes precedence over his fear of sin, that his wisdom will not endure. It seems that this applies even to someone who learns a great deal and also has great amounts of *yirat cheit*, fear of sin. Even in that case, his wisdom will not endure as long as his *yirat cheit* (great as it may be) comes second.

The mishnah mentions only that the *chochma* will be lost. However, I would assume that his *yirat cheit* will be lost as well.

One can see this as well in Tehillim 111:10, ראשית חכמה יראת יקוק, *The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem*. This could be understood to mean that fear of Hashem is prerequisite to wisdom. In other words, lacking fear of Hashem, one cannot hope to attain wisdom. In the context of our mishnah, this would mean that the wisdom “will not last.” Another way of restating this is to say that if one lacks the beginning of wisdom (namely, *yirat cheit*), then how could one possibly achieve the “end” of wisdom?

If you recall my interpretation of the previous mishnah, that the one sanctioned for “forgetting” his Torah is he who is filled with conceit, you will see how our mishnah is the continuation of that one. To my mind, there is a strong connection between being filled with conceit and a lack of *yirat cheit*.

A gemara in Massechet Shabbat 147b has some relevance here. It tells of Rabbi Elazar ben Arach's having come to a certain place that had particularly excellent wine and soothing waters for bathing. Having become attracted to these worldly delights, Rabbi Elazar ben Arach eventually forgot the entirety of his Torah knowledge. This was despite his having been one of the greatest scholars of his generation.

His decline was so great that, when visiting another town and being called to read from the Torah scroll, he read "HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem [This Month is Yours]" as "HaCheresh Hayah Libam [Their Heart was Deaf and Mute]." The nature of this mistake made obvious the extent to which he had forgotten his learning.

Seeing his pitiful state, his fellow scholars prayed that Hashem restore his learning.

Rabbi Elazar ben Arach's story seems almost beyond comprehension. He was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's greatest *talmid*. Recall what was said in Avoth 2:8:

Abba Shaul said in his name: If all the sages of Israel were to be in one cup of a balance-scale, Eliezer the son of Hurkenus included, and Elazar the son of Arach were in the other, he would outweigh them all.

Could it be that such a person would simply jettison his learning so as to bask in worldly pleasures?

Obviously not.

Many explanations are given as to what was really behind this puzzling story. The Midrash Koheleth Rabba offers a detailed account of the circumstances and explains that he was not there to soak in the material pleasures, but relocated to that place at his wife's insistence, to her hometown. Rabbi Elazar was expecting his fellow scholars to join him. They did not, remaining instead in Yavneh. Being there alone, his learning deteriorated

I would like to offer a different suggestion. I think that he went there relying that his great wisdom would protect him from suffering a decline in fear of sin. In other words, he most certainly knew of the threat posed by living in such a place, but rationalized that his great wisdom would protect him from all consequences.

Of course, when speaking of the holy Rabbis of the talmud, especially one as great as Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, we must exercise great caution. We may not presume to judge them, nor may we presume to critique their motivations or attribute to them any flaw, other than what explicitly appears in the text.

However, in our case, we must acknowledge that the story does appear in the talmud and could only have been included there so that we may draw an ethical lesson from it.

The lesson I see is that it teaches us about wisdom / fear of sin. In my opinion, had Rabbi Elazar ben Arach's fear of sin been greater than his wisdom, he would never have allowed himself to enter a place where he would be exposed to such material temptation. Following this line of thought, I would say that there were two vulnerabilities. One was that he thought that his wisdom would protect him from losing fear of sin. Second, his fear of sin most probably became compromised by his involvement in material pleasure.

Accordingly, he lost his wisdom. For, his wisdom came "before" his fear of sin.

In the end, because he was such a great scholar, and because of the merit he had earned through his many years of study, the other Rabbis prayed that his wisdom be restored. The talmud tells us that their effort met with success; his wisdom, in fact, returned.

**הוא היה אומר כל שחכמתו מרובה ממעשיו למה הוא דומה לאילן
שענפיו מרובין ושרשיו מועטין והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו**

The mishnah tells us of whoever's wisdom is greater than his deeds, that he is like a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few. A wind can readily come along, uproot it, and topple it. This reminds me of Gehazi, a great man who was Elisha the Prophet's servant.

The gemara tells us (Berachot 7b) that that one learns more Torah from serving a Torah scholar than one does from Torah learning alone. Elisha gave him the power to revive the dead. Had he followed Elisha's instructions to not speak with anyone, he would have himself been able to revive the dead, albeit through the prophet's merit. (Yerushalmi 10:2).

In any event, because his deeds were not greater than his wisdom, his wisdom did not remain with him and he therefore stumbled.

Na'aman appeared before Elisha, asking that he heal him of his *tzara'at*. After Elisha had fulfilled his request, Na'aman offered to pay him with silver.

Elisha refused, *As Hashem before whom I stood lives, I swear that I will not accept.*

Gehazi on the other hand, ran after him and took silver and fine garments. When Elisha asked him about it afterwards, he lied.

Despite being a *Ben Torah*, the merit of his learning did not protect him from financial greed. Elisha therefore cursed him. Na'aman's *tzara'at* was transferred to Gehazi.

Gehazi lost both this world (due to the suffering from *tzara'at*) and, as the mishnah tells us in Sanhedrin, the next world as well.

The rule is that the degree to which one has great wisdom, so much more so should he multiply his good deeds. Only in this way will his wisdom aid him in overcoming the temptations of the *yetser*. Should he not increase his deeds to the extent that they are greater than his wisdom, then the "*ruach*" will uproot it and throw it his face. He find himself uprooted from the world.

One cannot equate the *chacham* who has sinned with the fool who has sinned; they cannot even be compared. Our Rabbis tell us that to the extent that one is greater than his fellow, to that degree is his *yetser* greater as well.



הוא הִנֵּה אוֹמֵר כֹּל שְׂרוּחַ הַבְּרִיּוֹת נוֹחָה הַיְמָנוּ
 רִיחַ הַמָּקוֹם נוֹחָה הַיְמָנוּ. וְכֹל שְׂאִין רִיחַ הַבְּרִיּוֹת
 נוֹחָה הַיְמָנוּ אִין רִיחַ הַמָּקוֹם נוֹחָה הַיְמָנוּ. רַבִּי
 דוֹסָא בֶּן הֶרְכִּינֵס אוֹמֵר שְׁנֵה שֶׁל שְׁחֵרִית וַיִּין
 שֶׁל צְהָרִים וְשִׁחַת הַיְלָדִים וְיִשִּׁיבַת בְּתֵי כְּנִסְיוֹת
 שֶׁל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּי

He would say: He who is pleasing to people is pleasing also to God. And one who is not pleasing to people is also not pleasing to God. Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas says: Morning sleep, and afternoon wine, and conversing with children, and sitting in the synagogues of the amei ha'aretz remove man from the world.

The mishnah says that it automatically follows that whoever is not pleasing to his fellow man will not be pleasing to G-d.

It stresses that our obligation in this world is to conduct ourselves in manner that others find pleasing. This means that all of our daily interactions, both business and personal, must be done with honesty and integrity. The burden on Talmudic scholars is even heavier, as the bad impression they might leave often result in *chilulei Hashem*, desecrations of His Name. Given that they present themselves as being exemplars of Torah, the impression left when they misbehave is that the Torah itself is somehow deficient, G-d forbid.

When it comes to *talmidei chachamim*, the opposite is true as well. Just as their bad behavior potentially creates *chilulei Hashem*, so does their exemplary behavior potentially cause *kiddushei Hashem*, sanctification of His Name. Therefore, as careful as the rest of us have to be, it is even more so for *talmidei chachamim*, for their behavior reflects upon the Torah itself.

The generation of the flood were involved in all kinds of grave transgressions. The midrash tells us that they were so corrupted, that the ground itself yielded not what had been planted, but other things entirely. Yet, the rabbis tell us that the decisive transgression was not their sexual immorality, but theft.

It does sometimes happen that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* forgives a generation's sins and extends His "patience," but theft and exploitation are a different matter. He did not create the world so as to have it destroyed by mankind. Yeshiyahu 45:18 says **לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה**, *He did create it for emptiness; He fashioned it to be inhabited*. Theft was the cause of His bringing upon them the flood.

Rabbi Akiva's students were most certainly very great *tzaddikim* and were filled with Torah. Yet, according to the gemara, during one tragic period, they were all judged to die. The reason given was that they were not sufficiently respectful towards one another. Their deaths were by **אסכרה**, diphtheria, which the gemara considers a particularly difficult way to die.

Further on in Avoth (5:19), it says **עין טובה ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו**, *Generosity, great carefulness, and extreme humility [mark one as] a disciple of Avraham Avinu*.

Sotah 5a says, regarding those whose personalities are vulgar and coarse, **כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח - אמר הקב"ה: אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם**, *of him, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu says, "He and I cannot coexist in this world."*

Similar sentiments are expressed in Arachin 15b in reference to the habitual speaker of *lashon hara*, slander and gossip.

The Rabbis do not express comparable statements as regards to those who commit any transgression other than these, for these in particular undermine settlement of our world. Therefore, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* neither tolerates nor excuses them.

Several midrashim describe certain events surrounding the tragic episode of the Romans' execution of some of the most prominent Rabbis of tannaitic times. When Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yishmael were led to be killed, the midrashim say that Rabbi Shimon began to cry.

"Why is it that we are being led to execution like those who committed grave transgressions and desecrators of Shabbat?" he asked.

Rabbi Yishmael replied, "Perhaps it happened that some woman came to you with a *niddah* question or an orphan or widow came for help with their living expenses and you made them wait until you finished your drink?"

Rabbi Shimon answered, "Rebbi, you have consoled me. (In other words, I now understand why I deserve such punishment.)"

Through these midrashim, we see quite dramatically just how severe it is to violate the mitzvot between man and man. For, Rabbi Shimon readily acknowledged that, once he had been negligent in some instance of interpersonal conduct, he was indeed deserving of execution.

רבי דוסא בן הרכינס אומר שינה של שחרית ויין של צהרים ושיחת ילדים וישיבת בתי כנסיות של עמי הארץ מוציאין את האדם מן העולם :

Rabbi Dossa says that morning sleep drives one out of the world. Perhaps he refers to the *yetser hara*. For, its method is to cause us to be tired, lazy, and apathetic. These are the traits of Amalek, about whom it is said *he happened upon you . . . when you were faint and weary* (Devarim 25:18).

Regarding Esau, Amalek ancestor, the Torah has him saying, *I am tired*. (Bereishit 25:30)

The *yetser* uses whatever tricks it has to cause man to not even begin to do *mitzvot*. For it knows that the nature of man is such that he generally follows whatever path he has already begun upon. *One mitzvah leads to another* says Aboth. Once a person has tasted the taste of Torah and mitzvot, he will hunger for more.

The *yetser* therefore does what it can to dissuade man from ever beginning to do mitzvot.

The midrash tells us that Amalek was the first to entice the Nations to wage war against Yisrael. He did this following the miracles Hashem performed for Yisrael before the Nations' very eyes. This is because his craft is to destroy "beginnings," that is, to nip enthusiasm for mitzvot from its inception. These "beginnings" are what is known as *reishit*. A verse tells us that Amalek is the *reishit* of the Nations.

Yirah is called *reishit*, as we see in Mishlei 1:7. This is because without *yirah*, one cannot even venture towards *avodath Hashem*.

David tells us in Tehillim 119:148, קדמו עיני אשמרות לשיח באמרתך. One interpretation of our Rabbis is that until midnight, his eyes were blinking like those of a slumbering horse. After midnight, a north wind came forth and plucked the strings of the harp suspended over his bed, playing melodies upon it. David awoke immediately, jumping up to busy himself with Hashem's Torah until the break of dawn.

Let us try to understand why the wind that rose up was specifically one from the north.

Is this not a wonder, that each and every night a northerly wind would sweep in, exactly at the stroke of midnight? Given that we are already in the realm of the miraculous, why bother with the harp? Couldn't the wind itself have done the job of rousing David from his sleep? In fact, why did Hashem use the wind at all? Couldn't there have been a miracle whereby precisely at midnight, David would awaken "on his own"?

I'd like to propose an answer along the lines of the poetic.

It says in the gemara that the prophet Yoel calls the *yetser hara* is called a "*tsfoni*." This is because it is *tsafon* (hidden) in man's heart.

Another approach is to say that the *yetser* is called *tsafon* due to its actions. This is because it hides its intent. For, it can work upon he who is busy with Torah and mitzvot, telling him, "Why don't you just put down that *sefer* and step outside to serve other gods?"

Could it just come out and say, in the most direct fashion "Just this one time, why not transgress the Torah in its entirety -- just once?"

Of course not.

Rather, it has to work its ways more subtly and insidiously. I'll call this "with a wind (or breath) that is *tsafonit*."

That is to say, it begins by suggesting something seemingly innocuous. Perhaps it suggests a transgression that, in the eyes of many, seems very, very mild. The listener does not suspect that hidden within it (*tsafon*) is a sinister agenda. The listener might think to himself: "Why not? After all, what am I giving up, other than a simple *minhag*?"

Today, the *yetser* will say "Just this." Tomorrow, it will be something else. Eventually, the *yetser* will be separating him away from learning Torah. And then it will be leading him to full-fledged idolatry!

David was a king of Israel. All day, he was involved with monarchical duties. At midnight, he would finally go to sleep. And even then, the most he would sleep was a few winks, like the intermittent slumbering of a horse. The gemara says that this is sixty breaths.

Once midnight arrived, David's first thought was to rouse himself to start learning Torah.

The *yetser*, however, had different plans. The “*rua’ach tsfonit*” (in other words, the *yetser hara*) sprung into action: “How can you arise at a time like this? You’ve barely had a chance to fall asleep! And you already want to get up?”

“You are a king of Israel!” continued the *yetser*. So it went, on and on, with *yetser* trying its hardest to wear David down and exhaust him, specifically as he started -- or attempted to start -- his day.

David Hamelech, however, was wise to the *yetser’s* strategies. He knew that its method was to insidiously entice man with something seemingly reasonable -- and have it be a gateway to eventually transgress that which is major. David could have thought, quite reasonably, “It’s true; I’ve barely slept. How does it make sense for me to jump out of bed now?”

“Is it really incumbent on me to get up each night at midnight?”

On the face of it, it made sense. David, however, understood where it was leading. If he would not arise from his bed now, he wouldn’t be doing so until three hours later. (the gemara says that the custom of kings was to rise at the third hour of the night.)

David himself write in Tehillim that *fear of Hashem is the pre-condition (reishit) of wisdom*. Does this not say that the most critical factor in process is its beginning?

If a person decides from the outset to conduct himself with *yirah* and to not listen to the *yetser*, he will, in the end, defeat it completely. David therefore opposed the *yetser* already at midnight. Of course he was tired, but he nevertheless roused himself from bed. This, he was free of the *yetser’s* influence even at noon time.

In the end, he “killed” the *yetser* and expelled it from his presence.

We may now better understand our mishnah’s intent. All three of its elements are related.

The mishnah first mentions “morning sleep.” This is because when one pays heed to the *yetser* and thereby becomes “tired” when starting to do mitzvot, although no actual transgression had taken place, it sets the stage for falling prey to all of the *yetser’s* subsequent arguments. The effect is absolutely insidious; sometimes one can barely sense what is happening to him. This is why the use of the second phrase in the mishnah, “afternoon wine.”

Man can be like the drunk who follows the directions of whoever is feeding him his next glass of wine. Nor does he recognize the extent to which he is becoming more and more inebriated. So too with the *yetser*. One can become intoxicated by its entreaties without ever realizing the extent to which the *yetser* is taking control.

The Rabbis, in the name of Reish Lakish, tell us that were it not for being overpowered by foolishness, man would not sin. Once this spirit of foolishness sets in, man's ability to think rationally and make wise choices goes out the window. He is like the young child who spends his time with silly chatter. This is why the third part of our mishnah lists "conversation of children."

Were man to not turn his thoughts to *teshuvah* and instead continue following the directives of the *yetser*, he will in the end forget all his Torah learning. He will wind up "sitting in the assembly places of peasants," the penultimate (next to last) phrase listed in our mishnah. The *yetser hara* will then "drive him from the world" -- the mishnah's final phrase.

However, if one does not dose in bed when morning comes, refusing to pay heed to the *yetser*, no matter how trivial -- or reasonable -- the *yetser's* suggestions are, he will thereby avoid being drawn into the *yetser's* web all day long. This is how David merited to be unaffected by whatever the *yetser* said to him. For, he knew that the key was to start the day off right and, already from the beginning of his day, not allow the *yetser* to intrude.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו רוח המקום נוחה הימנו

Two families in Mogador lived in close proximity, but had radically different relationships with Rabbi Chaim Pinto the second, who lived in that city as well.

The Miyara family were amongst his "fans." They trusted implicitly all that came from his mouth and accepted whatever he said. The Zabiv family, however, had no confidence in what Rabbi Chaim had to say.

One evening, Rabbi Chaim suddenly roused himself from sleep and began to run towards the Miyara family's door. Once he got here, he knocked furiously.

The Miyaras were fast asleep, especially exhausted because their daughter had given birth to a son that very day. They were sleeping so deeply, that they did not hear the noise.

Rabbi Chaim then pounded the door heavily, until someone was finally awakened and opened the door.

The Rav told them that he had just seen something in a dream and ordered the family to flee the city at once, taking with them only some bare necessities.

Rabbi Chaim then went to alert their neighbors, the Zabivs, banging heavily on their door to wake them as well. Just as he had for the Miyaras, Rabbi Chaim told them of the dream and that they must flee immediately.

The Zabivs, however, were not impressed. “You dreamed a dream and for that we should run away in the middle of the night? **והלמות השוא ידברו**, and *the dreamers speak lies* (Zechariah 10:2). Is it really safer out on the road somewhere? Our home is our fortress; we are not going to leave.”

Rabbi Chaim pleaded with them, but to no avail.

Once he saw that his words were falling on deaf ears, he left them, returning to the Miyaras, whom he helped with their packing and then accompanied to the outskirts of the city. There, he stayed with them all night long, until the break of day.

Returning with the Miyaras, Rabbi Chaim saw that crowds of people were milling about the area that contained the Zabiv family home. Coming closer, they heard that the house had collapsed in the middle of the night, onto its inhabitants. The family elder was dead, while others in the family had been injured.

Rabbi Chaim cried out in anguish. “If only I had been more insistent! If only I had stayed there to plead with them more and more! Who knows? Maybe they would have left!”

The widow assured Rabbi Chaim he was not at fault; the Rav had done everything that was expected. It was her husband who, unfortunately, had chosen to not pay heed.

Rabbi Chaim did all he could to help the Zabivs recover. Once they had, they moved to Algiers, to be near the departed husband’s family.



רבי אֶלְעָזָר הַמוֹדְעֵי אוֹמֵר הַמְחַלֵּל אֶת
הַקְּדוּשִׁים וְהַמְבַזֶּה אֶת הַמוֹעֲדוֹת וְהַמְלַבֵּן פְּנֵי
חֲבֵרוֹ בְּרַבִּים וְהַמְפַּר בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ
עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם וְהַמְגַלֶּה פְּנִים בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁלֹּא
כְּהִלְכָה אָף עַל פִּי שֵׁישׁ בְּיָדוֹ תּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים
טוֹבִים אֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיָּא

Rabbi Elazar Hamodai says: One who desecrates sacred things, and one who disgraces the Festivals, and one who humiliates his fellowman in public, and one who annuls the covenant of Avraham Avinu, and one who presents interpretations of the Torah that are not in keeping with halachah, even if he has Torah and good deeds, he does not have a share in the World to Come.

The mishnah lists five things, all of which lead to not having a share in the world to come. The first four are: Profanation of of *kodashim*, Degradation of the Festivals, Humiliating one's friend in public, and Abrogating the covenant of Avraham.

I would like to explore what these four have in common.

We will begin by quoting Vayikra 23:2-4:

(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי יְקוֹק אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרָאוּ
אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֱלֹהִים מוֹעֲדֵי:
(ג) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא
קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבַּת הוּא לִיקוֹק בְּכָל מוֹשַׁבְתֵיכֶם:
(ד) אֱלֹהִים מוֹעֲדֵי יְקוֹק מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרָאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדֵם:
וַיִּקְרָא כֵן

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations -- these are My appointed festivals.

For six days, labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any

work; it is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places. These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the holy convocations, which you shall designate in their appropriate time.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh asks several questions. The first is, why does verse 2 end with **אלה הם מועדי**, *these are My appointed festivals*? The next is why the Torah needed to warn here about Shabbat. Doesn't this warning already appear elsewhere in Torah? The third question is why the verse regarding Shabbat is followed once again by **אלה מועדי יקוק**, *These are the appointed festivals of Hashem*.

I would like to respond to these questions using the technique of *mussar*, meaning that my primary goal will be to derive an ethical lesson. That means that I will be less concerned with whether my interpretation is consistent with a close reading of the verses and more concerned that the message itself is relevant and meaningful.

My interpretation is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* wished to stress to us the extent to which the festivals are holy. He did not want us to have the misimpression that only the Shabbat is holy or that only violators of Shabbat that are punished, but not violators of the festivals.

Because certain types of labor forbidden on Shabbat are permitted on the festivals, one might erroneously think that the festivals themselves do not have a comparable level of holiness to Shabbat. This explains, in my mind, why the reference to Shabbat was inserted. Shabbat and the festivals are comparably holy. G-d forbid that one should be lax as to the festivals and strict as to Shabbat.

In order to reinforce this idea, the festivals are also known as Shabbat, as we see that the Torah says in reference to the first day of Pesach, **ממחרת השבת**.

Furthermore, appearing in the text of one of the major commentators to Shulchan Arukh (**מופיע במגן אברהם סימן תפח, בשם דרכי משה**) is that we say Mizmor Shir l'Yom HaShabbat even on Yom Tov, "for it, too, is called 'Shabbat.'" **אומרים מזמור שיר ליום השבת - ד"ט נמי איקרי שבת (ד"מ)**.

Yom Tov is the equal of Shabbat in all matters, other than that many of the tasks connected to food preparation are permitted on Yom Tov. Regardless of what is halachically permitted on Yom Tov as opposed to Shabbat, their holiness is equal.

Our Rabbis go to great lengths to stress this holiness in their aggadic statements, for instance saying that one who trivializes the festivals is regarded as if he had worshipped idols. The Midrash Halacha Torah Kohanim says that whoever desecrates the Yom Tom is considered as if he had desecrated the Shabbat.

Statements like the above were deemed necessary because of a common misconception amongst the masses that the *Yamim Tovim* were somehow less “strict” than Shabbat.

I would like to quote at length the comments by Rabbi Obadiah m’Seforno to one of the verses quoted above (Vayikra 23:2), as I find them particularly striking. The translation is a free paraphrase, leaving out some of the Seforno’s proof texts:

מועדי יקוק אשר תקראו אתם מקראי קדש - After the Torah spoke of the *korbanot* and those who bring them, whose intention is to cause the *Shechina* to dwell amongst Yisrael, . . . it speaks of the *mo’adim*, whose intent is to have us cease our mundane activity.

On certain of the *mo’adim* (Shabbat and *Yom HaKippurim*), our rest must be total.

On all of them, [both those where the rest must be “total” and those where certain types of labor are permitted], we are to involve ourselves with Torah and matters of holiness.

On other festivals, one must refrain from *melechet avodah*, but not *melechet ochel nefesh*. [Certain stages of food preparation that are forbidden on Shabbat and *Yom HaKippurim* are permitted on these days. This category is known as *melechet ochel nefesh*,].

And why is it that *Melechet ochel nefesh* is permitted on some of the *yomei tovim*? An answer might be found in the book of Tehillim 149:2 : ישמח ישראל בעשיו . (Editor’s Note: Rav Yehudah Kopperman in his commentary to Seforno explains that Seforno’s comment here is tied to what he says in Tehillim.

There, Seforno explains this phrase to mean that the “*hamon*,” the masses, rejoice that Hashem has made them His nation: Hashem is their shepherd. Even in the time of Exile, it is incumbent upon Yisrael to sing and rejoice that He is our G-d, who guides us

directly, without intermediary. That is to say, Yisrael has a mitzvah to serve Hashem and to help guide the world towards its ultimate purpose. This is the basis of the concept **חציו לה' וחציו לכם**, that on certain Yamei Tovim, we are commanded to have *simchat Yom Tov* and permitted *melechet ochel nefesh*. This allows us to have the physical *simcha* that will assist us in having the *simcha* of rejoicing in Hashem and in our role as His nation.) This will certainly lead to the *Shechina's* dwelling in our midst.

That *mo'adim* are known as *Mikra'ei Kodesh* indicates that their purpose is that the Nation will assemble for purposes of *kodesh*. (Proof texts are then brought to this effect).

Seforno's commentary continues: **אלה הם מועדי** - *These are the mo'adim*: This way, as *My moa'adim*, is how you must relate to them. If, however, you don't relate to them as *mikra'ei kodesh*, but as *mikra'ei chol* (weekday-style gatherings) that revolve solely around mundane pursuit of fleeting pleasure, then they are not **מועדי**, *My moa'adim*. Rather, they are to be thought of as solely **מועדיכם**, *your mo'adim*. This is reminiscent of the verse (in Yeshiyahu 1:14), **ומועדיכם שנאה נפשי** *My soul detests your mo'adim* (This is Yeshiyahu's expression of Hashem's detesting the offerings brought by His people, because they persist in their improper conduct.)

From here, we see that the *mo'adim* are like *korbanot* and *kodashim*. One who takes them lightly transforms them from holy to mundane. In the case of *mo'adim*, when one fails to take advantage of them as an opportunity to learn Torah, they are for him neither *mo'adei Hashem* nor *mo'adei kodesh*. Rather, they are *mo'adei chol*.

The teacher of our mishnah therefore links "One who profanes the *kodashim*" with one who "degrades the Festivals." For, when one brings a *korban* but lacks the intent that it be for *kodashim*, that is, for the sake of Hashem, its status is *chol* not *kodesh*.

So too with the *mo'adim*. When they used for things other than Torah, they are not *kodesh* but *chol*. This is why our Rabbis taught us (Yerushalmi Shabbat 15) **לא ניתנו שבתות וימים טובים אלא לעסוק בהן בדברי תורה** - *Shabbatot and Yamim Tovim were not given other than for the study of Torah*.

Whoever fails to use the *mo'adot* for Torah will in the end be led to transgression. For, we know that work is forbidden on Yom Tov. And we know that idleness from work inevitably leads to sin.

The *Tur* famously writes in the laws of Yom Tov that the community should take steps to see to it that the *Yom Tov* celebrations not lead to sin.

The teacher of our mishnah warns that failure to properly observe the *mo'adot* leads to a loss of the World to Come. Along with failure to properly observe the *mo'adot*, he lists as well humiliating one's friend in public, abrogating the covenant of our father Abraham, and interpreting the Torah contrary to its true intent.

I believe that the connection between those seemingly different things is more than incidental. For, not using the *mo'adot* for Torah study, but simply for idleness from work, will lead to sins between Man and Man and between Man and his Maker. Inevitably, the other things listed in the mishnah will occur. Idle chatter is bound to include humiliation of one's fellow. And, the general idleness will lead to sexual impropriety as well.

The latter is sometimes referred to as abrogating the Covenant of Avraham, the *Brit of Avraham*.

To extend this *derasha* further, I would like suggest that he who transgresses these particular *aveirot* is considered as one who "interprets the Torah contrary to its true intent," as in the words of our mishnah. This idea appears in Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura's commentary to our mishnah. There, he says that interpreting the Torah contrary to its true intent refers not only to teaching halakhot that are contrary to authentic Torah tradition and in suggesting *derashot* that are nothing more than "foolishness," but also in brazen, public, and shameless disregard of Torah.

I would suggest that all of the above *aveirot* began with taking lightly the idea of *kodashim* and in failure to properly utilize the *mo'adot*. That ultimately led to losing a share in the World to Come, as he had become one who brazenly, openly, and publicly transgresses Torah law. His *aveirot* include sexual transgressions that are likened to abrogation of the Brit of Avraham. As a result, he will fall to *geheinom*. And, he will not be able to count on Avraham Avinu's taking him out of there, as Avraham Avinu would no longer recognize him. (See Eiruvin 19a. The talmud refers to one who sins with an idolatrous woman, who conceals that he is circumcised. Because of this concealment of the Brit of Avraham, Avraham Avinu no longer recognizes him and will therefore not draw him out of *geheinom*.)

רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֵאל אוֹמֵר הוּי קַל לְרֹאשׁ וְנוֹחַ
 לְתַשְׁחֹרֵת וְהוּי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּשִׂמְחָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיב

Rabbi Yishmael says: Be yielding to a superior and compliant to officials, and greet every person happily.

The mishnah says that we should receive everyone with *simcha*. Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura explains that this means not that we should not only “receive” every man with *simcha*, but that we should be *b’simcha* whenever we face (literally, when “opposite”) someone else.

We could expand upon these words to say that this rule of always showing a joyful disposition extends even to those times when one is particularly troubled, when something is “eating away at him.” When one is alone, between himself and his Maker, and is deeply worried and concerned about some matter, it is perfectly legitimate to express his true “face,” that is, his true, uninhibited self. However, in the company of others, one must project *simcha*.

Sefer Chovot HaLevavot (שער ט - שער הפרישות פרק ד) says, **בפניו ואבלו**, . . . “*shouting with joy*” should be upon his face, but his mourning should [remain] in his heart [alone].

Regarding Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, a story is told that of an encounter he had with a certain Jew during the month of Elul. The man was plainly distraught, restlessly turning here and there as he sighed heavily. Rabbi Yisrael turned to him and asked, “What has happened to you, that you are in such a state? Have lost some money? Have you lost your business?”

“Elul!” replied the man. “Elul! Woe, how I fear the Day of Judgment that is almost upon us!”

Rabbi Yisrael began to laugh at him: “Why, I’m certain you don’t even have a portion in the World to Come!”

“And how do I know that, you might ask?” said Rav Yisrael. “Because you cause everyone who sees you to fall into depression! Yes, I realize that the worry on your face is for legitimate cause and is sincere, that you truly fear the Yom

HaDin. Others, however, don't know that this is the real cause and, upon seeing you, will lapse into despair regarding their own worries. It is therefore forbidden for you to show such a face in public”

“Are you more religious than the author of Shulkhan Arukh? asked Rav Yisrael. Remember what he writes there, that one should eat, drink, and be joyful on Rosh HaShana.”



רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר שְׁחוֹק וְקִלּוֹת רֹאשׁ מְרַגְלִין
 לְעֶרְוָה. מִסּוֹרֶת סִיג לְתוֹרָה. מִעֲשָׂרוֹת סִיג
 לְעֶשֶׂר. נְדָרִים סִיג לְפְרִישׁוֹת. סִיג לְחֻכְמָה
 שְׁתִּיקָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיג

Rabbi Akiva says: Laughter and frivolity accustom one to immorality. The Tradition is a fence protecting the Torah; tithes are a fence protecting wealth; vows are a fence protecting separation. The fence that protects wisdom is silence.

Tithing [is] a safety fence to wealth - It is generally understood that one is not permitted to “test” G-d, to try and “see” if He will deliver on a promised reward. In fact, according to some authorities, it would be a Torah prohibition. (Other authorities, like the Rambam, limit the prohibition to the “testing” of an authenticated prophet.) An exception is made, however, in the case of tithing, as we see in Ta’anit 9a.

Ta’anit 9a quotes Malachi 3:10 as an explicit challenge from Hashem, inviting us to test His promise to reward those who tithe: **הַבִּיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשָׂאֵל בַּיִת** **הָאוֹצֵר וְיִהְיֶה טָרֵף בְּבֵיתִי וּבַחֲנוּנֵי נֹא בּוֹאֵת אִמְרֵי יְקוֹק צְבָאוֹת אִם לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת הַיְּסוּדוֹת שָׁמַיִם וְהִרְיָקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרֵכָה עַד בְּלִי דֵי־** *- Bring all the tithes into the storage house, and let it be sustenance in My Temple. Test Me, if you will, with this, says Hashem, Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end.*

That gemara is the source for the famous statement of the Rabbis: **עֶשֶׂר בְּשִׁבִיל** **שֶׁתֵּעָשֶׂר** - *Aseir bishvil sh’titasheir* - Tithe (Aseir) in order that you become wealthy (*sh’titasheir*). This would seem to mean that he who tithes from his income, will increase his income and become wealthy.

We learn as well that one is permitted to give *tzeddaka* conditionally. For instance, he who donates *tzeddaka* “in order that my son may live” is considered a “*tzaddik gamur* - a full *tzaddik*.”

We see that *tzeddaka* and *ma’aser* are different than other mitzvot, in that one may “test” Hashem through them, to “see” whether he will grant His promised reward.

A startling midrash (Shir HaShirim Zuta) declares that whoever gives *tzeddaka*, even though he sinned, will be protected from the grip of the *Malach HaMavet* (the Angel of Death). Why? (In other words, why this reward?) Because, were it not for him, the poor whom he fed and the poor whom he clothed might have otherwise died.

As one more reminder as to how different the mitzvah of *tzeddaka* is from other mitzvot, let us recall the third mishnah in chapter one of Avot. It says that one should not be like a slave who serves his master in order to receive reward, but like a slave who serves him unconditionally, that is, *not* for the sake of reward.

Bottom line, we know that a Jew is supposed to perform the Mitzvot *l'Shamam*, that is, purely for their own sake -- not to get reward, not to be protected from sin, and not in order to gain wealth.

Tzeddaka is unique. Even though one has done it in order to become wealthy or for some other purpose that is non-altruistic, still he is credited for a mitzvah and receives reward. According to the midrash, the reason seems to be that, because no matter what his intent (or lack thereof), much good came out of his deed. The hungry were fed and the naked clothed. And that is what counts.



הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר חֲבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם.
 חֲבֵה יִתְּרָה נוֹדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
 (בראשית ט) כִּי בְּצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם.
 חֲבִיבֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָּנִים לְמָקוֹם. חֲבֵה יִתְּרָה
 נוֹדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָּנִים לְמָקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
 (דברים יד) בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. חֲבִיבֵינוּ
 יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם כְּלֵי חֲמֻדָּה. חֲבֵה יִתְּרָה
 נוֹדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם כְּלֵי חֲמֻדָּה שֶׁבּוֹ נִבְרָא
 הָעוֹלָם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ד) כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נִתְּנִי
 לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי אֵל תַּעֲזֹבוּ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּיד

He used to say: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God, as it says, "For in the image of God He made man." Beloved are Israel, for they are called God's children. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to them that they are called God's children, as it says, "You are children to the Lord your God." Beloved is Israel, for He gave them a desirable tool. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to them that they were given a desirable tool with which the world was created, as it says, "For I have given you a good teaching, My Torah. Do not forsake it."

The mishnah lists three praises: For Man, that he was created in G-d's Image; for Yisrael, that they are called Children of G-d; and, once again, for Yisrael, that they were given a precious article, namely the Torah.

It could be said that these praises are cited in ascending order.

The first praise applies to all of humanity, for it says, regarding the creation of Adam HaRishon (Br. 1:26): **ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא** -- *And Elokim created Man in His image, in Elokim's Image did He create him*. Given that all of humanity is descendant from Adam HaRishon, we can say that all of mankind is **בצלם אלקים**, in Elokim's Image.

Yisrael, however, is of higher status. For, they are not only **בצלם אלקים**, but also **בנים למקום**, *children to Hashem*, as indicated both in the Torah **אתם בנים אתם** (**ליקוק אלהיכם**) and in our mishnah.

Our mishnah goes even further. It describes an even higher level, that Yisrael are more than **בנים**, but **חביבין**, *beloved*. Yisrael are children to whom Hashem has given a precious gift, namely the Holy Torah.

Because only they are both **בצלם אלקים** and **בנים למקום**, it is only Yisrael that is forbidden to wound or bald themselves (as mourning for their dead). The Torah is specific that the reason is Yisrael's being *children of Hashem*: **למת: בנים אתם ליקוק אלהיכם לא תתגדדו ולא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם** - *You are children to Hashem your G-d: Do not cut yourselves nor make yourselves bald between your eyes, for the dead*. (Devarim 14:1).

I would suggest that the reasoning here is that when one afflicts the son of a king, it is as if he has afflicted the king himself.

I would suggest as well that similar reasoning applies to the Torah prohibitions listed immediately after the verse above, which revolve around forbidden foods and begin with **לא תאכל כל תועבה**: *Though shalt not eat any disgusting thing* (Devarim 14:3).

It is the nature of every father that he would not want his children to eat that which is physically or spiritually harmful. So too with the Kaddosh Baruch Hu. Because we are His *banim*, we are told here to not eat that which is abominable or disgusting to the soul and the spirit. The Sefer HaChinnuch (amongst others) writes in various places that these foods are incompatible with our constitution and bound to cause us both physical and spiritual harm. It was his opinion that many of the animals forbidden to us are of particularly cruel nature and by eating them, we would naturally acquire traits that are contrary to what Yisrael is supposed to be.

This brings us to the third idea mentioned by the teacher of our mishnah, that we are recipients of Torah. Why is this significant or relevant to the approach I

am taking with this mishnah? I believe it is telling us that, because we are *banim* and *b'tzelem Elokim*, we are therefore **obligated** to guard ourselves (meaning our *tzelem Elokim*) from the physical and and spiritual harm of forbidden foods.

So particular was the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* was with the honor of his *banim*, that He went so far as to forbid the consumption of blood, crawling things, and all other things that contaminate the body.

A mishnah in Massechet Makkot tells us of the reward for performing Mitzvot: “If, when it comes to the mitzvah of not consuming blood, one receives reward despite its anyway being personally repulsive, how much more so (should one receive reward), when it comes to theft and sexual impropriety, which we actually crave and lust for.”

The following mishnah reads רבי חנניה בן עקשיא אומר רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא ליכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות שנאמר (ישעיה מ"ב) ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר. *Rabbi Chananya ben Akashia says; “The Kaddosh Baruch Hu wanted to bring merit to Yisrael. Therefore, He gave them Torah and Mitzvoth. .*

This mishnah is quoted in the gemara to Massechet Makkot 23b. There, the commentator known as the Rivaan (whose comments are printed in Rashi's name) remarks that there was no real need for the Torah's inclusion of so many prohibitions against consumption of things that are in any event repugnant other than to grant reward to those who separate from them (which they would be doing anyway).

A similar thought is brought in the *sefer Ma'alot HaMiddot*. It asks, “How are the mitzvot of the Torah different from that which is commanded by an ordinary king? The kings of the nations issue decrees, even ones that are harsh and extraordinarily demanding, yet he who fulfills them receives nothing as reward and he who violates them is executed. The mitzvot of the Jews, in contrast, were given by G-d for the Jews' benefit, that they should neither afflict nor wound themselves. Yet, there is reward.



הַכֹּל צָפוּי וְהַרְשׁוּת נְתוּנָה וּבְטוֹב הָעוֹלָם
 נִדוּן. וְהַכֹּל לְפִי רַב הַמַּעֲשָׂה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת גִּטּוֹ

*Everything is foreseen and freedom is granted.
 The world is judged with goodness. And
 everything depends on an abundance of deeds.*

“All is foreseen,” says our mishnah. Devarim 29:28 tells us that **הַנְּסִתֶּרֶת לִיקוֹק** - *The hidden re for Hashem, our God, but the revealed are for us and our children forever, to carry out the words of this Torah.*

Note the phrase **לִיקוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגִלַת לָנוּ** - the first letters of these four words could be rearranged to form the pattern “אלול,” Elul.

And why would **אלול** be pertinent within this verse? It is because the verse is understood to refer to *teshuvah*. But why the juxtaposition of the **הַנְּסִתֶּרֶת** and **וְהַנְּגִלַת**? It is because, when it comes to sins committed in public, people are generally quick to regret them. The fact that others know about the sin is often a strong motivator to *teshuvah*. Sins done in private, however, are easily forgotten about by the sinner. “No one saw me,” he tells himself.

That is the meaning, then, of **לִיקוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגִלַת לָנוּ וְלִבְנֵינוּ**. The “hidden” sins might very well be hidden from man, but they are not hidden from G-d. Just as one wishes to rid himself of the sins that are known to his “sons” (and therefore uppermost in his mind), one is obligated to do *teshuvah* from that which he prefers to forget, namely that which he thought was “hidden” -- but in truth is not, for it is known to Hashem.

The above verse appears in the *parasha* known as *Nitzavim*. It begins (Devarim 29:9) **אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְכֶם לְפָנַי יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** - *You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God.* The Rabbis of the Zohar tell us that the *today* referred to here is Rosh Hashana.

The verse continues **רֹאשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבִיכֶם וְזָקֵנֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל** - *the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers -- all the men of Israel.* The Midrash Tanchuma comments on the words **רֹאשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבִיכֶם**, *the heads of your tribes, your elders.* “Although I have appointed you ‘heads,’ ‘elders,’ and ‘officers,’ all are equal before Me, as [the continuation of the verse says] *all the men of Israel.*”

The meaning of this is that whenever a Jew returns to G-d in *teshuva*, he becomes equal in Hashem's eyes to any other Jew. Status does not matter. The wood chopper and the tribal head are one and the same, if both are free of sin.

That is why the verse says, *You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God*. If we are to say that the "today" refers to Rosh Hashana, like the Zohar, then we can say that on Rosh Hashana *all of you* can stand before Hashem, with no reason for embarrassment. For, all of you have done *teshuva*.

A similar thought is expressed in Sotah 3a: **אדם עובר עבירה בסתר והקב"ה מכריז עליו בגלוי** - *A person commits a transgression in private, but Hashem proclaims about him in public*. The context there is the wife suspected of having secreted herself with a man other than her husband. The gemara says that Hashem makes this known to the husband, who, upon hearing the report, is to warn her in the presence of two witnesses. This is tantamount to the matter's becoming "public."

In our times, people close themselves off at home to watch television and movies. And what do they see? Things that are unimaginable! Murderous thugs preying upon innocent citizens, terrorists hijacking airplanes and killing the passengers, etc, etc. And what is our reaction? We're entertained!

Now, what has come of these "harmless" fantasies? They have become our reality! An evil terrorist, who spent his life studying and teaching the ways of terror, sends other terrorists to grab planes and crash them into the Twin Towers. Thousands die. When in world history did we ever hear of such a thing? Yechezkel's prophecy "*And I will send a fire against Magog and against those who dwell confidently in the islands, and they will know that I am Hashem*" is fulfilled!

What connection do I see between this event and Yechezkel's prophecy? People were wasting their time with all manners of foolishness, immersing themselves in all kinds of action movies. And what occurred? The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* made their fantasy adventure movies come true! A fearful sight! Planes being snatched. Great buildings crashing to the ground in smoke and flames!

Whoever witnessed this became filled with fright!

And why did this terrible thing occur? For one reason: That people should know that they should find no pleasure in being spectators to the action movies that grab popular attention. Precious time is wasted on this foolishness. How many mitzvot, how many tefillot could have been performed instead! How

much Torah could have been learned during this time? Those moments, those hours are wasted, gone. They will never be back!

We can now return to our mishnah.

הכל צפוי - *All is foreseen*. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* is fully aware of what is going on in our private rooms. **והרשות נתונה** - *and freedom of choice is granted*. We are free to choose between good and bad. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will exact punishment from those who sin. He distinguishes between good and evil. The world is judged for good and judgement is based upon a majority of one's deeds.

On that day, Sept 11, hundreds of religious Jews were saved from that great tragedy. Each had a different story. This one had a Brit Milah that morning. Many were late to work because of the extra tefillot of Selichot. One *peleh*, one amazing tale after another. The Divine Providence was evident to one and all.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה

The ruler of Marakesh was in terrible distress: His only son, who was destined to succeed his father, had not yet fathered a child of his own. Not that the opportunity was not there for him: He had multiple wives.

In desperation, the ruler sought out Rav Shlomo Pinto, pleading that the tzaddik bless his son and pray that he merit offspring. Just to add a bit of motivation to the matter, the evil ruler added that should it occur that he not see a grandson within the year, the Jews will suffer the consequences. Not only will he issue a series of harsh decrees against those Jews who are currently under his control, but he will ask those who rule the Jews of other districts to do the same.

Rabbi Shlomo said that he needed some time. A week.

When the week had ended, Rabbi Shlomo entered the ruler's palace to tell him that it would be possible for him to pray that the son have a son of his own. There was, however, one catch: On the day that this child would be born, the father (meaning the ruler's son) would die.

"And don't think that any threats you'll make to me will change this," said Rabbi Shlomo. "Your threats do not scare me," he said. "We have our own savior. He is the King of kings. And he will save us, just as He has saved our people countless times in the past from those like yourself."

“Just pray that he has a son,” said the ruler, “and afterwards we’ll see what can be done to cancel the decree that the father will die.”

Rabbi Shlomo told him that matters were not as simple as he might think and gave a final warning about the consequence of the son having his own son. The ruler was stubborn. With a wave of the hand, he sent Rabbi Shlomo away.

Rabbi Shlomo returned home to pray that the only son will father a son.

One month later, one of the son’s wives let him know that she was pregnant.

The ruler, seeing that Rabbi Shlomo’s prayer was accomplishing what he said it would, now began to think quite seriously about the second part of the Rabbi’s prediction.

Quickly, he summoned the Rabbi Shlomo to his palace. He demanded that he now pray that the heavens cancel the decree that his son die.

“I already told you,” said Rabbi Shlomo. “There is nothing I can do. You pressured me to pray that your son have a child, even though it was not within his merit. Not only that, but you added all kinds of threats to the Jewish community. Therefore, this child’s birth will come at the price of another life. A soul will come down. But, another will have to take its place.”

“It is a Divine decree. Nothing I can do will change it.”

Needless to say, the threats and the attempts at intimidation were not long in coming. But, it was to no avail. Rabbi Shlomo stood his ground.

Not only that, but he told the ruler that if he even tries to harm a single Jew, G-d Himself will avenge the act.

All doubt had now been erased. The ruler knew that the second part of the decree would flow from the first.

He therefore took steps to protect the life of his only son: He began to harass his daughter-in-law. The idea was that she would miscarry.

The wife was threatened, pressured, and abused until, at last, she miscarried. And that is how the ruler saved the life of his only son.

* * *

The story I have just related was never “far from the mouth” of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto. He frequently told it to the childless couples who came to him, begging that he entreat the Heavens that they finally have a child.

“Sometimes, there is a Heavenly price to pay,” he would say. “One soul comes down and that sometimes means that another must take its place. It might be the father; it might be the mother.”

“I therefore believe that it is often best to not “storm” the Heavens and that, most certainly, one should never question the decisions made up Above. Whatever He decides, it is for the good.”



הוא הִיה אֹמֵר הַכֹּל נָתַן בְּעֶרְבוֹן וּמִצֻּדָה
 פְּרוּסָה עַל כָּל הַחַיִּים. הַחֲנוּת פְּתוּחָה וְהַחֲנוּנִי
 מִקִּיף וְהַפְּנִקֵּס פְּתוּחַ וְהַיָּד כּוֹתֶבֶת וְכָל הַרוֹצֶה
 לְלוֹוֹת יָבֹא וְיִלְוֶה וְהַגְּבָאִים מְחֹזְרִים תְּדִיר בְּכָל
 יוֹם וְנִפְרָעִין מִן הָאָדָם מִדַּעְתּוֹ וְשֵׁלָא מִדַּעְתּוֹ וַיֵּשׁ
 לָהֶם עַל מַה שֵּׁיִסְמוּכוּ וְהַדִּין דִּין אֲמַת וְהַכֹּל
 מִתְקַן לְסַעוּדָה:
 משנה אבות ג:טז

He used to say: Everything is given on collateral, and there is a net cast over all who live. The store is open, and the storekeeper is selling on credit, and the ledger is open, and the hand is writing. All those who want to borrow may come and borrow, and the collectors always make their rounds every day. And they collect from man whether with his knowledge or without his knowledge, and they have proof to rely on. And the judgment is just, and everything is prepared for the meal.

When the mishnah says that *Everything is placed in a pledge*, what does it mean? What is this pledge?

I thought I would answer this question homiletically.

The collection known as Agadath Bereishit (parashat Noach) says that the tzaddikim liken themselves to *geirim*, meaning itinerants, “foreigners.” Like those who lack the security of being part of a strong community and homeland, wandering from town to town, they depend completely upon the good will of others. The wanderer is constantly at someone else’s table, as a beggar. He knows that he has no “right” to demand things.

So, too, the tzaddikim.

In their case, however, that “someone else,” the One upon whom they feel completely dependant, is the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

And, like the wanderer, they are quick to acknowledge their dependency and to express their gratitude. For, both know that nothing is simply “coming to them.”

This could be compared to the situation of an inn. All who pass by are welcome to rent a room and stay their as long as they wish, as long as they pay their bill. Although they are free to sleep, eat, relax, and use their room in privacy, they know that they are not its owner. They know that it is not theirs.

They know that, were they to mistreat the property in any fashion, the hotel management would have them thrown out.

So, too, with the *olam hazeh*, with our physical world. We descend to live upon it, as guests, for a relatively short period of time. Hashem provides all types of natural resources for this “guest.” For instance, there are trees. All are placed here for our benefit and use. Not only are they placed here, but the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* placed within our minds the wisdom of how to use them. For instance, we are given the knowledge to build beautiful houses that bring us great pleasure.

However, man should not consider himself the “owner.”

He does have permission to use these things, but ultimate ownership remains with the Creator. Should Man become confused about this, thinking that the natural world is his for the taking, to do with as he pleases -- even to destroy it -- then, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will throw him out.

This, in my opinion, was the error of the generation of the flood.

They thought that the world was theirs, to do with as they wished. As far as they were concerned, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* was not a factor. Nor did they care about anyone else’s possessions. For, it says about them (Br. 6:11), **כִּי מְלָאָה הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס**, that the world became full of violent theft.

The generation that built the tower of Bavel and the one that existed in time of Enosh were, in my opinion, afflicted with this same flawed thinking. They, just like the generation of the flood, thought that the world lacked an “owner” -- and took it upon themselves to fill that (imagined) void. They worshipped statues of their own creation and bowed to stars and constellations.

And how did the actual ‘*Ba’al Habayit*,’ the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, react to all this? Upon the generation of the flood, He brought a deluge. The perpetrators of Tower Bavel were scattered throughout the world. The generation of Enosh, as that of the deluge, was punished through flood.

In my opinion, the reason Noach and family were allowed to survive the flood was because Noach, unlike all others of that time, did not view himself as “ba’al habayit.” Only *he* didn’t see himself as a permanent fixture, rather than a mere visitor, in the *olam hazeh*. Rather, he, like those tzaddikim mentioned in Aggadath Bereishit, saw himself as a *ger*, an itinerant, a wanderer, a guest privileged to spend a limited amount of time at the “inn.”

I believe that the Chumash hints at this idea. **אלה תולדת נח נח** says the *pasuk*. The word “Noach” appears twice in succession. Why? Allow me to suggest one possible reason.

A known principle in talmudic interpretation, appearing for instance in Bava Kamma 45b, is **אין ריבוי אחר ריבוי אלא למעט** -- The function of an amplification after an amplification is only to limit. This means that amplifications of a law that are followed by a further amplification are not to be understood in their plain sense (as amplifications), but as limitations. Although the talmud applies this principle specifically to *amplifications* that follow *amplifications*, I would like to take the liberty of using it to explain the significance of two identical *words* that follow one another. In our case, the two words are **נח נח**.

The word **נח** is the root of the word **מנוחה**, which, of course, means “rest.” In line with the interpretation I suggested above, that the generation of the flood was wiped out because they failed to acknowledge Hashem’s “ownership” of the world, I would like to suggest that the double usage **נח נח** hints to this.

What was so special about **נח**? That he did not allow himself **מנוחה**. What I mean is that he never felt a sense of entitlement, that is, entitlement to dwell in this world **במנוחה**. Rather, as I said earlier, he, like those tzaddikim mentioned in Aggadath Bereishit, saw himself as a *ger*, an itinerant, a wanderer, a guest privileged to spend a limited amount of time at the “inn.” (What I have now added to the discussion is an allusion to this concept, directly from the Torah verse that introduces the story of **נח**.)

Had those of Noach’s generation acknowledged that the meal placed in front of them was not really theirs, had they acknowledged that the world had an owner, had they acknowledged that he who buys on credit must, in the end, pay back the loan to the storekeeper, then their fate would have been entirely different. They would never have been uprooted from the world.

The Gemara Sanhedrin 108a says **דור המבול לא נתגאו אלא בשביל טובה שהשפיע להם הקדוש ברוך הוא**, that the generation of the flood filled themselves with

pride only because of the good that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* did for them. That is, they did not acknowledge the source of all this good.

However, the “creditor” finally decided that he could no longer extend “credit.” And, He was now coming to collect His debt. And they now had to pay, against their will.

The same happened with the generation of Enosh and that which built the tower of Bavel.

But then Avraham Avinu appeared. And he came to the realization that there is, in fact, One Who runs the world:

Rabbi Yitzhak said let me give you an example: It is like someone who goes from place to place and happens to see a castle that is all aflame. He will say, “It seems that this place must not have someone who is in charge!”

The owner looks at him and says, “I’m the owner here!”

So it was with Avraham Avinu. He pondered: “Does this world not have someone who is in charge?”

The Kaddosh Baruch Hu looked at him and said, “I am the owner of this world.”

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And, he proclaimed it aloud, so that all would learn from his example:

This teaches us that Avraham Avinu caused all who passed his way to call out the Name of the Kaddosh Baruch Hu.

How did he do it? After they would eat and drink, the people who rise up to bless Avraham.

Avraham would then ask, “You thought that it was my food that you were eating? No; it was from the Master of the world!”

“Thank, praise, and bless ‘the One Who spoke and caused the world to come into being!’”

Sotah 10b



רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר אם אין תורה
 אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה. אם
 אין חכמה אין יראה. אם אין יראה אין חכמה.
 אם אין בינה אין דעת. אם אין דעת אין בינה.
 אם אין קמח אין תורה. אם אין תורה אין
 קמח. הוא היה אומר כל שחכמתו מרבה
 ממעשיו למה הוא דומה לאילן שענפיו מרבין
 ושרשיו מעטין והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על
 פניו שנאמר (ירמיה יז) והיה כערער בערבה
 ולא יראה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ
 מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמעשיו מרבין
 מחכמתו למה הוא דומה לאילן שענפיו מעטין
 ושרשיו מרבין שאפלו כל הרוחות שבעולם
 באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו
 שנאמר (שם) והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל
 ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חם והיה עלהו
 רענן ובשנת בצרת לא ידאג ולא ימיש מעשות
 פרי:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה יז

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says: If there is no Torah, there is no derech erez; if there is no derech erez, there is no Torah. If there is no wisdom, there is no fear; if there is no fear, there is no wisdom. If there is no knowledge, there is no understanding; if there is no understanding, there is no knowledge. If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour. He used to say: One whose wisdom is greater than his actions, to what is he compared? To a

tree with many branches and few roots, and the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down. As it says: “He will be like a lone tree in the desert, and will not see when goodness comes. It dwells in parched lands, in the wilderness, in a salty, uninhabited land.”

One whose actions are greater than his wisdom, to what is he compared? To a tree with few branches and many roots. Even if all the winds in the world come and blow, they will not move it from its place. As it says: “He will be like a tree planted near water, which spreads out its roots along a brook and does not see when heat comes. Its foliage is always fresh; it will not worry in a year of drought and will not stop producing fruit.”

The mishnah says **אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה** (translated as “common decency”), there’s no Torah. The concept of **דרך ארץ** is that one should use common decency when interacting with those around him, whether in social relationships or business ones. One who acts otherwise is unworthy (and bound to be incapable) of learning Torah.

Not only that, but he who externally represents Torah but does not demonstrate good character, disgraces the Torah; his learning causes it no honor. The reaction of those who witness his conduct is, “Woe to his teacher who taught him Torah.” We see this from the gemara in Yoma 86a:

מי שקורא ושונה ומשמש תלמידי חכמים ואין משאו ומתנו באמונה, ואין דבורו בנחת עם הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו - אוי לו לפלוני שלמד תורה, אוי לו לאביו שלמדו תורה, אוי לו לרבו שלמדו תורה, פלוני שלמד תורה - ראו כמה מקולקלין מעשיו וכמה מכוערין דרכיו!

As to one who learns, teaches, and serves Talmidei chachamim, but whose financial dealings are not with integrity and whose social interactions are not with pleasantness, what do people say regarding him? “Woe to Ploni, that he learned Torah at all, woe to his father

who taught Torah to him, woe to his teacher who taught him Torah. Ploni, who has learned Torah -- behold how corrupt are his deeds and how ugly are his ways!"

The Midrash halacha to Sefer Shemot, the Mechilta, discussing Shemot 19:2, *ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר*, and *Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain*, points out that the hebrew word used here for “encamped” is *ויחן*, which is the singular form of the noun. Given that the subject is “Yisrael,” which constitutes a large group, we might have expected its verb to reflect that, and be in plural form.

ויחן שם ישראל. כל מקום שהוא אומר ויסעו ויחנו, נוסעים במחלוקת וחונים במחלוקת, אבל כאן השוו כולם לב אחד, לכך נאמ' ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר. מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל יתרו - מסכתא דבחדש פרשה א

And Yisrael encamped there - Wherever it says “. . . and they travelled and encamped,” they travelled with strife and encamped with strife. Here, however, all were equal; they were of one heart. That is why the verb is written in singular form, “. . . and Yisrael encamped (sing. form) opposite the mountain.”

It seems clear from their words that Yisrael were not worthy of receiving the Torah until they united, in absolute solidarity, as a nation of one heart.

This was no mere pre-condition for one generation’s accepting the Torah at a certain point in history, but applies to all subsequent generations as well. In other words, the pre-condition for *anyone’s* accepting the yoke of Torah in *any* generation, and the pre-condition for success in Torah learning in *every* generation is that the individual accept upon himself (and fulfill) the mitzvah of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*, *to love one’s fellow as oneself* (Vayikra 19:18).

A midrash (Vayikra Rabba 9:3) says that twenty-six generations before the giving of Torah, *derech erez* had already been implemented.

Let me illustrate this: Imagine a building that is beautiful both inside and out. This is what the Torah is like. The foundation of this “building” is *derech erez*, good character and pleasant ways. Should these be lacking, or were they to be pulled away, the building would topple. Had they not been layed at the outset -- strong, firm, and solid -- there would have been no point in even trying to place the building there.

No matter how beautiful the structure, no matter how many frills and how much glitter, and no matter how luxurious its rooms, it would not stand for even for a moment without its foundation.

It is therefore essential that Torah be preceded by *derech erez*. Otherwise, no matter how much Torah one has learned, it will never last; in the end, it won't amount to anything at all.

Another illustration: Torah may be compared to water. And *derech erez* could be compared to its vessel. Should there be even one small crack, the water will drain away. No matter how much water one puts in, and no matter how often, the cracked vessel will never be full.

And, before one begins to even consider using one particular vessel for storing one's water, he will make certain to ascertain that it is solid and without holes. So, too, with Torah. If one learns Torah and tried to store it in a "vessel" tainted by flawed character, his Torah will just ebb away -- through the opening created by his character flaw.

Our Rabbis tell us that twenty-four thousand talmidim of Rabbi Akiva all died at one period in time. The reason given in the gemara is that, despite having learned tremendous amounts of Torah, they were not respectful to one another.

I was once told a story regarding a student from a certain yeshiva who was arrested and thrown in jail one day. Late that evening, the yeshiva's *mashgiach*, its spiritual supervisor, went to the yeshiva dormitory and found the other students fast asleep.

In pain, he began to shout at them, "One of you is sitting in jail and the rest of you, his friends, are sleeping at a time like that? It would be better to close down the yeshiva than to see such things!"

This *mashgiach* was absolutely beside himself: "How could one student rest comfortably while his fellow student suffers?"

To my mind, this is what is meant by **דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה**.



רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן חִסְמָא אוֹמֵר קִינִין וּפְתָחִי
 נִדָּה הֵן הֵן גּוֹפֵי הַלְכוֹת תְּקוּפוֹת וְגַמְטְרִיאוֹת
 פְּרָפְרָאוֹת לַחֲכָמָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ג' מִשְׁנֵה יח

Rabbi Elazar (ben) Chisma says: “Nests” and the “beginnings of niddah” are the essential body of halachah. Astronomy and gematrios (study of the numerical values of the letters) are ancillaries to wisdom.

The mishnah says that the laws of *kinim* and that of menstrual periods are the *gufei halachot*, that is, the “bodies” of halacha. In a simple sense, this could mean that the laws of family purity are the foundation of not just the Jewish home, but of the entire Torah. The mishnah calls these laws, פתחי נדה, literally “openings.” This is because they open the way to all other mitzvot.

Without the practice of these laws, there would be nothing.

These laws help guard the Jewish home. Couples who do not keep them are left unprotected from tragedy, no matter how many other mitzvot they do.

The gemara in Massechet Shabbat 13a tells the story of a certain righteous man, who learned and taught Torah and served many talmidei chachamim as well. Yet, he died young. His wife could not fathom why her husband had been taken away.

She went from one Rabbi to another, showing his tefillin and asking them, “It is written in the Torah; *For this is your life and the length of your days*. My husband, who learned much mishnah, studied much scripture, and spent much time serving Torah scholars, why did he die at such a young age?”

None of the Rabbis would answer her, until she found one Rabbi who would.

Upon asking her about the details of their private life together and discovering that her husband had not been careful in one aspect of family purity, the Rabbi felt that he had the answer to her question.

There are two different understandings of the rabbi’s words here. One version has, “It was because your husband did not show respect towards the Torah, for the Torah says *You shall not approach a woman during her time of unclean separation*.” The other version has, “Blessed is the Holy One, who shows no favor, even to those who learn His Torah.”

The second reading of this gemara particularly demonstrates that these laws are the foundation of Torah. We know as well that their observance leads to the establishment of Sabbath-observing and kosher homes.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

One time, when the Rav was in Mexico, a certain Rabbanit sent two couples to see him. They had not yet merited to bear children and were there to receive the Rav's blessing.

Immediately, the Rabbi told them: "Are you prepared to accept the laws of family purity upon yourselves? If so, you will both see children within the next year."

Only the first couple accepted the challenge.

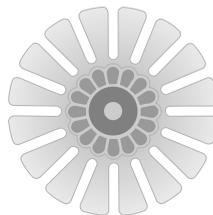
By the end of the next year, that couple had a baby and the second was still childless.

The second woman, upon seeing the blessing that had been brought to the first, decided that she, too, would begin keeping the laws of family purity.

One year later, just as the Rabbi promised, she was finally a mother.

When the Rabbi returned to Mexico some time later, both women came to see him, infants in lap. Needless to say, the Rabbi was absolutely overjoyed.

"Just look at the power of Torah and mitzvot!" he exclaimed. "When one fulfills them, they are an elixir of life! Lack of faith, lack of trust in G-d, and lack of dedication to Torah, however, can result in much sorrow. When one decides to accept the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, however, there will be Divine help that he merit the good.



Chapter Four

בן זומא
אומר איזהו רזכם
הלומד
מכל אדם
שנאמר

מכל מלמדי השכלתי
כי עדותיך שיחה לי

איזהו גבור
הכובש
את יצרו שנאמר

טוב ארך אפים

מגבור ומשל ברוחו
מלכד עיר **איזהו**

עשיר השמח בחלקו
שנאמר

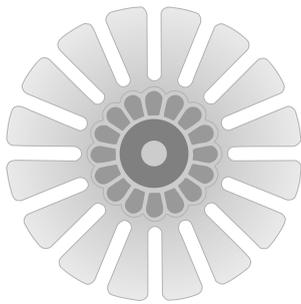
יגיע כפיו כי תאכל
אשריך וטוב לך

אשריך
בעולם הזה
וטוב לך

לעולם הבא
איזהו מכבד המכבד

את הבריות
שנאמר

כי מכבדי אכבד
ובזי יקלו



בן זומא אומר איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם
 שְׁנֵאמַר (תהלים קיט) מִכָּל מְלַמְדֵי הַשְּׂפִלְתִּי כִּי
 עָדוֹתֶיךָ שִׁיחָה לִּי. אִיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ
 שְׁנֵאמַר (משלי טז) טוֹב אֶרְךָ אַפִּים מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשָּׁל
 בְּרוּחוֹ מִלְכָּד עִיר. אִיזְהוּ עֲשִׂיר הַשְּׂמַח בְּחֻלְקוֹ
 שְׁנֵאמַר (תהלים קכח) יִגִּיעַ כְּפִיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל
 אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ. אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. וְטוֹב לָךְ
 לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. אִיזְהוּ מְכַבֵּד הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת
 שְׁנֵאמַר (שמואל א ב) כִּי מְכַבְּדֵי אֲכַבֵּד וּבֹזֵי
 יִקְלוּ:

משנה אבות ד:א

Ben Zoma says: Who is wise? One who learns from every person, as it says, "From all my teachers I became wise."

Who is mighty? One who conquers his evil inclination, as it says, "He who is slow to anger is better than a strong man, and the master of his passions is better than the conqueror of a city."

Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot, as it says, "When you eat the labor of your hands, you are fortunate and it is well with you." You are fortunate in this world, and it will be well with you in the World to Come.

Who is honored? One who honors others, as it says, "For I will honor those who honor Me, and those who scorn Me will be degraded."

Ben Zoma depicts verbally the type of person that epitomizes four traits: Wisdom, strength, wealth, and honor. He does this by asking, "Who is wise . . . Who is strong . . . Who is rich . . . Who is honorable?" and then answers the questions one by one.

In order to best explain this mishnah, I would like to first quote from a beautiful midrash in Shir HaShirim Rabba that expands upon the verse in Melachim I 3,5: **בגבעון נראה יקוק אל שלמה בחלום הלילה ויאמר אלהים שאל מהאתן לך:** *In Gibeon Hashem appeared to Shlomo in a dream of the night. G-d said to him, "Request what I should give to you."*

The midrash's question is, when confronted with Hashem's offer, "*Request what I should give to you,*" what, in fact, should Shlomo ask for?

The midrash says,

"If I ask for silver, gold, precious stones, and pearls, He will give me. However, I will ask for wisdom (for, it includes everything)."

This, in fact, what he what he requested (in verse 9) **ונתת לעבדך לב שמע**, *May You grant Your servant an understanding heart.*

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* said to Shlomo: "You have asked for yourself wisdom, not wealth, property, property, or the lives of your enemies. By your life, I grant you wisdom and knowledge. You will receive wealth and property as well." Immediately, Shlomo awoke -- and it was a dream.

One may wonder: How is it that, by granting wisdom and knowledge, The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* was granting wealth and property as well? Doesn't Shlomo HaMelech himself say (Kohelet 9:11), **לא לחכמים לחם**, *bread does not follow the wise?*

(Now, I know that Melachim I 3:13 specifically says that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* added to the blessing for chachma a blessing for wealth. **אשר לא שאלת** **נתתי לך גם עשר גם כבוד וגם**. This indicates that wealth is *not* an inevitable outgrowth of becoming wise, for if so, it would not have been necessary to add another blessing. The wealth would therefore be due to the Divine blessing for wealth, not the one for chachma. However, I am exploring this subject in the spirit of "derash." and within the spirit of the midrash, which has Shlomo saying that wealth "includes everything.")

I have another question: Was he limited in what he could ask for? Are there not other things that to be asked for, other than wisdom and wealth -- Righteous children and military success, for instance? And, why exactly did he prefer wisdom over all else?

In answer to these questions, my belief is that Shlomo was not asking for wisdom in its most commonly understood sense. Rather, he was seeking the wisdom known as “Fear of Heaven.” This category is expressed in Iyov 28:28, **הן יראת אדני היא חכמה וסור מרע בינה**; *Behold, the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and refraining from evil is understanding.* It is expressed as well in Tehillim 111:10. **ראשית חכמה יראת יקוק**. *The beginning of wisdom is fear of heaven.* (This verse speaks only of the *beginning* of wisdom. In other words, it speaks of what a person needs to do *as a precursor* to studying wisdom. This would seem to mean that it is not talking about wisdom *itself*. However, my purpose is to explain things in the spirit of derash, which means that I am using “poetic license.”)

Shlomo HaMelech was thinking that once he had Fear of Heaven, he would no longer pursue wealth, power, and military conquest. Rather, all his thoughts would be of Hashem alone.

In that way, he would become a truly wealthy man. For, he would be (just as in our mishnah) “happy with his portion.” and he will be a *gibor* (For it says: “Who is a *gibor*? He who overpowers his inclination). It’s my belief that the fear Shlomo Hamelech gained would be the key to overpowering the inclination.

In addition, just as in our mishnah, he would be “honored,” in that the populace would honor him due to his conducting himself as a *yoreh shamayim*.

I would like to add an additional point, based upon Daniel 2:21 **יהב חכמתא להב חכמינ** - *He gives knowledge to the wise.* This verse is saying that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* gives wisdom to those who are **לב חכמי**, *wise of heart*. I believe that this means that He does this in order to that they know how to use their *chachma*. And this means, with *yirat Shamayim*.

What I mean is that in order for one to know how to use their *chachma*, an additional *chachma* is required -- and that is the *chachma* of *yirat Shamayim*. It was this *chachma* that Shlomo Hamelech was seeking. Shlomo understood that once he had this type of *chachma*, then all other *chachma* would follow. For, he would then know how to best use *chachma* and would only use it for *avodath Hashem*.

This is why Shlomo Hamelech ended Sefer Kohelet with **דבר הכל נשמע את נשמו** **האלקים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם**: *The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man’s whole duty* (Kohelet 12:13).

When Shlomo Hamelech said (Kohelet 9:11), **לא לחכמים לחם**, *bread does not follow the wise*, I believe that he referred to those **חכמים** whose *chachma* does not include the *chachma* of *yirah* and who do not use their *chachma* for the sake of Heaven. Those **חכמים** who do know how to properly use their *chachma* and put their *yirah* before their *chachma*, however, do not lack bread. Rather, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* even gives them wealth, just as He did to Shlomo Hamelech.

A gemara in Nedarim (41a) sums this up: “No one is truly destitute other than he who lacks understanding. They said in Eretz Yisrael ‘He who has understanding within him, has everything within him. He who does not have wisdom within him, what does he have within him?’”

We see that through *yirat Shamayim*, one acquires all the characteristics listed in our mishnah.

Another distinguishing quality of the *chacham* is that he learns from one and all, as it says in our mishnah, **איוהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם**. He does not think, “What could someone like myself possibly learn from a student so insignificant as this one? Haven’t I learned so much more than he has?”

Rather, he conquers his inclination and looks to learn even from those of lower standing. This is because he is, as in the words of our mishnah, **הכובש את יצרו**. Our *chacham* may also be described as **השמח בחלקו**, as in the words of our mishnah. However, he is only **השמח בחלקו** as it applies to matters of worldly goods. When it comes to matters of Torah, however, he is so much not **השמח בחלקו** that he is prepared to learn from just about anyone. In other words, **הלומד מכל אדם**.

David Hamelech said **מכל מלמדי השכלתי**, *All my teachers have enlightened me*, which is quoted in our mishnah. This trait of David is described in Berachot 4a. “All that I do, I first consult with Mefiboshet, my Rabbi. I say to him, “Mefiboshet, my Rabbi! Did I judge correctly? Was I correct in finding this party guilty and in setting the proper payment? Did I do well in finding this one innocent? Was I correct in finding this to be *tahor*? Did I do well in finding this was *tameh*? And I was never embarrassed”

This is the way of Gedolei Yisrael, our great Rabbis.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו

Who is happy? He who is satisfied with his lot.

Rabbi Yishaya Pinto, in the introduction to his sefer *Kesef Tzaruf*, a commentary on *Mishlei* (the Book of Proverbs), writes “Hashem had pity upon me, and I was therefore able to bring treasures of silver to the present *sefer*.” He is alluding to the sefer’s title, *Kesef Tzaruf*, which means “Refined Silver.”

He continues, “The silver I brought is only from that which is most chosen, and the sefer’s name is *Kesef Tzaruf*, ‘Refined Silver,’ because I refined it just as a silversmith refines silver. I tested it as government officials check gold.”

He then continues poetically, with an allusion between the words **כסף** and **נכספה**, from a verse in *Tehillim* (84:3) followed by a series of allusions to other verses: “**נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי** , *My soul yearns, indeed it pines to serve* (Habakuk 1:12) **יקוק אלהי קדשי** , *O Hashem, my G-d, my Holy One all the days* (Yonah 4:2) **היותי על אדמתי** *I will be on my earth until I die.*”

This was the type of tefillah that a tzaddik and *kaddosh* like Rabbi Yishaya Pinto would think of. He never asked that Hashem give him silver and riches.

Rather, all he wanted was the opportunity to serve Hashem all the day of his life. And that is the meaning of real wealth and is the true **כסף**.

It is interesting to note that, excepting the one known as *Me’or Eynayim*, all his sefarim used some variation of **כסף** in their titles.



בְּן עֲזַאי אוֹמֵר הֵי רָץ לְמִצְוָה קְלָה
 (כְּבַחְמוּרָה) וּבֹרַח מִן הָעֲבֵרָה. שְׂמִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת
 מִצְוָה וְעֲבֵרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבֵרָה. שְׂשֹׁכֵר מִצְוָה
 מִצְוָה. וְשֹׁכֵר עֲבֵרָה עֲבֵרָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת דָּב

Ben Azai says: Run to do a minor mitzvah and flee from sin. For one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin. For the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the outcome of a sin is another sin.

הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה

The mishnah says that one should run to pursue a relatively “minor” mitzvah just as one would a relatively “weighty” one. I wonder: What is this “running” all about? Why use the word רץ?

I believe that the Tanna is coming to teach us something absolutely fundamental in terms of how mitzvot should properly be done -- and that is that they must be done with joy and desire, not with any kind of laziness or indolence.

This is evident from Tehillim (100:2) - *עבדו את יקוק בשמחה באו לפניו ברננה*; *Serve Hashem with simcha; appear before him with joyful song*. David Hamelech is teaching us that *avodath Hashem* must be accompanied by joy.

When their *avodath Hashem* is not accompanied by this requisite joy, tragedy befalls the Jewish people. It can be said that we see this from the Torah itself (Devarim 28:45-47):

All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you will not have hearkened to Hashem, your God, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you. They will be a sign and a wonder, in you and your offspring, forever, because you did not serve Hashem, your God, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant. (Devarim 28:45-47)

Rabbeinu Bah'ya (13th century Torah commentator) explains that *simcha* is not a component of the mitzvah, but an additional, independent obligation. In other words, aside from the reward one gets for performing a mitzvah, an additional, separate reward is earned for the *simcha* that one brings to it.

Similarly, writes the Rambam:

. . . The simcha that one brings to performing a mitzvah and the love of G-d Who commanded the mitzvot is a great act of service. Whoever holds himself back from this simcha deserves to be punished, as it says in the Torah, "because you did not serve Hashem, your God, amid gladness and goodness of heart . . ."

Rabbeinu Bah'ya speaks of the reward one gets for doing a mitzvah with *simcha*. Rambam speaks of the punishment for *not* having done the mitzvah with *simcha*. Clearly, serving Hashem with *simcha* is a very important.

Let us try to understand why.

One reason, I believe, is that failure to approach the mitzvot with *simcha* will ultimately lead to their neglect. Allow me to explain.

Our Rabbis teach us that, each and every day, we must try to bring a freshness to the way we do the mitzvot. We must approach them not as stale remnants of the day before, but as something new and exciting, as if we had received them that very day, for the first time. Surely, this is quite a challenge! Given what we know of human nature, it almost seems impossible!

I would like to suggest the following: The punishment spoken of by the Torah and by Rambam does not come as a direct result of not having done the mitzvot with *simcha*. Rather, it comes because of the inevitable neglect of mitzvot bound to result from not maintaining their novelty. In other words, when it comes to any task, the onset of stale routine leads to neglect. And, neglect of mitzvot leads to punishment. The punishment therefore comes from the neglect of the mitzvot themselves.

And how do we protect ourselves?

Through *simcha*!

Of course, all of this is well and good when it's only a matter of theory. How do we come to implement it in our lives?

After all, we do these mitzvot day in and day out. Just because we are told to feel *simcha*, it doesn't mean that we can just feel something upon command. That's especially true for those amongst us for whom this is simply not their nature.

What are we to do?

“Run!,” says ben Azzai.

Physically run.

Physically run to the mitzvah.

By having one's body physically do so, the mind will follow. In other words, physical enthusiasm will lead to emotional enthusiasm. And, it will prevent the onset of stale routine.

David HaMelech expressed this very idea in Tehillim: *I eagerly pursue your commandments* (lit. “I run to them”), *for you broaden my understanding*. In other words, he would run to do the mitzvot so as to do them with an “expansive heart.” He could thereby avoid falling into the trap of laziness and routine.

שמצוה גוררת מצוה ועבירה גוררת עבירה

How does one understand this idea, that one mitzvah brings another?

One could say that the Tanna of our mishnah is hinting that one should not fall into the following trap: Upon encountering (and completing) a mitzvah that turned out to be quite trying, G-d forbid that one should say, “No more mitzvot, please! After a mitzvah like this last one, I kind of need a break!!!”

Rather, upon completion of one mitzvah, even a difficult one, one must hope that another comes his way as soon as possible. If he had just given tzeddaka to a certain poor individual, for instance, he should be looking forward to the opportunity of encountering yet another poor person. He should hope that the very act of performing the mitzvah of tzeddakah will bring him the merit to have another mitzvah of tzeddakah come his way. He should hope that, as soon as one poor man leaves his front door, donation in hand, that momentarily there will be another knock on his door and another needy man waiting outside.

Even one hundred times!

Through having opened up his own hand and given of his own money to the poor, it will be that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will bless those who are generous by giving them more and more ability to give out more and more *tzeddaka*. This means that those who are generous will see a blessing that their own livelihoods will be quite respectable.

ששכר מצוה מצוה ושכר עבירה עבירה

The mishnah seems to be saying that mitzvah performance carries no earthly reward. I wonder how we reconcile this with the beginning verses in *Parashat b'Chukotai*, which seem to promise that there is indeed earthly reward, specifically that rain will fall in its time, the land will yield its produce, and that fruit trees will flourish. These verses seem to contradict as well Rabbi Yaakov's opinion in Massechet Kiddushin that says without qualification that mitzvah performance earns no this-world reward.

Rashi's approach in his commentary to the verses in *b'Chukotai* might help us. He says that **אם בחקתי תלכו** refers not to mitzvah performance but to dedicating oneself to Torah study. The second phrase, **ואת מצותי תשמרו**, tells us that the dedication to Torah study should be directed towards being better able to fulfill the mitzvot -- as opposed to learning for intellectual gratification or towards some other goal.

One could conclude from this Rashi that the Torah is saying that one cannot expect to achieve proper mitzvah observance without first deeply involving oneself in Torah study. Perhaps this accounts for why we see individuals who are diligent when it comes to some mitzvot but negligent when it comes to others. Perhaps these are people who have not been serious as regards to their Torah study. Their neglect of Torah leads to neglect of mitzvot.

When it comes to mitzvot, people like this do only what comes easily. Ironically, though, when it comes to worldly pursuit, they are not lazy at all. In fact, they are quite ambitious and hard-working. Not only that, but they are prepared to make great sacrifices in order to achieve their worldly goals and in pursuit of worldly pleasure. They are prepared to spend great amounts on vacations, for instance. It must be that people like these get little satisfaction from -- and see little purpose in -- doing Hashem's mitzvot.

In contrast, those who study Torah deeply do find satisfaction and purpose in Hashem's mitzvot.

It says in the Book of Job that *man was born to work*. Perhaps this means that the more deeply that a person studies Torah, the more he sees purpose in it and the more he wishes to fulfill every one of Hashem's mitzvot. This extends even to those mitzvot that do not come easily. For one who

is accustomed to working hard at his learning will also work hard on his mitzvoth.

Recall what Rashi wrote regarding *b'Chukotai*, that Torah study should be in order to be diligent and to fulfill. One could say this means that through diligent study, diligent observance of all Hashem's mitzvoth will become one's goal.

Were one to immerse himself in Torah, with the intent to thereby enhance his mitzvah observance, as Rashi says, then the Kaddosh Baruch Hu will reward him in kind. This means that He will grant him more time in this world, so as to provide him with yet more opportunities for mitzvoth. For, most mitzvoth depend upon having physical objects. Examples would be the mitzvoth of *leket*, *shikcha*, *pe'ah*, *ma'aseroth*, and *bikkurim*.

What I mean is the following: How is a person to fulfill these agricultural *mitzvoth* unless he has a field and crops? How is one to have the opportunity to say *Birkat HaMazon* if he lacks bread for his meal? How is he to give *tzedaka* unless he has the funds to do so?

So, it seems that it logically follows that one who learns Torah seriously will necessarily be rewarded with longer life and material possessions. It is not, however, by way of reward. Rather, it is to give him the opportunity to accomplish the mitzvoth that depend upon material possessions and on the individual's being on this earth long enough to do them.

The verses say that rain will be brought in its time. The Hebrew word is *gishmaychem*. The root noun, *geshem*, carries a double meaning (in this context): "rain" and "material possessions." Another word for material possessions is *gashmi'ut*. Therefore, why not read the verse as saying not that rain will come in its proper time (i.e. in winter as opposed to summer), but that *gashmi'ut* (material possessions) will come?

Reading the verse in the way I just suggested would support the idea I've been advancing until now, that the blessing is that Hashem will grant us the material wherewithal to continue doing His mitzvoth. Perhaps one could even say that this is the reason why we are given *gashmi'ut* in the first place -- so that we may use it for mitzvoth.

Once Hashem has already opened His treasure house of goodness, the good continues to flow from there, with abundant generosity. The prophet Malachi

says that Hashem will cause almost boundless blessing to flow. Perhaps this means that the blessing will be even more than what the individual actually needs, so that he will have more opportunities for mitzvot. (*)

(*) והריקותי לכם ברכה למעלה מן הטבע, ותהיה הברכה עד בלי די כי ברכת השמים יש לה גבול בהכרח שבבואה עד הגבול ההוא יאמר די, אבל ברכת ה' שהיא על פי נס אין לה גבול ולא יאמר לה די, כי תוסיף ותלך לאין קץ, אבל אין זה נסיון רק בחינה, כי הוא מאוצר ה' ששם אין זה למעלה מכחו, וכן מצד שכבר הבטיח הברכה הוא רק בחינה שימלא דברו מלבי"ם מלאכי פרק ג פסוק י

Perhaps we may better understand now what the mishnah means when it says that the reward for a mitzvah is yet another mitzvah. When one puts great effort into his Torah learning, The Kaddosh Baruch Hu gives him the opportunity to do even more mitzvot. I reiterate: This is not a reward *per se*, but a means -- a means, that is, by which one may accomplish the mitzvot that having these additional resources depends upon.

The “reward” for serious dedication to Torah study is more mitzvot. The *gashmi'ut* comes indirectly; it is just a means.

The converse is that one who never takes the trouble to put serious effort into Torah study -- and likewise does not put serious effort into doing any mitzvot beyond what comes easily to him -- will not see the additional G_d-given *gashmi'ut*. (What for?)

Gemara Kiddushin 82a says “I have corrupted my deeds and thereby forfeited my sustenance, as it is stated, (Yermiyahu 5:25) *Your sins have turned away these blessings . . .*” (The quoted verse in full is: *Your sins have turned away these blessings and your transgressions have withheld the good from you.*)

When one gets to Heaven, stands in judgment before the Heavenly Court, and pleads, “The reason I did not perform all the mitzvot was because I was poor,” they will answer him: “It is because you never toiled in Torah, that you never merited the bounty of sustenance.”



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖**שמצוה גוררת מצוה**

Marital life was not very peaceful for a certain wealthy individual. In fact, he and his wife wound up becoming divorced.

The man appeared before Rav Chaim Pinto zt"l one day, asking for a *beracha*. The Rav smiled at him and said, "You have 'merited' to fulfill the positive mitzvah to divorce one's wife with a *get* (where the couple has already decided to divorce). Congratulations!"

"Now, are you aware of what our Rabbis teach us, that one Mitzvah leads to another? Well, I am quite certain that you will one day return to your home, your ex-wife and your children, and remarry the woman you have just divorced. You should know that one of the tzaddikim has already done this. He and his wife divorced -- and soon after, the man returned to remarry her."

Needless to say, this fellow did not know what to think! Here he was, having just divorced his wife because he couldn't see himself continuing to live under the same roof as her -- and now the Rav was predicting that the two of them would soon be together once again! The man simply could not understand how or why this should be!

The Rav began to speak of the man's former wife, reciting some of her positive qualities. Little by little, the Rav's words began to have the desired effect.

"Could it be that I made a mistake?," thought the man.

He began to realize what Rav Pinto was actually saying, that he has to be more patient, more tolerant; that he needs to learn to control his temper.

The man began to weep, tears upon tears.

"Rabbi, I have decided."

"I am returning to my wife."

And so it was.

Just a few weeks later, the man stood under the chuppa with his former wife. From that day onward, they shared a life of happiness and peace.



הוא הִיה אֹמֵר אֶל תְּהִי בּוֹ לְכֹל אָדָם וְאֵל
 תְּהִי מִפְּלִיג לְכֹל דְּבַר שְׂאִין לְךָ אָדָם שְׂאִין לוֹ
 שְׂעָה וְאִין לְךָ דְּבַר שְׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת דָּג

*He used to say: Do not be scornful of any person,
 and do not speak disdainfully of anything, for
 there is no one who does not have his hour, and
 there is nothing that does not have its place.*

The mishnah says that one should not “scorn any man.”

What does this mean?

According to Rambam, in his commentary to this mishnah, it means that there is no such thing as someone who cannot, at one point or another, cause you some sort of anguish or provide some sort of assistance, should he be so motivated. Should you ridicule him [thinking that he can do you no harm], know that he will cause you anguish [in return], at least to a minor degree.

Rabbi Obadiah m’Bartenura says, similarly, that one should not think regarding someone else, “What harm could he do me?”

Although their comments don’t indicate this explicitly, I believe that both Rambam and Rabbi Obadiah are saying here that it is forbidden to disparage anyone, no matter whom. If my reading is correct, then we see from here as well how wrong it would be to falsely condemn or accuse the people of Israel. For, we learned in the mishnah, that one should not “scorn any man.” My understanding is that this refers to attitude, even to the way one feels in his heart, unrelated to what one actually does. One should not trivialize another individual, even to oneself, thinking disdainfully: “Him? What could *he* possibly do to *me*?” How much more so, then, that one should not *say* “How awful this person is!” “He’s worthless! A nothing!” “All his good deeds? They’re inconsequential, meaningless. They don’t amount to a thing!”

An illustration of these ideas could be found in the story of Eliyahu Hanavi. Before I explain how it relates to the lesson at hand, I will recount the entire incident, which may be found in Melachim I chapter 19. The story is a bit complex, so please bear with me as I relate the details.

Eliyahu had just slaughtered the false prophets of Baal. Achav told Izabel, his wife, of what had occurred. She, in response, sent a message to Eliyahu, vowing that she would slay him as well.

Upon hearing the news, Eliyahu fled the city, to hide in the wilderness. He walked into the desert for a full day. He came upon a solitary tree, under which he sat and then lay down to sleep.

An angel came to awaken him, bringing food and drink. “Get up and eat!” said the angel. And Eliyahu saw near his head a coal-baked cake and cruse of water. He ate, drank, and went to sleep.

The angel then came to him a second time, to urge him to eat some more. That meal sustained him for the forty days it took to then travel to the mountain of Hashem, Horeb. There, he spent the night in a cave. And then Hashem appeared to him, asking “Why are you here, Eliyahu?”

Eliyahu then recounted to Hashem what had occurred, saying not only that he, Eliyahu, had acted with great zeal in honor of Hashem’s name, but that “the B’nei Yisrael have forsaken Your covenant.; they have razed your altars and killed your prophets by the sword.” B’nai Yisrael had killed Hashem’s prophets by the sword, said Eliyahu, and now he, Eliyahu is the only that remains. “And they now seek to take my life.”

The story continues, with Hashem returning to speak to Eliyahu a second time, asking him the exact same question, namely why Eliyahu had come.

Eliyahu’s response was the same, reiterating the sins of Bnei Yisrael, namely that they had forsaken His covenant. Eliyahu said that he was fleeing for his life, he said once again, after having acted for the sake of Hashem’s honor.

Hashem’s reaction was not to honor Eliyahu, but to let him know that he should now go anoint Elisha as prophet in his stead.

What had occurred here? Why was Eliyahu, the prophet would had acted so zealously for the sake of Hashem’s honor, now being told that Elisha was to take his place?

The question becaomes even more puzzling when we consider the miraculous nature of the story. It is well-established that Hashem prefers to act through nature, rather than through circumvention of nature. This means that even where He does intervene miraculously, He generally does so in a manner that makes it seem to the onlooker that no miracle had occurred. It is my understanding that He also limits their number.

Yet, in our story, it seems to me that two miracles occurred where, at least superficially, the same “result” could have been attained through a single miracle.

A single meal sustained him for forty days. That was miracle number one. The second was that Eliyahu’s path to Horeb, in the Sinai desert, was most likely “straightened” for him. I understand why Eliyahu’s meal had to last forty days, for that was the length of the journey. However, as long as the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* was going to “straighten” his path to Sinai, meaning intervening so that he would not get lost, He could just as well have “shortened” the journey so that it would not have required anything more than a single day. That way, both miracles would be “rolled up into one.”

Another question I have is why the food miracle was done with the second meal, rather than the first. A third question is why the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* had Eliyahu go to Horeb, which is Har Sinai.

My answer here has two components. The first is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* did all this in order to limit him from being an accuser of the Jewish people. The second part of the answer is that He wanted to teach Eliyahu a lesson in *bitachon*, in trust.

What I mean by the second answer is that there was no reason for Eliyahu to flee Izabel’s threats. Rather, in my opinion, he should have trusted that Hashem would protect him. I do not believe that Hashem would not have allowed Eliyahu to fall into her hands.

A look at the symbolism behind the food turns out to be quite revealing. What food was it? It was a coal-baked cake, brought to him by a *malach*. And what significance did that food, in particular, carry? Midrash Shir Hashirim 1:6 explains it:

And he looked, and there beside his head were cakes that were “ritzafim.” Why are they called “ritzafim?”

(In other words, we know that it refers to coal-baked cake. However, why was “ritzafim” used rather than “gechalim,” which is the most common way of saying “coals?” “Ritzafim” appears only one other place in Tanach.)

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman says “rotz - peh” (smash - mouth). That is, smash the mouths of whoever speaks accusingly against my sons.

The midrash is saying that the angel served him precisely this item, specifically named “*ritzafim*” here, in order to warn Eliyahu to not speak against Bnei Yisrael, lest his mouth be “smashed” by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* for committing this sin.

One could also say that the idea of a cake that is coal-baked is to allude to that his mouth would be “singled,” as if a coal had been placed against it.

I would add yet another idea here, of my own: This incident demonstrates to Eliyahu a lesson in *hashgacha*, namely that Hashem is with him everywhere. Just as He could direct that food be brought before Eliyahu, no matter where Eliyahu happened to be, even in a distant wilderness, so could He protect Eliyahu from his enemies wherever they happened to be.

When the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* saw that Eliyahu was not returning to Yehuda, that his harsh feelings against Israel remained, and that he simply went back to sleep without having “taken the hint,” the next step was for Hashem to send the angel a second time with food and drink.

With this food, a miracle was done. It remained with Eliyahu for the next forty days, long enough to allow him to reach Har Sinai without his needing to eat again.

Earlier, we asked why, rather than make the food last for forty days, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* hadn’t shortened the journey. He performed a miracle to make the food last so long, but could have instead “shortened” the trip by having Eliyahu arrive at Har Sinai in a moment’s time. Why didn’t He?

Of course, the reason why He did not do it that way was because He chose not to.

And why not?

I would say that it was in order to give Eliyahu as much time as possible to think. In other words, “shortening” the journey would have been counter productive.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* wanted that Eliyahu return to his people and convince them to do *teshuva*. He therefore wanted to grant Eliyahu as long as possible to consider doing so.

I do think, however, that He did “straighten” the path for Eliyahu, in the sense of making it free of the wild animals and highwaymen whose presence would distract Eliyahu from pondering his own actions and, hopefully, drawing the conclusion that the best thing for him to do would be to return to his people and cause them to do *teshuvah*.

That did not happen, though.

When Eliyahu arrived at Har Sinai, he entered an adjoining cave. “What are you doing here, Eliyahu?” asked the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

Eliyahu responded by telling Hashem of how His people had transgressed.

“But what are you doing here?” asked the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

“One needs to have permission in order to leave Eretz Yisrael. You did not have it. Furthermore, your people have been left without a prophet in their midst. True, they have sinned. And true, they have strayed to idolatry. In the end, however, they will return to Me in *teshuvah*.”

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* continued, “Hadn’t all of Yisrael hearkened to your words earlier, when you said (I Melachim 18:39) **כל העם ויפלו על פניהם ויאמרו יקוק הוא האלהים יקוק הוא האלהים: וירא** *And the all the nation saw (were awed), fell to their faces, and said ‘Hashem is the Elokim! Hashem is the Elokim!’?* You could once again be successful with them and inspire their *teshuvah*! Why, then, did you flee?”

Despite the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*’s hints, Eliyahu was still not judging His nation with favor. Rather, he just continued with his accusations (I Melachim 19:14): **כי עזבו בריתך בני ישראל:** “*Bnei Yisrael have abandoned your covenant*” he said, for the second time.

One could say that what happened next was that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* saw that Eliyahu would not be dissuaded by mere words, so He then invited Eliyahu to go onto Har Sinai itself. Surely, the symbolism and the memories would be quite powerful here. For, it was in this place that the B’nei Yisrael sinned with the golden calf -- after having heard the voice of Hashem from amidst the fire and receiving the Torah.

And how did Moshe Rabbeinu, their leader react? Run to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* to tell him in detail of B’nei Yisrael’s sins? No. What he said was (Shemot 32:32) **ועתה אם תשא חטאתם ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת:** *And now if You would but forgive their sins! But if not, then erase me from the book that You have written.*

Surely, Eliyahu would now realize what it was that he was supposed to do as regards to his people. Surely, he would realize that the appropriate thing was to follow Moshe Rabbeinu’s lead: He must dedicate himself to leading them towards the path of *teshuvah* -- or, at the very least, immediately cease his words of accusation!

Even this, however, did not work.

The way that I understand the story is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* now saw that even this last chance at inspiring Eliyahu would be to no avail. He therefore decreed upon Eliyahu that he die. Eliyahu was deprived of his rank and his role as prophet was transferred to Elisha, his disciple.

This was because it is forbidden to be *melamed chovah*, that is, to interpret actions in a negative light, when speaking of the Jewish People. Rather, one must focus instead on how they may be brought back in *teshuvah*. Even Achav, the evil one, ultimately returned in *teshuvah*. So, too, does that potential exist for every Jew, no matter how far he appears to have strayed.

The prophet tells us (II Shmuel 14:14) of an incident where Yoav “put words into the mouth” of a woman from Tekoa for her to say to David Hamelech, so as to make a certain point to him via a parable: *Hashem spares no one*. [*Let the king therefore*] *ponder thoughts so that no one be banished from him*. The plain meaning here is that the king in question is David Hamelech and not the King of kings (Hashem). When it says that *Hashem spares no one*, the simple meaning is that everyone must die and that no one is spared from that fate. However, there are those who interpret this homiletically. To them, the “king” here is Hashem, not David Hamelech. And, rather than saying that everyone must die, barring no one, they interpret this phrase as saying that *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* considers and reconsiders, so that not even a single soul of Israel be lost. This corresponds to the way I understand our mishnah.

We know as well that our Rabbis tell us that nothing “stands before” teshuva. In other words, when it comes to teshuvah, there are no insurmountable impediments.

The gemara tells us (Kiddushin 40b) that even if one had been absolutely evil all his days, if, in the end, he did teshuvah, he is not to be reminded again of those sins. Although this could be understood to mean that it would a sin to remind him of his evil past, one could understand it as well as meaning that those evil deeds are now “gone.” This concept is found in Rambam’s Laws of Teshuvah 2:1, partially based on this gemara.



רְבִי לְוִיטָס אִישׁ יַבְנֵה אוֹמֵר מְאֹד מְאֹד הָיָה
 שֶׁפֶל רוּחַ שְׁתַּקוּת אָנוּשׁ רָמָה. רְבִי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן
 בְּרוּקָא אוֹמֵר כָּל הַמְחַלֵּל שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם בִּסְתֵר
 נִפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ בְּגִלּוּי. אֶחָד שׁוֹגֵג וְאֶחָד מֵיזִד בְּחִלּוּל
 הַשֵּׁם:
 אבות פרק ד משנה ד

Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh says: Be exceedingly humble, for the end of mortal man is worms.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka says: One who desecrates the Name of Heaven in private will be punished in public. Both unintentional and intentional are the same in desecrating God's Name.

Our mishnah quotes Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh. He would say: *Be very, very humble, for the hope of mortal man is worms.* There are two ways of saying “of Yavneh” in hebrew. One is “*Ish Yavneh*” and the other is “*m’Yavneh*.” My question is whether there is any significance to the mishnah’s having used “*Ish Yavneh*” rather than “*m’Yavneh*.”

As we already know, the mishnayoth were edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi with great precision. I believe that he chose to use “*Ish Yavneh*,” rather than its alternative, for a reason.

The talmud praises the teacher who excels both at discovering secrets hidden in Torah verses and at applying them. They call this **נאה דורש ונאה מקיים**. I believe that “*ish Yavneh*” is used here to describe Rabbi Levitas in order to tell us that he was amongst those about whom it was fitting to say, **נאה דורש ונאה מקיים**. In other words, Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi is telling us that Rabbi Levitas not only preached *Be very, very humble*, but lived it as well.

In its simple meaning, *ish Yavneh* means a person from the town of Yavneh, which was a famous center of Rabbinic scholarship. Let us have a look, though, at the word “yavneh” and break it down to its root component. Its root would be *b-n-h*, which is *boneh*, to build. *Yavneh*, then, is associated with building. When the mishnah says that Rabbi Levitas was an “*ish Yavneh*” it is saying that he was an *ish* who built himself up on a daily basis. He built himself up daily to be more than he was the day before.

This constant growth was made possible because of his humility.

What that means is that, because of his humility, he would do daily self-evaluation and never be satisfied with what he had achieved so far in *avodah Hashem*. In his eyes, his *avodah Hashem* until that point was woefully inadequate. Objectively, however, this was far, far from the truth. However, it was his humility that caused him to view himself this way.

Those who are filled with conceit would never achieve this. Rather than search for their flaws -- and acknowledge them-- they would be self-satisfied, full of pride as to what they have attained. They would never see themselves as lacking or inadequate, for this requires the self-negation that goes with being *very, very humble*.

He who is prideful might do a daily accounting, just as the humble person does. The difference, however, is that he will be quite pleased with what he sees. He will see that the day before -- and the day before that as well -- he had done just as he was commanded. He was commanded to pray -- and he prayed. He was commanded to study -- and he studied. He was commanded to give *tzeddaka* -- and he gave *tzeddaka*. After patting himself on the back, he concludes that all is well and there is nothing to improve.

The fate of such a person is that he will be ensnared by the *yetser hara* and tempted by sin on a constant basis. The gemara tells us (Kiddushin 30b) **ואמר ר"ש בן לוי: יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו** -- *Rabbi Shimon ben Levi says: "Man's yetser overpowers him daily, seeking to murder him."* This can be compared to warfare. Even though one has defeated the *yetser* today, tomorrow still awaits.

It is therefore highly unwise to abandon one's weapons, simply because today's battle has been won. The victory was only temporary. Tomorrow, the enemy will return.

Therefore, one must increase his *avodah Hashem* daily. He must self-reflect and seek to improve -- daily.

In that sense, man is like a *binyan*, a structure. Buildings must be inspected on a regular basis. Is the foundation still sound? Are any cracks developing there?

So too with man. His foundation must be checked as well -- daily.

Referring to that which was taken from *Adam HaRishon*, the Torah says (Br 2:22) **ויבן יקוק אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה** - *Then Hashem*

G-d fashioned the side He had taken from the man into a woman. (We see the verb b-n-h being used here in relation to the “building” of a human being.)

Similarly, we see in Koheleth 10:18 **בעצלתיים ידלים ובשפלות ידלים ידלף הבית** - *Through slothfulness, the ceiling sags, and through idleness of the hands, the house leaks.* That is to say that one who neglects the “house,” that is he does not “fix” it, causes its destruction.

So, too, with men who do not make a daily accounting. Their end will be a bitter one.

And that is why Rabbi Levitas was called here an *ish Yavneh*. Because all his days he continued to repair and build himself up. By his own estimation, he was of little worth. (Of course, that was only in his own estimation -- not by any objective standard!) He taught his students to view themselves this way as well. They, too, must do a daily accounting and fix and build. For, the *yetser hara*'s trap awaits them.

I would like to quote in full something that Rambam brings in his commentary to our mishnah. He is describing something he had seen in a “book of ethics.”

A certain righteous man was asked, “What was the happiest day of your life?” He replied, “It was the day I was traveling by ship. My quarters were the most undesirable on the entire vessel. I was dressed in worn-out rags. The other passengers were merchants and the well-off.

“As I was laying in my lowly space, someone descended to where I was in order to relieve himself. I was so pathetic and degraded in his eyes that he proceeded to urinate right on to me.”

“The sheer brazenness of this man astonished me. However, I swear that what he had done did not trouble me even the slightest. I had no anger. In fact, I was filled with great joy that I had attained a level where even degradation such as this would not bother me. It was not even something I would pay attention to.”

There is no question that this is the ultimate goal of *shiflut haru'ach*, humility of spirit (as in our mishnah) -- namely, that one should be totally distant from pridefulness.

The gemara (Shabbat 31a) tells a story of someone who had laid a bet of 400 zuz with his fellow that he would be able to cause Hillel the Elder to lose his temper. Even after multiple acts of provocation, the man was unsuccessful; no matter what, Hillel the Elder maintained his equanimity. The man was told

that the lesson he had learned was far more valuable than the 400 zuz he would now have to pay out on this bet. The lesson was that, no matter what, Hillel did not take offense.

The way I understand the above story is that it is illustrative of Hillel's humility, which is what we all have to strive for. For him, there was no difference whether someone insulted him or praised him. Either way, his reaction would be the same. He would neither hate the one who insulted him, nor favor he who had flattered him.

After having composed the above lines, I came across a commentary of the famous kabbalist Rabbi Avraham Azulai to our mishnah. There, he writes that *ish Yavneh* means the greatest one of Yavneh.

His comments end there, but I would like to take them a step further.

One could say that even though he was the greatest of Yavneh, this would not negate what we said earlier. For, there is no contradiction between being "the greatest of Yavneh" and being exceedingly humble. Moshe Rabbeinu is evidence of this.

והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל האדם אשר על פני האדמה: - *And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any other man on the face of the earth* (Bemidbar 12:3). This verse refers to him as *Ish* and as *anav m'od* (exceedingly, greatly humble) just afterwards.

In fact, it would not be possible for someone who is an *anav gadol* to be anything other than an *ish gadol* as well. After all, from where would he have the insight needed for comprehending how important it is to not be prideful, if not from one's greatness. This greatness allows him to see how much evil stems from pridefulness.

We therefore see how well my interpretation matches with that of the great *mekubal*, Rabbi Avraham Azulai. It was precisely because Rabbi Levitas was so very great, that he attained true humility. This is just as I wrote above: His great humility caused him to build himself up.

אחד שונג ואחד מיזד בחילול השם

Our Mishnah says that *Chilul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name, is punished publicly whether or not it was committed intentionally. I would like to examine this statement in light of the midrash that says that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* has foregone meteing out punishment for *Avodah Zara* but not *Chilul Hashem*.

What is it about the transgression of *Chilul Hashem* that makes it even more serious than *Avodah Zara*? We discussed this earlier, in chapter one mishnah 11, but, due to the severity of the matter, I would like to discuss it again here.

The gemara (*Avodah Zara* 17b) tells of a time when there was a government decree that Yisrael not study Torah. Despite the decree, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon continued to study. When he was found out, three further decrees were made: Rabbi Chanina would be set afire, his wife executed, and his daughter was to be enslaved in a brothel.

As the gemara continues, it explains how Rabbi Chanina and his family could have possibly deserved such severe punishment. In fact, says the gemara, it was *middah k'negged middah*, measure for measure.

According to the gemara, Rabbi Chanina deserved to die this way because he was guilty of having uttered Hashem's complete Name in public. Although he did so in order to learn it, which is permitted, he should have done it only in private. Rabbi Chanina's wife was punished for not having reproached him for it.

Rabbi Chanina's daughter was held prisoner in a brothel, says the gemara, because of an incident that occurred when she was walking past a group of prominent Romans. Overhearing one of them remark as to her gracefulness, she took extra care with each subsequent step. According to some interpretations, because she intentionally excited the men's *yetser hara*, this was the test she would be put to herself, by being placed in a brothel.

The gemara later tells the story of Beruriah, Rabbi Meir's wife and also another daughter of Rabbi Chanina. According to the gemara, she told her husband that having a sister living in a brothel was an embarrassment to her. She therefore asked him if there was something he could do to get her out of there. Rabbi Meir set out to try and free her, telling himself that the matter depended on a miracle, which would only occur had she not succumbed to committing an immoral act.

The story continues from this point, describing how Rabbi Meir brought with him a large amount of gold and how he went about determining whether his sister-in-law had succumbed. Disguised as a Roman, he went to the brothel and sought out her services. She declined, explaining that "the manner of women" was upon her. Rabbi Meir said he would wait.

"Why wait," she replied, "when there are women here much more pretty than me?"

It was clear to Rabbi Meir that she had kept herself pure; he proceeded to invoke the process whereby she could miraculously be saved. The gemara then describes how indeed miracles were done for her and she was brought by Rabbi Meir to safety.

I would like to ask, however, how is it possible that she could have put into such a precarious situation? This was Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon's daughter; even given the intimidating nature of the brothel, she remained pure. Why was she punished so severely simply for having taken greater care to walk gracefully? Would it enter your mind that her intent was for something disgusting?

When we see someone who maintained her purity even in the company of prostitutes, would we imagine that she had intent to sin -- or to entice others to sin -- when walking in the marketplace?

All this is made even more puzzling when we see how, according to the gemara, she and her parents acknowledged the righteousness of Hashem's judgement. Upon learning of the punishment that awaited them, all three recited in turn precisely the verses that affirm that Hashem's judgement is just (in general) and that it was just even that their own case.

Does this not prove that the three were free of sin?

I feel compelled to say that Rabbi Chanina's daughter never intended to transgress any prohibition whatsoever -- and certainly never intended to entice anyone else to sin. However, how do we explain the gemara?

I would suggest that Rabbi Chanina's daughter was so innocent of sin, that she totally misinterpreted the Roman dignitaries' remarks as to her gracefulness. It never occurred to her that the intent was salacious.

In hearing the Romans' remark, perhaps the young woman had in mind that which is written in Shir Hashirim, *But your footsteps were so lovely when shod in pilgrim's sandals, O daughter of nobles*. Gemara Sukkah interprets that verse as follows, How lovely are the steps of Israel when they ascend to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival!

What does it mean, then, when it says that she "paid extra attention"? Perhaps that she "paid attention" to be more careful about the fine points of Torah and the fine points of *tsniut*, modesty. If so, why then was she punished? Perhaps because, despite that her response was with good intent, still she was wrong for having given undue weight and consideration to remarks made by Roman heathens.

Despite having interpreted the Romans' words in a way totally unrelated to their true intent, the fact that she reacted to them at all allowed the Romans to delude themselves. "We see that she pays heed to our opinions," thought the Romans. "True, this time she interpreted them in order to do something right and proper. But now that we see she values what we say, perhaps next time we'll be able to get her to do something sinful."

This amounted to a *Chilul Hashem*.

I believe that I can show not only that Rabbi Chanina's daughter never intended to sin, but that her punishment was not due to sin. My proof is what the gemara says about Rabbi Chanina himself, that he was punished for *Chilul Hashem*. In other words, Rabbi Chanina was punished not for having done something wrong *per se*, but because of the way that something actually permissible was perceived. The situation of Rabbi Chanina's daughter parallels this most strikingly.

The general rule, as stated in our mishnah, is that whoever disgraces Hashem's name in private will be punished in public. This is what happened to Rabbi Chanina's daughter, who was held in a brothel. Her allowing the Romans to believe that next time they might influence her to do an actual transgression amounted to a *Chilul Hashem*. She was therefore punished accordingly, in public.

Our mishnah continues that when it comes to *Chilul Hashem*, intentional and unintentional commission are "one." One way of understanding this is that although the individual never intended to transgress, what matters is that it led to a *Chilul Hashem* -- which Hashem must seek retribution for.

This should serve as rebuke to those -- particularly some ladies -- who come to the synagogue and to weddings dressed in their finery, primarily in the hope of being complimented on how terrific the clothes look on them. Behavior like this can lead to *aveirot*.

It becomes an endless cycle. The fashion-conscious wearer seeks to draw the attention of her friends. The more that they praise, the more encouraged she feels to wear something even more eye-catching next time. And the more eye-catching the clothes, the more likely that they will lead -- even unconsciously -- to *aveirot*.

It is not that the women are intending to draw the attention of not just the women, but of men other than her husband, *chas v'Shalom*. However, it is

nevertheless a sin.

This is because the other women are drawn to envy, jealousy, enmity, and competition.

As if envy, jealousy, enmity, and competition were not bad enough in and of themselves, *lashon hara*, gossip, and quarrelling follow in its trail.

I am not saying that women should not dress attractively -- it is her obligation to do so! -- but that is only in her own house. When she goes out, she should pay attention to dress tastefully and respectably -- and not in a manner that is ostentatious and flashy, as if her goal was to “show off” to other women. Otherwise, this will lead to her drawing the attention not just of women, but of strange men as well.

We learn in Tehillim **כל כבודו בת מלך פנימה**, The honor and glory of the *bat-melech* is “within,” that is, it best that her beauty be displayed in private, not in public.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

מאד מאד הוי שפל רוח

Self-deprecation, humility, and simplicity were the hallmarks of of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto zt”l, all the days of his life.

When *talmidei chachamim* would approach him to receive his blessing, Rabbi Moshe Aharon would reach out to greet them, shake their hand, and then pull back -- to keep them from honoring him with the traditional kiss of the hand. He would then deflect their requests for his *berachot* and *tefillot*. “Who am I,” he would say, “to bless someone as such as you? You are scholars! You sit all day in the tents of Torah, with our teachers from the gemara. Blessed are you, that this is your portion! Your merit is surely very great, that you are able to sit all day with Torah! What could you possibly want from me?”

Every Shabbat, when entering the *Beit Hakeneset*, he would stoop as he passed through the doorway, hoping that he would not be noticed. If those already inside would rush towards him to kiss his hand, he would object, trying to resist the honor they wished to show him.

When seated and approached by one of the townspeople, he would rise to greet them, rich and poor. When asked about this, he explained that each and every Jew has within him a G-dly portion. When he rises, he said, it was for this G-dliness. Our *chachamim* taught us (Avoth 3:20), **אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה**, **שיש בו** *Do not look at the container, but rather what is inside of it.*

כל המחלל שם שמים בסתר נפרעין ממנו בגלוי.

It was, in Mogador, a time of drought. The local Jews flocked to the houses of study and of prayer to spill out their tears in *tefilla*, beeing Hashem that He bring rain. In the meanwhile, however, not even a cloud was to be seen.

A group, composed of the city leaders, assembled in the home of Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l to join with him in *tehillim*. As soon as they began, however, they saw that the Rav had fallen asleep.

Of course, they were quite puzzled. Here they were, suffering from the lack of rain, specially gathered at the Rav's house, and there was the Rav -- fast asleep! Waking the Rav was not even a consideration. So, puzzled as they were, they continued with *tehillim*.

The Rav was dreaming. And, in his dream, he saw one of the city officials. And he saw that this official was engaged in an illicit affair with someone else's wife. Startled by the sight, the Rav snapped out of his slumber!

"Is so and so present in this room?" asked the Rav. "No," they answered, as they looked around. "Well, go find him! And bring him here at once!" the Rav demanded.

The group searched house to house, but the individual in question was nowhere to be found. They returned to Rav Chaim, empty-handed.

"Spare no effort!" answered the Rav. "Find him and bring him to me, no matter what it takes!"

The group returned to the city's main streets and no sooner had they got there, that they saw the individual in question. Grabbing him forcefully, the brought him to Rav Chaim.

"Where were you until now?" asked the Rav. "Why weren't you with the rest of the community, praying for rain?"

The man offered his explanation. It was met with Rav Chaim screaming at him: "Say the truth! You had better do *teshuvah* right now -- for the time has come for you to depart this world!"

No sooner had the words flown from Rav Chaim's mouth, that the man fell to the ground, already in the throes of death.

"Begin saying the prayers and verses recited upon witnessing the soul's departure" said Rav Chaim to the group, as they stood there, stunned.

The prayers were said -- and the man then expired. His soul left him in one final breath.

It wasn't very long before the skies opened up and rain began to fall.

Shortly afterwards, Rabbi Chaim had his assistant summon the woman with whom the man had transgressed. Upon her arrival in his office, the Rav asked her to tell him the truth as to what happened.

She began to weep. Through her tears, she told him that while all the other men in town were gathered to pray for rain, the man came to her house and forced himself upon her. She had called out for help, but no one was there to answer. "Woe, woe is me!" she wailed.

As Rabbi Chaim listened, he nodded his head in agreement; he knew that she was saying the truth. Right away, he gave her a *tikkun* for the sin.

A similar story is told regarding an incident where someone came to Rabbi Chaim and told him that he suspected that his wife had transgressed with a certain individual. The Rav shook as heard this.

He summoned the woman to his office. Once she was seated before him, the Rav asked whether the story he had heard was true. If so, then she must do *teshuvah* immediately.

The woman denied it. Neither had she sinned with this man nor with any other in her entire life, she said.

"Come," said Rav Chaim, "and we will examine whether or not you are saying the truth."

With that, Rav Chaim opened a sefer Torah.

He began reading the episode of Sotah, which is in parashat Naso. He had the woman stand along side him. Once he had completed the reading, he sent her and her husband back home.

Along the way, the woman began to feel pain in her legs and stomach. She fell to the street and got up, fell to the street and got up, then fell to the street and arose once again.

This continued -- until she died.



רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֵאל (בְּנוֹ) אוֹמֵר הַלּוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה עַל
 מְנַת לְלַמֵּד מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לְלַמּוֹד וּלְלַמֵּד. וְהַלּוֹמֵד
 עַל מְנַת לַעֲשׂוֹת מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לְלַמּוֹד וּלְלַמֵּד
 לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת. רַבִּי צְדוֹק אוֹמֵר אֵל תַּעֲשֵׂם
 עֲטָרָה לְהַתְגַּדֵּל בָּהֶם וְלֹא קַרְדָּם לְחַפּוֹר בָּהֶם.
 וְכֵן הָיָה הַלֵּל אוֹמֵר וּדְאִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּתַנְגָּא חֲלָף. הָא
 לְמַדְתָּ כֹּל הַנְּהַנָּה מִדְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה נוֹטֵל חַיּוֹ מִן
 הָעוֹלָם:

אבות פרק ד משנה ה

Rabbi Shimon says: One who learns in order to teach is given the means to learn and to teach. And one who learns in order to do is given the means to learn, to teach, and to do.

Rabbi Tzadok says: Do not make them a crown with which to aggrandize yourself, nor a spade to dig with. Hillel also used to say: One who makes use of the crown shall fade away. From this you learn that whoever derives personal benefit from words of Torah removes his life from the world.

The mishnah says that one who learns in order “to do” will be given the opportunity to learn, to teach, to be protected from transgression, and to fulfill the commandments (that is, “to do”).

The gemara (Abodah Zara 18a) tells a story regarding Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma.

When Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma became ill, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon went to visit him. “Chanina, my bother!” Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma told him. “Do you not know that this nation (Rome) has been imposed upon us from the Heavens? They have destroyed G-d’s house, burned His sanctuary, murdered His pious ones, caused His

nobles to perish, and this foreign ruler still exists. And yet, I have heard about you that you sit and engage in Torah study, convene public gatherings to disseminate Torah, and that a sefer Torah sits openly upon your lap!” [In other words, “Why do you endanger yourself so?”] Rabbi Yossi said to Rabbi Chanina, “Heaven will have mercy upon me.”

Rabbi Yossi responded to him, “I have said something sensible to you. And you are telling me that Heaven will have mercy upon you? [In other words, I am telling you based on reason, fact, and experience that you are endangering yourself. Yet, you respond that you will rely upon miracles?] I will be astounded if they don’t incinerate both you and the Torah scroll!

[Unsure now of his actions,] Rabbi Chanina said to Rabbi Yossi, “Rebbi, How do I stand with regards to the World to Come?” Rabbi Yossi answered him, “Has any particularly challenging incident presented itself to you? [Meaning, if so, let me know how you conducted yourself.]”

Rabbi Chanina answered him, “I once switched my own Purim funds for general charity funds. Then, thinking that the money was indeed general charity funds, I distributed it on Purim without specifying that it was for the Purim feast. [I then distributed money from my own pocket for the Purim feast, without seeking reimbursement.]”

Rabbi Yossi said to him, “If so, let my portion in Torah be from your portion. And let my lot in good deeds be from your lot!”

The gemara then tells us what happened next.

Not even a few days had passed before Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma died. All the great men of Rome went to bury him. They mourned him with a great funeral. Upon their return from the funeral, they came upon Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, who was sitting, engaged in Torah study, and convening public gatherings for its dissemination. A Torah scroll was resting on his lap. [All of this was in open violation of Roman edicts.]

They therefore brought him and wrapped him in a Torah scroll, encircled him with bundles of vine shoots, and set them on fire. The Romans then brought tufts of wool, soaked them in water, and

placed them over Rabbi Chanina's heart, so that his soul would not depart quickly.

Rabbi Chanina's daughter said to him, "Father, must I see you in such a state?" He answered her, "If I alone was being burned, it would be a difficult thing for me. However, now that I am being burned and the Sefer Torah is with me, He who will seek retribution for this Torah scroll will seek it as well for the insult to me."

The gemara's account seems quite puzzling. I wonder how it could be that Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma would discourage Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon from disseminating Torah, to the extent that he would warn him, "I will be astounded if they don't incinerate both you and the Torah scroll!"

Let us say that the Jewish People fully dedicated themselves to Torah and mitzvot, to the extent that they were prepared to die for them -- even for those mitzvot that they are not commanded to give up their lives for. Let us say that they had essentially extended their necks, so as to sanctify Hashem's Name for the sake of these mitzvot. Would the *Chachamei Yisrael* discourage them from doing these mitzvot? In my opinion, certainly not! [See note below.]

This would be especially true at a time of persecution. [See note below.] Therefore, how do we reconcile my questions with the gemara's account of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma's directive?

I have another question: In my reading of this gemara, it seems to be saying that Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma holds that *tzeddaka* is more important than Talmud Torah and that one would merit the World to Come through it. (I believe this is what the gemara is saying when it reports what Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma said to Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon upon hearing that his major "transgression" was what he had done with charity funds.) If my reading is correct, than Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma's statement seems to run counter to what we know from the mishnah (Pe'ah 1:1), that Talmud Torah is greater than all other mitzvot, including *hachnasat kallah* and *gemilut chasadim*.

Why would Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma be asking Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, "Has any particularly challenging incident presented itself to you?" as a way of discovering whether Rabbi Chanina had some demerit that would preclude his meriting the World to Come? Doesn't Rabbi Chanina have the merit of having taught Torah to the many, with great self-sacrifice? Wouldn't that stand above all good deeds?

The answer to my questions would be that there is no doubt that Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon holds that Talmud Torah should continue, even during times of persecution specifically directed against disseminating Torah wisdom. Rather, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon only wanted to warn Rabbi Chanina to not rely upon being saved by miracle.

He told him only to end his public discourses, not his personal studies. He was saying that his own learning should continue as before, but that he should no longer assemble large groups for public study. He told him, “Don’t you know that this nation (Rome) has been imposed upon us from the Heavens?” In other words, the Roman suppression was heavenly decreed and one is not permitted to place oneself into situations of possible danger.

Rabbi Chanina answered that he does not agree that terminating all public discourse and studying only by oneself was the proper response to the situation. After all, if the young students are neglected today, how will they develop into the Torah scholars needed for the future?

If Torah is not taught, even where *messirut nefesh* (extreme self-sacrifice) is needed, then Torah would be forgotten. The gemara (Sanhedrin 14a) tells of Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava, who sacrificed his life for the sake of continuing the process of Rabbinic ordination.

When the evil empire decreed that the Rabbis not give ordination to their students, that one does so would be executed together with the one he ordained, and that the city where the ordination took place would be destroyed, Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava went out to an unpopulated area and ordained five students there. The enemy seized him and did not move from there until they had plunged three hundred spears into his body, making it like a sieve.

Now, the ordaining of future Rabbis is not one of the mitzvot one would ordinarily include among those that one must be willing to die for. Yet, we see that Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava was prepared to die in order to continue this process. Apparently, Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava felt that were he to abandon this practice, then Torah would be forgotten from Israel. Rather than have fully-trained and qualified Rabbis, the Jewish People would suffer through those who lack the knowledge and wisdom to properly interpret Jewish Law. There would be no qualified candidates to staff rabbinic courts or to judge between man and his fellow.

In short, Torah would be forgotten, G-d forbid! And this is why Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava was ready to give up his life.

Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon made a similar calculation. He told Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma that were his Torah learning limited to private study, then Torah would not continue to the following generations. After all, who would teach it?

He therefore felt it obligatory to continue public discourse, despite the danger. For Torah must be transmitted by its teachers, from one generation to the next.

Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma could see that Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon intended strictly for the sake of Heaven and that he was perfectly sincere in being prepared to sacrifice his life so that Torah not be forgotten. This caused Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma to recall our mishnah: **הלומד על מנת ללמד מספיקין בידו ללמוד וללמד** - *One who learns Torah in order to teach, is given the opportunity to learn and teach.* **והלומד על מנת לעשות מספיקין בידו ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות** - *One who learns Torah in order to do, is given the opportunity to learn, to teach, to be protected from transgression, and to fulfill the commandments (that is, "to do").*

The idea was that the "learning in order to teach," -- that is, the going out to teach his students -- would enable the students to teach and "to do."

I could extend this idea by quoting the gemara in Kiddushin 40b, **שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה** - *that learning brings one to action*, that is, to the performance of mitzvot. If one does not learn, how would they know how to do?

The gemara records Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma as asking Rabbi Chanina, **אמר לו: כלום מעשה בא לידך?** Earlier, we translated this as "Has any particularly challenging incident presented itself to you? [Meaning, if so, let me know how you conducted yourself.]" Through the freedom of poetic license, I would interpret this as "Has a *ma'aseh* come to your hand?" My idea is that this means, "Have the Heavens caused you the merit **לשמור ולעשות** - to "guard" and to "do"?"

I'll continue this poetic approach as follows: When Rabbi Yossi heard that Rabbi Chanina was a *ba'al ma'asim*, a man of action, that he cared not for his own self, and that he was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to teach his students, he immediately knew that Rabbi Chanina was entirely dedicated to fulfilling the wishes of Heaven. So he told him, "If so, let my portion in Torah be from your portion. And let my lot in good deeds be from your lot!" In my estimation, Rabbi Yossi had now conceded the argument to Rabbi Chanina.

Yet, Rabbi Chanina was still burned to death, along with his sefer Torah.

Why?

Because **קללת חכם אפילו על תנאי היא באה** - the curse of a *chacham*, even when conditional, will come to pass (Makkot 11a).

רבי צדוק אומר אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהם ולא קרדום לחפור בהם

Rabbi Tzaddok would say, “Do not make the Torah a crown to magnify yourself with or a spade with which to dig.” It is a fundamental truth that Torah learning motivated by pride and self-aggrandizement has no basis upon which to survive. Rather, when learning, one should be especially careful to conduct themselves with humility -- and certainly not be motivated by a desire to argue (just for the sake of arguing) nor to use one’s learning as a way of showing off how superior one is to his fellows.

One idea is that, just prior to embarking on one’s learning, one should have in mind to do *teshuvah*. The learning itself thus becomes an exercise in humility. This thought appears in an a note I saw from the great Chassidic master, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhinsk. There, he says this explicitly. One must ponder his own deeds prior to study -- or else whatever Torah he learns will soon be forgotten. Recall what it says in Tehillim (50:16-17): *But to the wicked, God said, “For what purpose do you recount my decrees and bear My covenant upon your lips?” For you hate discipline and you threw my words behind you.*

I recall once entering the room of my master and teacher, the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian. He told me he was in the midst of writing a commentary to the sefer *Shev Shema’tata*, written by the the author of *Sefer Ketzot haChoshen*.

“You should know,” Rabbi Chaim Shmuel told me, “that the holy author of *Shev Shema’tata*, prior to that day’s learning, would open his *sefer* and quietly meditate upon his deeds, contemplating his own worthiness. He would read the verse from Tehillim, “*But to the wicked, God said . . .*”

Rabbi Chaim continued, “. . . and the author of *Shev Shema’tata* did this because he considered himself unworthy of studying the holy Torah. Therefore, each time he sat down to learn, he would reproach himself, search his deeds, and do *teshuvah*.”

“This is how he would implant within himself the trait of humility -- and that was how he merited to raise himself up to be great in Torah and be the author of such wondrously profound *sefarim*. The entire Torah world learns his *Ketzot haChoshen*, his *Avnei Miluim*, and his *Shev Shema’tata* today. It is due to the modesty and humility with which he approached his own learning that he merited to write works that are renowned today throughout the Torah world.”

My Rebbi continued, “And if this is how the brilliant and holy author of *Shev Shema'tata* approached his learning, than how much more so people like ourselves -- if we want that, like the author of *Shev Shema'tata*, that our Torah will survive.”

“Instead we see that the everything is the reverse of what it should be. We come to the Beit Hamidrash to learn and what is the first thing we do -- make a few phone calls and then smoke a cigarette or two. Next thing, we stroll inside to sit down with our *chavruta*. What happens? Chit-chat about the latest news and what is happening with the family and the business. Any only afterwards do we get to actually opening a *sefer*.”

“What remains of the hour we had set aside for learning? Half-an-hour, perhaps. And that's what we call ‘preparing for learning.’

Think of what would be if, rather than the nonsense described above, we would set our minds to *teshuva* instead! If only we would negate ourselves before Hashem the way that the author of *Ketzot* did! We would never come to this kind of time-wasting and hubris in the guise of so-called “learning.” Those who learn *Mussar* discover themselves incapable of having their minds wander to outside matters while in the midst of learning.

The rule is that learning will not, in and of itself, bring one to humility unless one precedes it with *mussar* study and self-effacement. Whoever learns Torah without beginning this way, will find that his learning will not only fail to bring him to humility, but will actually bring him to pridefulness.

Note well what our Rabbis have warned us about: “Don't make them into a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor a spade to dig with. So too did Hillel state: ‘He who uses the crown of Torah will pass on.’ From this you may learn that anyone who derives benefit from words of Torah takes his life from the world.”

How awesome are the words of our Rabbis (Avoth d'Rabbi Natan 38): “When they captured Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yishmael so as to execute them, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel wondered aloud: ‘Woe to us that we'll be executed like common desecrators of Shabbat, like idolaters, like sexual transgressors, and murderers!’”

“Rabbi Yishmael ben Eliezer said to him, ‘Would you like me to tell you just one thing?’”

“Go ahead,” he said.

“Perhaps, one time when you expounded upon the Temple Mount, with the masses of Yisrael arrayed before you, you became proud.”

“He said in return, ‘Yishmael, my brother, a man must be prepared to accept his affliction.’”

One could say that this midrash tells us that Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was punished for having had personal benefit from words of Torah. Surely those like ourselves must take this to heart! If someone truly great like Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was punished for having thoughts of pridefulness, how much more so must unworthy souls like ourselves not fall into pridefulness!

I heard that the Rebbe of Sanz zt”l, author of “Divrei Yatziv,” when opening his gemara prior to giving his *shiur*, would gaze upon the blank, first page. Then he would gaze at the final page -- also blank. He would then tell his students, “This is why the gemara begins with a blank page: To remind one not to learn with haughtiness; to not not tell oneself, “See how much Torah I have learned! How many *chachamim* have I learned from!”

“Rather,” continued the Rebbe, “just as before one gets to the actual Talmud, the first page is blank, so should the student look upon himself as well. He should consider himself as if he were “blank,” empty, as if he had not yet learned anything whatsoever.”

“And were one to look at himself after having learned great amounts, having ‘filled his belly’ with talmud and the legal codes, and tell himself: ‘Wow! Look at how much I have learned! I am truly on the verge of greatness!’ -- at that point he should have a look at the last page of the talmud, the one that is left blank.”

“He will now have the proper perspective. He should tell himself: ‘Just as this last page is blank, bereft of content, so am I. True, I have learned many pages. However, it amounts to little more than nothing, for the holy Torah is as broad as the sea and as expansive as the land mass. The quantity I have learned amounts to less than a drop in the ocean.’”

And this is what one must grasp before even beginning the day’s learning. One must at that moment awaken himself to do *teshuvah* and to think humbly. In this way alone will he stand a chance that the Torah he is about to do will survive.

**וכך היה הלל אומר ודישתמש בתגא חלף הא למדת כל הנהנה מדברי
תורה נוטל חייו מן העולם:**

The phrase above, *This is what Hillel would say*: “From here you may learn that whoever derives benefit from words of Torah takes his life from the world,”

appears twice in Pirkei Avoth. I was wondering why Rabbeinu haKodesh, who organized the mishnayoth, would have seen fit to bring this statement of Hillel a second time, after it had already appeared in the first chapter (Mishnah 13).

I would like to suggest an answer, inspired by a gemara in Berachot 32b. There, it lists four things that require strengthening: Torah, good deeds, prayer, and *derech erez*. Rashi explains that this means that man must strengthen himself in them with all his might.

The reason one must strengthen himself in Torah learning is that the *yetsar hara* knows it will have no dominion over those who learn Torah with pure intent, solely for its own sake. Not only will it have no dominion, but the *yetsar* would not even be able to entice him to sin. Given that this is the case -- and that surely we wish to be protected from the influences of the *yetsar* -- it is incumbent upon one and all to strengthen themselves in Torah and to see to it that their learning is “for its own sake.”

What is “learning for its own sake”? A definition I like is that it means that the learning should be directed towards action, that is, that it be with the goal of enhancing one’s observance of Mitzvot. This idea is hinted at in the gemara’s statement that the goal of *chochma* is *teshuva* and *ma’asim tovim*. And Kiddushin 40b says that “Learning leads to good deeds.”

Let us have a look at the context of our mishnah. First it says that he who learns in order to do will find that he will not only learn, but will teach, guard himself against transgression, and perform good deeds. Then the mishnah brings the phrase we’re focusing on here: “. . . whoever derives benefit from words of Torah takes his life from the world.”

The connection between the two parts of the mishnah is that they emphasize that man must guard himself from falling into the clutches of the *yetsar*, which will try and entice him into directing his learning to be not “*l’shma*,” but for ulterior motive. That is, that the *yetsar* will try and get him to learn not for the sake of doing, but for his own aggrandizement.

The story of the *meraglim*, the spies, is a lesson in how ulterior motives can cloud one’s judgement. The Torah tells us how great they were: *distinguished men; heads of the Children of Israel were they*. The Torah calls them “*anashim*.” And what does “*anashim*” mean here? The midrash, commenting this verse, tells us that “in every instance” it means “men who are *tzaddikim*.”

We see that the spies, at the time they left Moshe's presence, prior to entering Eretz Yisrael, were *tzaddikim*. According to the Zohar, the following occurred: Upon entering the Land, they said to one another, "If Moshe were to bring Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael, he would depose us from our positions of tribal leadership and appoint others in our stead. With that, they were seized with a "*ruach shel shtut*" and pridefulness -- and proceeded to speak badly of Eretz Yisrael. Their "report" and its aftermath led to that entire generation's having to die in the wilderness.

This is why Rabbeinu HaKaddosh, the editor of the Six Orders of Mishnah, placed here the statement that whoever benefits from words of Torah, casts away his worldly life. This is precisely what had occurred with the spies. Motivated by a desire to benefit from "*kavod haTorah*" and to not lose their claims on leadership, they were punished with their worldly lives.



רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר כָּל הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַתּוֹרָה גּוֹפוֹ
 מְכַבֵּד עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת. וְכָל הַמְחַלֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה גּוֹפוֹ
 מְחַלֵּל עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת דָּוִד

Rabbi Yosse says: One who honors the Torah is himself honored by people. One who disgraces the Torah is himself disgraced by people.

Our mishnah says that whoever honors the Torah is himself honored by the people. The Hebrew word used here to say “himself” is גּוֹפוֹ. Literally, this means “his body.” I wonder if there is some significance to the mishnah’s using the word גּוֹפוֹ. In other words, is it possible that it means גּוֹפוֹ in its literal sense? Is it somehow saying that “his body” would be honored? I believe that the answer could be “yes.” And, I will explain the mishnah as if that is, in fact, its intent. I therefore ask, “Is that the purpose of man, that his גּוֹף be honored?” A further question: Why would honoring someone’s גּוֹף be a fitting reward for his having honored the Torah? What does one have to do with the other?

My answer, just as the question, will follow my reading of this mishnah, that when it says that his גּוֹף is *עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת*, it means that his *physical self* is being honored. I will therefore suggest the following: That the mishnah is saying that it is not possible to honor the Torah or engage with it unless one’s self is “honored” and clean.

Our Rabbis tell us (Shabbat 50b) *רוחץ אדם פניו ידיו ורגליו בכל יום בשביל קונו*, that one must rinse his face, hands, and feet daily for the sake of his Maker. They say as well (Shabbat 114a) that a *talmid chacham* who allows himself to be seen with stained clothing deserves death, for [because he represents Hashem’s Torah in an unseemly fashion] he causes others to disdain the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah.

It is also said (Mishnayoth Sotah), *ונקיות מביאה לידי טהרה*, that “cleanliness” brings one to purity. Ultimately, this leads to (among other things) *ruach hakodesh*, Divine inspiration. (See note below.)

There are halachic consequences to poor physical hygiene and having *ruach ra’ah* attached to one’s self. Shulkhan Arukh warns us to take care, prior to eating and to tefillah, that our hands not come into contact with parts of the

body assumed to be exceptionally unclean. Similarly, it lists several situations that require one to rinse his hands afterwards. Among these are arising from sleep, exiting a privy or bathhouse, after cutting one's nails, after removing one's shoes, and after rubbing one's hair. It says that failure to do so would cause the talmid chacham to forget his Torah, while the non-talmid chacham would suffer some other kind of mental lapse. (*)

(*) This latter consequence, namely forgetting Torah or some other mental lapse, is associated with the mystical quality of *ruach ra'ah* that, according to the Rabbis, clings to a person in these situations -- not because of "uncleanliness" per se..

In other words, the lack of "cleanliness" indicates, for the Rabbis, the presence of *ruach ra'ah*. The assumption that *ruach ra'ah* is present, then, compels us to rinse our hands in these situations.

One is not allowed to say *kriyat shema* nor study Torah in a place that is either filthy or foul-smelling, for this is not called "honoring" Torah. We find that one who wears tefillin must have a גוף נקי.

In my opinion, when the teacher of our mishnah says המכבד את התורה גופו כל מכובד, it is not saying *Whoever honors the Torah, is himself honored by the people*. Rather, it says that whoever honors the Torah will, due the honor he wishes to give Torah, necessarily have a גוף that is מכובד amongst the people -- or, as an alternative reading, will honor his own body.

This person knows that he may not involve himself with Torah unless his body is free of the types of uncleanliness associated with *ru'ach ra'ah*. If he is known as a Torah scholar, there is an additional requirement. Namely, all aspects of his outward appearance, including his clothing, must be free of the kinds of "stains" that would cause others to disrespect the Torah he represents. David Hamelech says in Tehillim (26:6) בנקיון כפי ואסבבה את מזבחך יקוק: ארחץ, *I wash in purity my hands and circle around Your altar, Hashem.* (*)

(*) The נקיין referred to here, according to its traditional understanding, means "free of sin." However, we are treating it literally, using the broad poetic license taken by *darshanim*.

Berachot 43b, which parallels the gemara quoted above that says that a Torah scholar should not go out with greasily-stained clothing, lists six things that are "disgraceful" for a talmid chacham. Among them is that he should not go out with shoes that are visibly shabby.

One might ask why the mishnah is not worded differently, if our understanding of the mishnah's intent is correct. For instance, it could have said, "Whoever honors his *guf* and is honored by his fellow man honors the Torah" rather than "*Whoever honors the Torah, is himself honored by the people.*"

In defense of my reading, I would say that there is good reason why the mishnah was not worded in a way that more closely coincides with that I read the author's intent. The reason is that people might misunderstand.

Specifically, they will think that the main thing in life is to pay great attention to one's physical self, adorning and beautifying it to the greatest extent possible. Inevitably, this will excite the *yetser hara* and draw oneself towards sin. An illustration of this is what the gemara (Nedarim 9b) says about Shimon HaTzaddik.

It says that although it was Shimon HaTzaddik's custom to not partake of the sacrifice offered by a *nazir* who had become *tameh*, he made an exception in the case of a particular *nazir*, after having heard of this *nazir*'s great sincerity. What happened was that, upon seeing a certain *nazir* whose hair had grown to be exceptionally beautiful, he asked him why he had decided to shave it off. The man answered that he did so because upon seeing his own reflection in the water and noting his great beauty, his *yetser* seized hold of him. It tempted him to take advantage of this great attractiveness and use it to attract others to sinful pursuits. The man explained that he told the *yetser* (meaning himself) that he has no reason to be so vain, as like all men, he was destined to be eaten by maggots and worms. He therefore decided to shave his hair, the object of his vanity -- and do so as an act of dedication to Hashem. Specifically, he would take a vow of *nazirut*.

Shimon HaTzaddik was so impressed by the purity of his motivation, that he said that this man personified the ideal behind the mitzvah of *nazirut*. This story illustrates the danger of great vanity and the positive value of negating that urge.

We see hints of this as well in the midrash's account of the story of Yosef, who was punished for, amongst other things, curling his hair while his father sat in mourning for him. (See note below.)

Note: The midrash emphasizes the insensitivity of his eating, drinking, and primping himself while his father mourned. Presumably, however, the vanity involved in pampering himself to this extent contributed to Hashem's anger. The punishment was that, because of his beauty, Potiphar's wife would be tempted to sin with him.

Berachot 43b, quoted above as listing six things that are “disgraceful” for a *talmid chacham*, includes amongst them his walking through the marketplace wearing clothing that is heavily-perfumed. (See note below.)

Note: The commentators seem to understand the reason is because the perfumed clothing raises suspicion that he is trying to attract illicit relations by feminizing himself. We, however, through the license of darshanut, would like to say that it relates to the idea that vainly pampering oneself can lead to transgression, just as we read earlier, in the story of Yosef.

In conclusion, those individuals whom the public associates with Torah are forbidden to bring disgrace to Torah by wearing filthy clothes. Not only are they to avoid unseemly appearance, but are expected to present themselves in a manner that brings honor to Torah. However, they must take care to not adorn themselves to the extent that it excites their vanity and ultimately brings them to sin.

Here is how the Rambam formulates these laws, in Hilchot De’ot 5:9:

The clothes of a *talmid chacham* should be pleasant-looking and clean. It is forbidden for there to found upon his garments a stain or grease. He should not wear the clothing of “kings,” like gold and purple, as they would attract everyone’s attention. Nor should he wear pauper’s dress, which disparages its wearer. Rather, he should wear clothing that is middle-of-the-road and pleasant.

. . . He should not wear heavily-patched shoes in summertime. In winter, however, it is permitted if he is poor [as the shoes will be covered with mud and their patches will not be evident to the public.]

He should not go out to the marketplace with himself perfumed, his clothes perfumed, or his hair perfumed. However, if he does it in order to counter body odor, then it is permitted. . . . [The reason for not doing this is] is to avoid suspicion.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖**כל המכבד את התורה גופו מכובד על הבריות**

In the days of Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l, who passed away in 1845, Morocco was not yet an independent state. Its judicial system was haphazard and not yet formalized. By contrast, there were fully-functional and organized Jewish Batei Din in many cities. Jews would come there to have their disputes adjudicated.

Rabbi Chaim was a member of one of these Batei Din, together with Rabbi David ben Chazan and Rabbi Avraham Kuryat. Theirs was the supreme Beit Din of Mogador and Essaouira.

During Rabbi Chaim's lifetime, Morocco's government attempted to formalize and codify some aspects of governmental law. It is said that the guidelines and decisions published by Rabbi Chaim's Beit Din were held in such high regard, that they even influenced Morocco's judicial system during this period.



רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ אוֹמֵר הַחוּשֵׁךְ עֲצָמוֹ מִן הַדִּין
 פּוֹרֵק מִמֶּנּוּ אֵיבָה וְגִזְלֵי וְשִׁבּוּעֵת שְׂוֵא. וְהִגֵּס לְבוֹ
 בְּהוֹרָאָה שׁוֹטָה רָשָׁע וְגִס רוּחַ:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה ז'

Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabbi Yosse says: One who withdraws from judgment removes from himself hatred and robbery and an unnecessary oath. And one who is brazen in issuing rulings is foolish, wicked, and proud.

The mishnah says that one who frivolously hands down rulings is a fool, wicked, and arrogant. I would like to try and understand what is behind this assessment. Of all the things to call someone who rules frivolously! A fool, wicked, and arrogant? Why this choice of words?

By way of introduction, I would like to quote a gemara in Sanhedrin 97a that says that *Ben David will not come until the last coin has disappeared from the pocket*. This is only one of the many answers offered in Sanhedrin 97a and 98a as to the question of what need happen prior to the coming of Ben David, which means the time of Mashiach.

What is the connection between there not being any more pocket money and the final redemption?

One answer to that question might be found in another gemara, Yoma 9b, which says that the second temple was destroyed due to blind hatred.

It follows from there that putting an end to the blind hatred amongst us would be the key to bringing about the final redemption. However, what is blind hatred? How, specifically, would it be defined? How would we rectify it? How would we eliminate it?

Let us take the case of a *dayan*, a Rabbinic judge. Were he to be incapable, unconscientious, or unethical, he could easily wind up distorting the judgment. He would transfer money from one person to another contrary to *halacha*, without cause or due process. That could happen because he was careless in his legal research or in his investigation. Or it could occur because he rushed to

judgement. It could be that he failed to deliberate properly. Or he failed to make a sincere attempt to understand the facts of the case and the legal issues.

The end result is that someone winds up losing, unjustifiably, and has to pay money to a party that he really does not owe money to. Hatred and anger are the inevitable result.

And this is hatred “without cause,” as it came about only because of the judge’s failures and dishonesty.

Had the *dayan* judged properly, this money that was taken away unrightfully would still be in the man’s pocket. Were the money not taken away, there would be no cause for hatred. For, why should this man otherwise hate the person who was his adversary in court? Because they had a dispute? Why should that alone cause hatred? Had they gone to an honest *dayan*, the *dayan* would have properly explained the *halacha*, and both men would understand why no payment was required. Instead, there is hatred! And it’s hatred for nothing! Were it not for this *dayan*, there would be no reason at all for this man to hate the other.

The normal pattern of life is that when a man has spent his last penny, he turns to G-d, to pray that He will save him from his sorrows. When that last penny was stolen from him, whether by violence or deception, man’s reaction is different: He will pursue the one who cheated him. Perhaps he will pray as well, but he will also dedicate himself to tracking down the thief and do whatever he needs to in order to get the money back from him.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* wants to bring the *geulah*. And, He wants us to pray for it. One way He accomplishes this is by bringing upon us poverty. Because of the poverty, man will then turn to his Maker. He will then pray for the *geulah*.

Now, when the *dayan* acts dishonestly and irresponsibly, the cheated party does not feel that his loss came from Heaven. Rather, he feels that he was stolen from. He will therefore do whatever he can to get that money back.

And, when I say “Whatever he can do,” I mean “Whatever he can do.” *Shulkhan Arukh Choshen Mishpat* goes out the window -- as does fear of G-d. *Tefillah* might go out the window as well. For, what good is *tefillah* when Jewish Law clearly states that the money is his?

He will rationalize: “Was it the Heavens that decreed that I should be cheated? Of course not! Why then should I be turning to the Heavens for the solution?” Rather, he will try and chase down his adversary, to do whatever he can to get that money back into his own pocket -- where it belongs.

In cases like this, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* must find some other way of evoking this man's *tefillah*.

The Rabbis of our mishnah therefore refer to a *dayan* who rushes to judgment and thereby cheats his litigants as "a fool, wicked, and arrogant." For, it is the **הרוח גסי הרוח**, the arrogant, who undermine the *Shechina*. This means, among other things, that they delay the *geulah*.

As we said, this delay occurs because the *geulah* cannot occur without our *tefillot* -- and the person who has lost his last penny to theft will not pray until the stolen money gets back to his pocket. All of us therefore have to wait until such time as this money is restored.

Once the money is restored, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* could arrange some other means for this person to lose it -- that is, to lose it in a way that will cause him to cry out to Hashem for salvation.

That cry will then become a prayer for the *geulah*.

והגס לבו בהוראה שוטה רשע וגס רוח:

I would now like to take a different approach as to why the mishnah says that he who hands down rulings frivolously is a fool, wicked, and arrogant.

Perhaps the intent of the mishnah is not only to say to the *dayan* that he must take great care in his court cases, but extends this admonition to the communal Rabbi who deals not with litigants, but with issues of *issur v'hetter*, that is, the prohibited and permitted. Examples would be questions as to whether a certain pot need be kashered, whether a certain food might be eaten, or whether some other activity is halachically permitted. Alternatively, he rules for someone else that something, be it a cooking utensil be it some activity, is prohibited.

After giving his decision in the above situations, the Rav then allows his students to see that he is unwilling to personally fulfill that which he has just instructed someone else to either do or not do. My belief is that this mishnah is referring to such a situation.

I believe that proof for my interpretation appears in the mishnah in Pirkei Avot that follows ours. Unlike our mishnah, it uses the word **דין**, which means "judge." It says **אל תהי דן יחידי**, that one should not *judge* on one's own.

It does not say, however, that one should not give a *Rabbinic opinion* on one's own. (see note below)

Note: Of course, it is obvious why this second mishnah does not say that one should not give a Rabbinic opinion on one's own -- for there is nothing wrong with doing so! Avoth itself tells us (in the first chapter) עשה לך רב -- Appoint for yourself a Rav. Note that it says "A Rav," one Rav. Therefore, it is not only permitted and the traditional practice, but would seem to be the ideal.

We therefore wish to emphasize once again that our readings are intended derekh derash, that is, using the process of creative, poetic license rather than that of plain meaning.

In contrast to that mishnah, ours does not use the word רבי. What this indicates, I believe, is that it refers to situations where a Rav (not as a judge) freely tells his community what they have to do (whether it's in the form of *mussar* or as a matter of *halacha*) and then fails to follow his own directives. Rabbinic hypocrisy like this brings the Torah to disgrace. Needless to say, it inevitably results in people's eventually disregarding whatever the Rav had originally told them.

Another point I would like to bring out is that not only must the Rav follow the advice he gives the community, but that he must be prepared to do things for them that might normally be considered below his dignity. I remember, for example, the first Yom Kippur we spent in the Lyons yeshiva. The Motzei Yom Kippur tefillot had concluded and the students had all left for home. I was alone there, waiting for the janitor, who would be coming to clean up.

A Jewish man and his wife came in to the building. She had come to use the yeshiva mikveh. However, it was simply not usable. It was positively filthy. We had posted a sign explaining that our mikveh was not operational at the moment and that ladies should go instead to one of the other mikva'oth. This woman, however, refused. She told me that she had no intention of going to another mikveh. If she could not use ours, she said, she would just return home.

A famous statement of our Rabbis immediately popped into mind, that it is particularly praiseworthy Motzei Yom Kippur to go from mitzvah to mitzvah. Although they were referring to beginning to build one's Sukkah, it was quite obvious that here before me was a mitzvah opportunity not to be missed.

So, I told them to please wait while I see to it that the mikveh becomes ready for use.

I descended to the mikveh, drained the water, cleaned the reservoir, and refilled the mikveh. Two hours later, I told the waiting couple that it was now available.

As I returned home, I felt great inner peace and satisfaction, combined with a feeling of *simcha shel mitzvah*. Although it meant that I was arriving home so late that night, on Motzei Yom HaKippurim no less, I was happy to have had the opportunity for the mitzvah. This woman knew that I expected all the community women to use the mikveh. How would she have reacted had I told her, “Look, the janitor didn’t show up. The mikveh is filthy tonight and simply cannot be used.”? Quite possibly, she would have returned home and never come to mikveh again.



הוא הִיָּה אֹמֵר אֶל תְּהִי דִן יְחִידִי שְׂאִין דִּן
 יְחִידִי אֶלָּא אֶחָד. וְאֵל תֵּאמַר קִבְּלוּ דְעִתִּי שְׂהוּ
 רְשָׁאִין וְלֹא אֶתְּהִי:
 אבות פרק ד משנה ח

He used to say: Do not judge alone, for there is only One Who judges alone. And do not say, “accept my opinion,” for they have permission, and not you.

The mishnah says that one should not judge on one’s own. In its simple meaning, the advice is directed at those who will be adjudicating Jewish Law. However, we could extend it to apply more broadly.

All of us “judge” on a daily basis. One could say that the mishnah is telling us that we should consult with others when making important decisions.

Mishlei (11:14) says, **וּתְשׁוּעָה בְּרַב יוֹעֵץ**, which translates as *with many counselors, there is victory*. That part of the verse is in apposition to the first part of the verse, which says “*Without strategy, the people falls.*” I believe that the verse is not merely stressing that one should strategize, but to not do it alone. And, who is it that is telling us to not do it alone? None other than Shlomo HaMelech, who is known as the wisest of all men.

One might assume that Shlomo HaMelech took his own advice to heart as well. Despite being more wise than all other men, he still felt the need to consult with others.

Although we translated it as “victory,” because of the context, the hebrew says **וּתְשׁוּעָה**, which literally means “salvation.” One’s “salvation” will come due to the multiplicity of individuals with whom one seeks counsel. When faced with “judging” how to decide within a given situation, this is the way of discovering the *emet*.

Note as well what David HaMelech said, (Tehillim 119:99) **מִכָּל מַלְמָדֵי הַשְּׂכֵלְתִי**, *From all those I have taught, I have learned.*

Helpful advice does not necessarily come only from those known to be wiser and more resourceful, but even from those normally not considered a first choice with whom to seek counsel. When the mishnah says to not judge alone and - in my reading of it - that one should seek counsel in every major decision, it does not say with whom one should consult. If the mishnah is only speaking of Rabbinic judges, then it is obvious that they would be consulting with other qualified judges. But, with my reading, that it is speaking about everyone, then we could also say that it is saying that one should not limit oneself to those who are one's intellectual equal or greater.

One sees this from Hashem Himself, in my opinion. For instance, we say that He consults with *malachim*. There is also the idea that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* works with His “Beit Din,” as we see according to one opinion in Midrash Bereishit Rabba 51:2, אר"א כל מקום שנאמר וה' הוא ובית דינו, *Wherever it says 'ה' and Hashem, it means Him, together with His Beit Din.* (The vav functions like an *and*.) The context there, as in most other places where the principle is cited, is that He *acts* with this Beit Din in certain situations (such as meting out punishment) and might refer to one of His attributes. However, I would like to say that this shows how important it is to consult with others, for He, too, has this “Beit Din.”

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 1:1) says that even the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does not sit in judgment alone.

The mishnah continues, *and do not say, “You must accept my view,” for this is their [the majority’s] right, not yours.* Who is it that would insist, “Accept my view!”? It is the person who stubbornly insists that he is not in need of anyone else’s input. He does not wish to hear anyone else’s opinion, as he considers himself smarter than one and all.

He who is willing to join with others, though, demonstrates humility. He is following the ways of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, who, as we said before, consults with His “Beit Din” and with “Malachim,” even though they have no wisdom other than what Hashem Himself put into them. . . .



רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן אָמַר כָּל הַמְּקִיִּים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מֵעֲנִי
 סוֹפוֹ לְקִיְמָה מַעֲשֶׂה. וְכָל הַמְּבַטֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה
 מַעֲשֶׂה סוֹפוֹ לְבִטּוּלָה מֵעֲנִי:
 אבות פרק ד משנה ט

Rabbi Yonatan would say: Whoever fulfills the Torah in poverty, will ultimately fulfill it in wealth; and whoever neglects the Torah in wealth, will ultimately neglect it in poverty.

The mishnah begins by telling us that whoever fulfills the Torah in poverty will ultimately fulfill it in wealth. If we were to take this literally, in its most plain sense, we would certainly wonder what this means. We know that many of the talmud's sages carried on their studies under quite difficult circumstances all their lives. Yet, they did not eventually become wealthy.

I would therefore suggest that the mishnah refers not to financial poverty and wealth, but to enlightenment. And, not only that, it refers to proper attitude. What I mean is this: One should not say, "I have invested great effort and time in Torah and Mitzvot, yet still can not understand or meaningfully relate to them." The Mishnah is telling us, "Don't despair; insight and sense of purpose will come."

The midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu would assemble and disassemble the *mishkan* on a daily basis, each of the seven days of "initiation," known as **שבועת ימי המילואים**. He assembled it again on the eighth day and left it standing, according to one opinion. Moshe said that on that day, the *Shechina* would rest upon the *mishkan*.

I wonder why Moshe built and rebuilt the *mishkan* each of the seven days prior to that, if he knew that, in any event, the *Shechina* would not be resting upon it until the eighth day.

Although this is certainly not the plain meaning, I would like to suggest, by way of *mussar*, that Moshe did so in order to teach Yisrael the lesson that they should continue to serve Hashem even when they don't have any sense of gratification from it. For, it could sometimes happen that one's *yetser* could

cause one to feel that serving Hashem is nothing more than a burden, *chas v'shalom*. The result could then be, *chas v'shalom*, that one might cease his *avodath Hashem*.

Therefore, Moshe assembled, disassembled, and reassembled the *Mishkan* each of those seven days. Seeing that the *Shechina* was not resting upon the *Mishkan*, despite Moshe's efforts, the Bnei Yisrael became ashamed. They blamed themselves, thinking that this must mean that Hashem had not yet forgiven them for the sin of the calf. Then, on the eighth day, which was the first of Nissan, the *Shechina* finally did descend upon the tabernacle.

To reiterate what we just said above, it happens that sometimes we do a *mitzvah* and feel absolutely nothing afterwards. Physically, one has eaten a piece of matzah on Pesach or shaken a lulav on Sukkot, but, spiritually, one feels nothing. One might ask themselves, "Why did I eat that matzah just now? Why did I shake the lulav?"

This is why, in my opinion, the mishnah tells us to not get discouraged, not to give up. For, eventually, if one keeps working at it, he will begin to feel spiritually enriched. Isn't that what Rashi teaches us in Shemot 19:5?

The verse there says, **אם שמוע תשמעו בקלי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה . . . ועתה** . . . **מכל העמים** - *And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you will be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples . . .* Rashi says, **אם עתה תקבלו עליכם יערב לכם מכאן ואילך, שכל התחלות קשות- ועתה** - *And now- If you accept it upon yourselves, it will be pleasant to you from here onwards, for all beginnings are difficult.*

Sometimes, this process takes years.

A gemara in Eiruvim (54b) tells us, interpreting a verse in Mishlei, that Torah is compared to a fig tree. (The verse says, *He who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit.*) In what way are words of Torah compared to fig tree? Every time one handles a fig tree, one finds ripe figs on it. Words of Torah are the same: Every time one studies them, he finds "flavor" in them.

Rashi explains to the gemara above that the fig tree, unlike others, has fruit that ripens at different times. One may therefore eat from it at almost any time. Torah is the same.

I would add to the above that the nature of Torah and of fig trees is that the more one searches, the more "tasty fruit" one will find, for Torah does not reveal

the extent of its wisdom in one dazzling moment. I would add that, the more one works at Torah, the more “tasty” he will find its “fruit.”

When it comes to mitzvot, how does one draw closer to finding the “taste” within them? Only through Torah study.

Talmud Bavli Menachot 53b says that Yisrael may be compared to an olive. Another gemara, Berachot 39a, discusses what size olive is meant when the Rabbis defined the volume known as כזית, “like an olive.” It concludes that the volume known as כזית is that of the AGURI, which is medium-sized. It is called AGURI because its oil, its שמן, is “gathered” within it.

I would like to take this idea further. We just said that Yisrael is compared to a certain type of olive which has the characteristic of having its oil, its שמן, welled up inside it. The word for “the oil” is השמן. The letters of this word can be rearranged to read נשמה. With that, we can now say that Yisrael is like an olive because they are engaged in Torah study, which is נשמת ישראל.

Let us go even further with this. The Torah obligates one to fill up his body just as the AGURI olive is filled with שמן. Why? Because a lamp will not ignite unless it is filled with שמן. Without oil, the lamp will not light, no matter how hard one tries. So, too, with Yisrael. No matter how many mitzvot he does, and no matter how much effort he puts into them, he will not “ignite,” that is, feel their “taste,” unless he fills himself with Torah.

The gemara from Menachot that compares Yisrael to an olive goes on to say מה זית אינו מוציא שמנו אלא ע”י כתיחה, אף ישראל אין חוזרין למוטב אלא ע”י יסורין, *Just as the olive does not exude its oil except through being crushed, so does Yisrael not return to “the good” except through affliction.* I would say this somewhat differently: Just as an olive does not exude its oil except through being crushed, so does Torah not remain with someone except through suffering, hard work, and poverty. Only after putting great effort into learning and mitzvot will one hope to sense their “tastiness.”

A hint to this might be found elsewhere in Avoth, where it says, in reference to Torah, בן בג בג אומר הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה, *Ben Bag Bag says, “Turn it over and over again, for all is within it.”* Not until one has “turned it over and over” could one expect to find meaning in Torah and Mitzvot.

This is why Moshe assembled and reassembled the *mishkan* daily, during the seven days of המילואים. He wanted to demonstrate to Yisrael the way of Torah and Divine service. One cannot hope to immediately feel “taste” and spiritual

satisfaction from mitzvoth, simply because one has jumped into them. The *Mishkan* demonstrated this, for Yisrael saw that despite the fact that the *Mishkan* had been assembled on that first day, the *Shechina* had not yet descended upon it. And what did Moshe do? He rebuilt it the very next day.

And, even then, on the second day, the *Shechina* did not descend. Before Yisrael's eyes, Moshe put it up again on the third day, undeterred. The pattern continued day four, day five, day six, and day seven.

Finally, on day eight, the *Shechina* arrived.

The people saw that one should not become discouraged, for the *ta'am* will come -- after the proper degree of preparation, effort, and time.

Getting back to our mishnah, that is why it says **המקיים את התורה מעוני סופו כל לקיימה מעושר כל**. Although a person does not yet feel a *ta'am*, if he continues onward despite this, he will eventually fulfill the mitzvoth in wealth, that is, spiritually enriched. It will be the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* that will enrich him, rewarding him with the insight to feel *ta'am* for mitzvoth.

Those who give up, however, and do not maintain their being **את התורה מעוני מקיים**, will not see this wealth. They will never sense spiritual *ta'am*.

Remember what David HaMelech said (Tehillim 34:9), **וראו כי טוב יקוק טעמו** *Taste and see that Hashem is good*. . . Or, *Ta'amu u're'u*. Taste the *ta'am*.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל המקיים את התורה מעוני סופו לקיימה מעושר

Rabbi Chaim Pinto was beloved and admired by all, Jews and Non-Jews alike. All would come to him, presents in hand, asking for his blessing. Amongst the many who flocked to him were those who sailed the seas, who would bring Rav Chaim gifts from the places they had visited.

The Rabbanit had a special room for these. She would tell her husband, Rav Chaim, that her plan was to open the room once their children get older. She would then sell off these exotic treasures, so as to pay for marrying them off honorably.

Rabbi Chaim would listen to all this and respond with pasukim. **יעזב את והבוטח ביקוק** (Tehillim 37:28) *He will not abandon his faithful* ולא חסידיו ולא

חסד יסובבנו . . . *but for the one who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him* (Tehillim 32:10). The Rabbanit persisted, however: That room will not be opened. The gifts will remain there, waiting to be used as dowries for their daughters.

The Rav listened, but kept his silence.

Months passed and there was a knock on Rav Chaim's door. A Jew had come to pour out his troubles. He said that his wife had died, leaving him with eight daughters, four of whom were of marriageable age. He had no money for their dowries. Who would possibly marry girls who are as poor as these? The man wanted both advice and a blessing.

The Rav listened and told him **סוד יקוק ליראיו**, *The secret of Hashem is to those who fear Him . . .* (Tehillim 25:14). "Come to my home tomorrow night. And bring your wagon. I will give you so many gifts that you will have dowries for your daughters. However, you must keep this a secret. Don't tell a soul what I am giving you."

The next evening, the man arrived, accompanied by an empty wagon and a horse. Together with the Rav, they loaded the wagon with one beautiful present after another. The man then headed home, replete with things brought by sea from England, Spain, and Portugal.

The Rabbanit's room of exotic presents was now empty.

Before long, the news went out that the poor man was marrying off one of his daughters.

The custom was that, when a girl was announcing her engagement, that the women of the town would gather in her house to rejoice with her. While there, the women would gaze upon the dowry gifts she was bringing to the marriage.

Rabbanit Pinto had come, just as the other women had. When she saw the gifts, she knew immediately where they had come from.

Rushing out the door, she ran home to look into her special room. To her astonishment, it was completely empty.

Quickly, she ran to Rabbi Chaim to tell him the news: The poor man marrying off his daughter had broken into their home and stolen all the valuable presents that had been brought to Rabbi Chaim from all over the world. These presents were now in the hands of the man's daughter.

Rabbi Chaim told her that no theft had occurred, that he had personally handed them to him. “And, if you are worried about the future, about what will become of our own daughters -- don’t. I have no doubt that there will be many who will wish to marry into the family of Pinto Rabbanim. Dowry or not, our girls will not stay single. Those who wish to marry into the Pinto family are not doing so for the dowry. The same can not be said, however, for the daughters of a poor man such as that one. Without dowries, what would have happened to them?”

Having heard the Rav’s rationale, the Rabbanit now agreed that he had done the right thing. But the story did not end there, for the tzaddik’s words made an impact not only upon the Rebbetzin, but in the heavens as well. When it came time for their daughters to marry, they had dowries far more valuable than what had been stored in that special room.



רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֹמֵר הָיָה מְמַעֵט בְּעֵסֶק וְעֹסוֹק
 בְּתוֹרָה. וְהָיָה שְׂפֵל רוּחַ בְּפָנָיו כָּל אָדָם. וְאִם בְּטִלְתָּ
 מִן הַתּוֹרָה יֵשׁ לְךָ בְּטִלִּים הַרְבֵּה כְּנֶגְדְּךָ. וְאִם
 עָמַלְתָּ בְּתוֹרָה יֵשׁ לְךָ (לוֹ) שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה לְתֵן לְךָ
 אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנָה י

Rabbi Meir says: Limit your occupation with business and engage in Torah study, and be humble before every person. And if you neglect the Torah, many distractions will come up against you. And if you have toiled in Torah, He has much reward to give you.

Rabbi Meir says that one should minimize his business activity and be involved with Torah. On the surface, Rabbi Meir's advice here would seem to contradict what is brought in his name elsewhere, specifically in Kiddushin 82a. There, he says that one should certainly teach his son a trade that is clean and "easy." The advice continues, that he should also pray to the One who holds the key to financial success and owns all property. For, there is no trade that does not have both poor and wealthy practitioners. Ultimately, neither poverty nor wealth are due to one's trade, but to one's merits.

Again, approaching this from a purely superficial level, one might ask whether these two contradict each other. For, if Rabbi Meir holds that one is to minimize his business activity and be involved with Torah, why would he advocate teaching one's son a trade?

One answer might be that which is found in Midrash Vayikra Rabba: The normal course of events is that one thousand students begin at the first level of Torah study, and one hundred go on to the next level, which is memorization of Oral Torah. Ten will graduate from there to the next level, which is logical exposition. From that ten, only one will graduate to the next level, which is legal argumentation.

The Rabbis also said that idleness brings one to boredom and boredom leads to improper thoughts.

What I want to say, then, is that Rabbi Meir recognized that only one in a thousand get to the point of becoming a teacher of Torah, communal Rabbi, or judge. The other nine hundred and ninety-nine are in danger of coming to idleness, which would in turn lead to improper thoughts. Odds are, then, that one's son will *not* be that one-in-a-thousand. It is therefore more pragmatic to make plans for that, lest the son wind up idle, bored, and subject to transgression. Lacking the skills for making a living, he could even become a thief.

However, those who have succeeded in business to the extent that they could afford to take a full or half-day off, should do so and engage in Torah. The mishnah is saying that just because one has succeeded in business, that does not mean that he must limit himself to business.

My interpretation, then, is that when Rabbi Meir says that one should certainly teach his son a trade, it is because of the statistical likelihood that he will not merit becoming a professional Torah scholar. He therefore wanted to make more certain that one's sons not wind up idle, prone to transgression.

This mishnah, then, is directed toward those who followed the path of commerce and became successful. Who knows, just as they were successful in business, maybe they could now succeed in the "business" of Torah! Therefore, pray to the One who provides livelihood that He will provide you with livelihood now (as you embark upon Torah study). For, wealth does not ultimately depend upon one's being involved in trade, but in the merit one earns from Torah study. (See our reading of Avoth 2:5) .



רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֶּן יַעֲקֹב אֹמֵר הָעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה
 אַחַת קוֹנֶה לוֹ פְּרָקְלִיט אֶחָד. וְהַעוֹבֵר עֲבֵרָה
 אַחַת קוֹנֶה לוֹ קְטִיגוֹר אֶחָד. תְּשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים
 טוֹבִים כְּתָרִיס בְּפָנָי הַפְּרָעָנוֹת. רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן
 הַסַּנְדֵּלָר אֹמֵר כָּל כְּנִסְיָה שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שְׁמַיִם
 סוֹפָה לְהַתְקִים. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שְׁמַיִם אֵין סוֹפָה
 לְהַתְקִים:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ד משנה יא

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says: One who does a single mitzvah acquires for himself a single defender, and one who does a single sin acquires for himself a single prosecutor. Repentance and good deeds are like a shield in the face of punishment.

Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar says: Every gathering that is for the sake of Heaven will endure, and one that is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure.

This mishnah quotes both Rabbi Yochanan the Sandal-Maker and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov. I was wondering what these two had in common, other than their both being disciples of Rabbi Akiva. I was wondering as well why Rabbi Yochanan is identified by his trade. Excepting Rabbi Yitzhak Nafcha (the Baker), we don't find other Tana'im and Amora'im named according to their profession. This is despite the fact that many of them worked at trades and business. Many of the Rabbis had wealth and property, presumably the outgrowth of successful commercial endeavor, yet they are not named for that activity.

This shows us the greatness of our Rabbis. For, even at the times they were someplace other than the Beit HaMidrash, occupied with business and trade, their minds did not stray from Torah. They bought and sold with honesty and integrity, ever mindful of the Torah prohibitions against deception that, quite unfortunately, many of us to sometimes fail to heed.

With that introduction, we can now understand why the editor of the mishnah calls Rabbi Yochanan "the Sandal-Maker." Just about anyone involved in

business has the opportunity to take advantage of others. This is true whether they are managing vast wealth or involved daily with the public. The craftsman, however, has more opportunity -- and therefore more temptations -- than the property owner. Although they are dealing in smaller amounts, they transact with the public many, many times per day. And, because they are not wealthy, and their livelihood is more tenuous, the temptation to dishonesty might be more pressing.

Rabbi Yitzhak is given the added appellation “the Baker” for similar reasons.

We will now address why, aside from both being students of Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Yochanan the Sandler and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov are brought in the same mishnah. I would say that Rabbi Eliezer was inspired by Rabbi Yochanan’s combination of being both a talmid chacham and honest shoemaker. In a sense, Rabbi Yochanan epitomized Rabbi Eliezer’s teaching, *Repentance and good deeds are as a shield against retribution*.

All of man’s deeds, meaning his practical life, the times when he is doing something other than studying, should be directed in the ways of Torah. At those times, he should recall the mitzvot, both positive and negative, just as Rabbi Yochanan HaSandler did. One could go even further and say that it is not just the *thought* of mitzvot that protects, but the actual *involvement* in mundane work *performed* according to the Torah’s ethical guidelines.

Now, because Rabbi Yochanan was involved with the public day-to-day, and was so careful to never take advantage, cheat, or deceive, he could then say that *Any gathering for the sake of heaven will endure*. Rabbi Yochanan demonstrated that even the mundane could become *for the sake of Heaven*. This was a lesson to those scholars who might resist participation in community-wide religious gatherings, thinking that to do so would be counter to their mission of dedicating themselves to Torah study. If the gathering is for the sake of ego, self-aggrandizement, personal ambition, controversy, or personal enrichment, then there is no purpose in their attendance. However, if it does not contain those elements, then it is potentially for the sake of heaven and their attendance is potentially consistent with their dedication to Torah.

Rabbi Yochanan’s language here is very specific. He says that the **כנסיה** must be **לשם שמים**. Otherwise, he says, it will not endure. Let us examine the word, **כנסיה**. It may be broken down into two components **כנס** and **י-ה**. He is saying that the **כנסיה** will not endure unless it is entirely for the sake of heaven, in other words a **כנס-י-ה**.

Now, the word ה-י is associated with *shalom*, as we see in gemara Sotah 17a. There, it is told that Hashem placed (הכניס) His Name (י-ה) between a man and his wife so that there be *shalom* between them. (The gemara there describes the ceremony where a piece of parchment upon which Hashem's Name is written is dropped into liquid. It will become erased, as part of the "test" done to determine whether a woman suspected of adultery is guilty. She drinks the water. If she lives, this proves her innocence. The man and wife may then go home together. This shows that Hashem is ready to have His name erased so that there be *shalom* between a man and his wife.)

So, if the כנס is לשם שמים, literally for the Name of Heaven, meaning that its goal is to be מכניס *shalom*, to bring *shalom* to Yisrael, then it will endure. For, the ה-י is there to strengthen their efforts.

Let us have a look at the word י-ה. Its gematria is fifteen, for the י is ten and the ה is five. Let us compare this to the word for pride, גאווה. The ג is three, the א is one, the ו is six, and the ה is five. The four letters that compose גאווה are fifteen as well.

What's the significance?

Part of the Rabbi's role is to exercise a degree of גאווה, as he has the responsibility of sometimes issuing *takanot*, telling the community what they must do. A poetic reading of the verse (Divrei HaYamim 17:6) יקוק ויגבה לבו בדרכי גאווה hints at this, in that it says that he "took pride" in his service of Hashem. That גאווה, however, must be entirely for the sake of heaven. In Hebrew, שמים לשם, literally for the Name of Heaven. If not, as we are taught in this mishnah, it will not endure.

**העושה מצוה אחת קונה לו פרקליט אחד והעובר עבירה אחת קונה
לו קטיגור אחד תשובה ומעשים טובים כתריס בפני הפורענות**

The mishnah says that even by doing a single mitzvah, one acquires for himself a "defense attorney" in *Shamayim*. Conversely, one who commits even one transgression acquires for himself some one to "prosecute" him in *Shamayim*.

The choice of language here is interesting. When it comes to that which is positive, the mishnah call it "doing" (העושה). When it comes to that which is negative, the mishnah calls it "transgressing" (העובר).

It seems to me that the mishnah should have been consistent. The parallel to העובר is המקיים, not העושה. The parallel to העושה would be, once again, העושה

- for doing something negative is no less of an עשייה than doing something positive would be.

A second question I have is how the second part of the mishnah relates to the first. (The second part says that every assemblage purely for the sake of Heaven will have lasting positive impact. When it comes to assemblages not for the sake of Heaven, the opposite will transpire -- it will not “last.”)

I would like to answer these two questions, *derekh mussar*, that is, homiletically. Perhaps the mishnah's author wished to tell us that man did not descend to the world for any reason other than to be constantly involved in עשייה. And through this עשייה, he will merit life in the Next World.

The idea is that the main thing is not the ephemeral, physical world, but the eternal world that follows. This world is nothing more than an entranceway to the Next. The hard work and the עשייה one does in This World is what allows him to merit the Next One. For, there the עשייה is completed. Tehillim 88:6 tells us that the *dead are free*. The Rabbis explain (Shabbat 30a) “this means ‘free from Torah and Mitzvoth.’”

The implication is that whenever man *is* alive -- in This World -- he is not free. This means he is obliged to engage in עשייה. He is obliged לעשות ולעשות. And whatever he does do in This World, will accompany him to the Next. Whoever has no עשייה in the physical world, will have nothing at to take with him to the Next.

The generation of the Flood rebelled against Hashem because all their “work” was already “done;” they believed that there was nothing left for them to “do.” A hint to this may be found in the following midrash (Bereishit Rabba 34:11):

What caused them to rebel? Because they planted once in forty years and they could wander from one end of the world to the other in practically no time. Along the way, they could uproot the cedar trees they passed. Lions and leopards were as nothing in their eyes, like a strand of hair that fell upon their flesh.

Another source that reminds me of the above idea is brought in the name of Midrash Avkir. There, it says:

From the time of Adam haRishon, people were born with the fingers of their hands unseparated, as they had no need to work the ground. Noach, however, was born with separated fingers. (מדרש אבכיר הוצא בפטר פענה רוא בראשית ה, כט)

They had no need to work. They therefore thought they had no reason to pray nor any reason to aspire to coming close to Hashem. They thereby became deniers of His providence and dominion.

The works of kabbalah commonly refer to this physical world as that of **עשייה**. This is because man was created upon it **כדי לעשות** -- and not in order that he simply draw upon that which is already “done” and ready.

It is interesting to note that the world is called **עולם העשיה** and not **העשוי עולם**. Perhaps this is because, in fact, it is not an **עולם העשוי**. Rather it is an **עולם** that is merely a corridor that leads to an **עולם העשוי** -- which is the **עולם הבה**. Our physical world, however, is an **עולם העשיה**; for its essence and purpose is that there is work within it **לעשות**.

The culmination of the Creation Story is (Bereishit 2:3) **ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלקים לעשות**. On the surface, it would appear that the verse could have ended with **ברא אלקים אשר ברא אלהים לעשות**; that follows it seems curious. In fact, even the **אשר ברא אלהים** seems superfluous; had we not already been told on numerous occasions in the previous verses that the world was created by Hashem?

Perhaps the curious phrasing comes to teach us the fundamental principle we have been speaking of, that the physical world itself was created for no reason other than so that man would have the opportunity for Torah and mitzvoth.

The verse quoted above refers to Shabbat. We proposed a theory as to why the verse says that the creation was **לעשות**. But why was it said specifically in this verse, which talks of Shabbat?

Perhaps the Shabbat - **לעשות** connection is to tell us that Shabbat was not given to Yisrael for any reason other than that they engage in Torah. Not only that, but one could even suggest that the highest form of **עשיה** is Torah study.

Here is what Midrash Eliyahu Rabba says:

Although you work six days a week, Shabbat should be devoted to Torah. This is why we say that one should certainly rise early on Shabbat and head to the Beit haMidrash and Beit haKenneset to study Torah and to review the works of the prophets. Only afterwards should he head home to eat and drink.

Another interesting source is a midrash brought in the Tur:

Declared the Torah to the Kaddosh Baruch Hu: “Master of the World!” When Yisrael enters The Land, this one will run to his vineyard and that one will run to his field. As for myself, what will become of me? “ Said Hashem: “I have a match for you! Its name is Shabbat. On that day, the people will be resting from their physical labors and will be free to devote themselves to You!”

Let us now return to the text of our mishnah, “He who does (העושה) [even] a single mitzvah.” Why does it use the word העושה, -- which was our original question? Because only a mitzvah is considered an עשיה.

The continuation of the mishnah says והעובר עבירה. This is because an עון has no עשיה; in the world of עשיה, it is of no help. Another reason why an עון is considered an עבירה is because it is עוברת. This means that when one does an עבירה, he regrets it afterward. In other words, he wishes that it would disappear and be forgotten. The individual had nothing from it other than the temporal pleasure of the moment.

Mitzvoth, however, expand in influence and multiply. One mitzvah leads to another. Mitzvoth stay with the one who did them for ever and ever.

The mishnah continues, that “*teshuvah and ma’asim* are like a shield before calamity.” It says this because it is unrealistic to expect someone to learn at literally every single moment. After all, he does need to work, to eat, and to take care of practical, mundane affairs as well. The challenge is how to implant that time with עשיה.

Our mishnah therefore teaches us that “*teshuvah and ma’asim* are like a shield before calamity.” This means that although one is not able to learn at a given moment, he can still make certain to conduct all his affairs strictly in accordance with the Torah. His business dealings are scrupulously honest. He steers clear of transgressions and gives charity. His entire life is spent with good deeds and thoughts of *teshuvah*. He thereby adds עשייה to the world, even at the times not spent on actual Torah study.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל כנסיה שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים

The city of Mogador was blessed with three holy and great Rabbis, Rabbi Abraham Quryat, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, and Rabbi David ben Hazaan. Together, they formed the city’s only Beit HaDin. The bond between them was inseparable.

Rabbi Chaim Pinto and Rabbi David ben Hazaan once came to the following agreement: The first one of them to get to the “Yeshiva of Ma’alah” would return to reveal himself to the other -- and study Parashat Hashavuah with him, with the commentary of the holy Rabbi Moshe Alshikh.

Why this particular *limmud*? Because, this is what they had done together, consistently, for years. Every week, the two would study Parashat HaShavuah with the Alshikh's commentary. Why end this practice simply because one of them had already passed on to the next world?

The first to go was Rabbi David ben Hazaan.

The Shabbat following his passing, Rabbi Chaim Pinto waited and waited for the arrival of his dear *Havruta*. Finally, he asked his attendant to go to the widow's home and ask her why her husband was late.

The attendant, upon hearing his instruction, could not quite believe his ears. He stood there dumfounded, not quite knowing what to do.

Rabbi Chaim repeated his words: "I would like you to go to the home of the Rabbanit and ask why her husband is late for our *chavruta*."

The attendant realized that Rabbi Chaim was speaking of something very lofty, so lofty that it was beyond the comprehension of one as simple as himself.

So, he went.

The attendant knocked on the door, as instructed. The Rabbanit came to the door. He explained that he was sent by Rabbi Chaim. Haltingly, he asked what Rabbi Chaim told him to ask.

The Rabbanit was startled.

"How did Rabbi Chaim know my husband was here?" she cried out.

Before the night was out, Rabbi Chaim understood what had occurred. For, Rabbi ben Hazaan came to explain it to him!

It seems that Rabbi ben Hazaan had not only promised Rabbi Chaim that he would return to learn with him, but that he had also promised his Rabbanit that he would return Friday nights to make the Kiddush on wine for her. And, how could he be in two places at one time?

However, now that the Rabbanit had revealed this profound secret to the attendant, Rabbi ben Hazaan would henceforth appear to her only in a dream. To Rabbi Chaim, however, he would appear while Rabbi Chaim is awake.



רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שִׁמּוֹן אָמַר יְהִי כְבוֹד תַּלְמִידָךְ
 חֲבִיב עֵלְיךְ כְּשֵׁלְךְ וְכְבוֹד חֲבֵרְךָ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ
 וּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ כְּמוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם:
 משנה אבות ד:יב

Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon says: Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as the honor of your friend, and the honor of your friend should be like the fear of your teacher, and the fear of your teacher should be like the fear of Heaven.

The mishnah says that one's awe of their master (their Rabbi) should equal their awe of Heaven. I wonder how this would be. How could one possibly be in awe of their Rabbi (or teacher) as much as they are in awe of Hashem Himself? After all, Hashem looks right into our innermost selves; nothing is hidden from Him. The Rav, however, is human; one can hide from him quite easily.

Let us consider what is written in Sefer Bereishit (2:7): וַיִּצַר יְקוֹק אֱלֹהִים אֶת - *Now Elokim formed a man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This is how man became a living person.* A midrash to this verse says that when Hashem created the world, He created three things each day. Erev Shabbat, however, there was only one creation: Man, which took all day. Why did the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* dedicate an entire day for this act of creation, unlike the others?

I wonder as well why the Torah emphasizes here that Hashem breathed into man's nostrils נשמת חיים. Is this not like the רוח חיים that all living things have?

The answer, I believe, may be found in the midrash that says the world was created only so that Yisrael would receive the Torah.

Hashem placed within Man "248 limbs and 365 sinews," a number that corresponds to the numbers of positive and negative mitzvot. Within them, He placed the *nishmat chaim*. And, he placed within Man a unique potential not given to other created things. Our verse calls it חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה

נשמת Onkelos translates this as **נשמתא דחיי והות באדם לרוח ממלא:** [*and breathed into his nostrils*] *Nishmat Chaim*. *And it will be for man a “ruach” that “speaks.”*

Ramban explains that the *nishmat chaim* “breathed” into man comes not from something worldly, but directly from the One doing the “breathing,” namely Hashem. He says **אבל היא רוח השם הגדול, מפיו דעת ותבונה, כי הנופח באפי אחר בו מנשמתו יתן בו** - *It is the “ruach” of the Great Name . . . for the one who blows into the mouth of someone else, gives from his own neshama.*

The way I explain this is that there is a “special force” that fills every sinew and limb and is called the *ruach Elokim*. It is (Iyov 31:2) **חלק אלוה ממעל** *lit: “part” of Eloka from on high*. Each limb “tells” man to do a certain mitzvah and each sinew “tells” him of a certain negative commandment that he may not transgress. (See Tanchuma 371:2 and Zohar 1:109:2.)

Perhaps this is why the midrash says that Hashem “spent so much more time” creating man than he did all other things. For, unlike with other created things, He “blew” the *ruach Elokim* into their “limbs and sinews.” He did this so that they could fulfill the 613 mitzvot.

Torah and Mitzvot are the end goal of creation. Man was brought into existence for no reason other than this. Through his performance of Torah and mitzvot, Man sustains the world. Everything else exists only so that they fulfill a subordinate role -- and only for those who study Torah and perform mitzvot. As I see it, that is what Rabbi Shimon ben Zoma is saying in Berachot 6b, when he refers to one who is “filled with fear of Hashem” and says that the whole world was created to be “a companion for him.”

R. Helbo further said in the name of R. Huna: If one is filled with the fear of God, his words are listened to. For it is said: The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole man. What means, ‘For this is the whole man’? R. Eleazar says: The Holy One, blessed be He, says: The whole world was created for his sake only. R. Abba b. Kahana says: He is equal in value to the whole world. R. Simeon b. ‘Azzai says (some say, R. Simon b. Zoma says): The whole world was created as a companion for him. (Soncino Translation).

The Torah describes the *luchot habrit*, the tablets of the covenant as (Shemot 32:16), **מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הלחת:** *the work of*

Elokim; and the inscription was Elokim's inscription, engraved on the tablets. Targum Yonatan, an Aramaic translation/commentary, says in Shemot 20:2 -- as I read it -- that the writing on the *luchot* had "life" and that its "voice" went through the encampment, crying out all ten commandments, beginning with, "I am the Lord, Your G-d, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, from a house of slaves."

The inscription was G-d's "handiwork." It therefore had "life" and would cry out to Yisrael to do the positive mitzvot and stay away from transgression.

Man's body is the same. Because it, too, is G-d's handiwork, it, too, has "life." As I said before, this is known as (Iyov 31:2) **חלק אלוה ממעל** *lit: "part" of Eloka from on high.* Every limb tells Man, "Do a Mitzvah." Every "sinew" tells him, "Stay away from transgression."

I would take this image even further than our Rabbis did. To me, it seems that this "voice" cries out to Man not only to do mitzvot, but tells him daily to do teshuvah. Not only that, but this "voice" even gives him the strength to withstand life's tests and to overcome its difficulties. (This is just my interpretation, of course.)

The gemara Berachot 8b tells us to be careful to guard the honor of a Torah scholar who, due to extenuating circumstances (old age, sickness, accident, struggle to make a livelihood, etc.) has forgotten his Torah learning. He is compared to the first *luchot*, which, even when shattered in pieces, were nevertheless accorded the honor of being placed in the *Aron*. From this gemara, I see that our rabbis compare the scholar to the *luchot habit*. In line with the idea I expressed above, I would say that both the *luchot* and the Torah scholar's body were "engraved" by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* with a hidden life force. And, just as the writing on the *luchot* was miraculous, so too is the *neshama* of Man. The *Ramah* highlights this in his explanation of why we say of Hashem that He "heals all flesh and performs wonders." The wonder He performs, according to the *Ramah*, is that He "guards the *ruach* of Man within him" and ties that which is *ruchani* to that which is physical.

Allow me to continue with this theme.

The *luchot habit* were made of stone. Why?

I would say that it was to teach us a lesson.

That lesson is that no one should ever think to say that learning is just too difficult for him and that it "just won't sink in." For, the life-giving writing has

been etched by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* specifically into stone. Even if someone were to feel that his heart is like stone, he should know that if he wishes to learn Torah, it will, eventually, become accessible to him. Words of Torah will melt the hardness of the hardest heart and bring it to life. The gemara Kiddushin 30b says: *If you meet the Yetser haRa, drag him to the Beit Hamidrash. If he (the Yetser ha'Ra) is stone, he will melt. If he is iron, he will crack.*

Recall as well what the Rabbis have told us about Rabbi Akiva: Until age forty, he had not learned Torah at all. One day, he was standing by a stone well. He wondered, “Who cut a hole in this rock?” A passage from the book of Job about water wearing away even stones is quoted to him. Rabbi Akiva then thinks: *מה רך פסל את הקשה דברי תורה שקשין כברול על אחת כמה וכמה* - If something so soft (water) can cut something so hard (a rock), then surely the words of Torah, which are “hard as iron,” can engrave themselves on my heart, which is nothing more than flesh and blood. He then takes himself and his son to a teacher of little children and says, “My teacher, teach me Torah!” Thirteen years later, after having totally devoting himself to study, Rabbi Akiva was teaching Torah to crowds of people.”

True, the midrash appears to be speaking of Rabbi Akiva at a time in his life when he had not yet had the opportunity to learn, as opposed to someone who *had* tried to learn but was not successful. Still, I believe that the story illustrates as well that Torah eventually penetrates the heart even of those who have tried, but nevertheless not been successful. For, I believe that the situation of one who has reached the age of forty without ever having been touched by Torah has something in common with that of other adults who, whatever the reason, also have a heart untouched by Torah.

To continue with what I said earlier, my belief is that when one overpowers his *yetser* and becomes a servant of Hashem, he will have transformed even his physical body into something *ruchani*. This is possible only because of the spiritual force already placed within him by Hashem. Otherwise, how could it be? For, the body is physical and we are saying that it assists man -- by urging him to do mitzvot -- into becoming *ruchani*.

One might wonder, though, how it would even be *possible* for man to sin, given that his very body calls upon him to do *mitzvot* and to not do *aveirot*. I would answer that transgressions cause the *Shechina* to depart from “inside” of one’s body, as we see hinted to in the gemara Chagiga 16a. There, it says, regarding those who transgress secretly, that it is “as if” they push away the *Shechina*.

At this point, I think that we can understand why Hashem has caused us to be frightened in the presence of great tzaddikim. For the tzaddikim have expelled the *yetsar hara* from within themselves. All that is left is the holy “voice” of Hashem, which rises up from within them and exhorts, “Do a Mitzvah!” “Do a Mitzvah!”

No created thing can possibly resist this “Kol Elokim,” which is why those in the presence of great tzaddikim are so frightened and are moved to *teshuvah*. It is not even necessary that the tzaddik utter even a single word. For, through their purging their bodies of the *yetsar hara*, their very bodies have become so pure, that they are now *ruchani*.

We can now better understand the words of our mishnah, which equates the honor towards one’s teacher with honor towards Hashem Himself. I believe this is due to the teacher having purged himself of his *yetsar*; thereby making his “physical” body into something entirely *ruchani*. Their awe stems not from being frightened of being hit or from verbal reproach, but from the silent “voice of G-d” that wells up from with their teacher. What they are sensing, then, is the presence of Hashem Himself.

I believe that the explanation offered here clarifies not only the words of the Rabbis of our mishnah, but also those of gemara Moed Katan 17a, which says that if one’s Rav is like an *Malach Hashem*, then “seek Torah from his mouth.” If he is not, then do not seek Torah from him. One might ask, “How is one supposed to know whether or not one’s Rav is like a *Malach Hashem*?” The answer, I would say, is that one should pay attention to how the Rav’s students act when in his presence. Specifically, look at whether they act towards him with fear and awe. If they do, then you can be certain that he is a *Malach Hashem*. For, it must be that they sense the voice of G-d rising up from within his holy self.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

מורא רבך כמורא שמים

All other lights had dimmed and the householders fast asleep, but in the room where Rav Chaim Pinto sat and learned Torah, the candles were still burning bright. Eventually, still bent over a sefer, he too drifted off to sleep. So exhausted was he, that he his foot had somehow come to rest upon the holy sefer of his revered grandfather, Rabbi Yoshaya Pinto zt”l.

Once awake, and upon noticing what his foot had been resting on, Rav Chaim was horrified. To him, it hardly mattered that it was completely inadvertent. What mattered was where his foot had been allowed to stray. To his mind, this personal failing could not go unanswered. He therefore summoned his attendant -- and, when he arrived, told him to bring a leather strap.

The attendant returned. Rav Chaim then ordered him to take the strap and whip the foot that had dared to rest upon the holy sefer of Rabbi Yoshaya Pinto. Needless to say, the attendant was horror-struck at the prospect. "How could I possibly do such a thing!" cried the man. He refused to even consider it.

Rav Chaim, however, would not accept the protestations. He ordered the man to do as he was told -- and to not stop the whipping until Rav Chaim would tell him, "Enough."

Now that he had no alternative, the servant proceeded to strike his master with all his might. The blows continued and continued. Meanwhile, Rav Chaim did not give the signal, even as his foot began to swell and his pain mounted. Eventually, though, the signal came: Rav Chaim told him that it was enough.

Later that evening, the time arrived for Rabbi Chaim to go to the Beit Hakenneset for his usual practice of reciting midnight prayers. However, he felt himself unable to rise. The pain was simply too great.

The attendant, however, did go. And, when he got there, he was startled to hear that a voice, seemingly from the synagogue's Aron Hakodesh, was calling out to him:

"Where is Rav Chaim Pinto? Why has he not yet arrived for Tikkun Chatzot, the midnight prayers? All of the heavenly assemblage awaits the sound of his songs and tefillot."

Needless to say, the servant was now shaking from head to toe.

"Who is calling me?"

"I am Rabbi Yisrael Najarra. Go and tell Rabbi Chaim that he is a "spark" from the soul of the prophet, Achiya HaShiloni. His sin is forgiven; he should stop feeling anguished over it."

The voice continued, "My poetry cause endless delight to the One Above during my time on earth (16th century). But now that I am no longer amongst the living, Rabbi Chaim Pinto is the only one left who knows how to truly reach the depths of holy poetry."

Still shaking, the servant hurried to Rabbi Chaim, to tell him what had occurred. It was not, however, necessary. For, as soon as Rabbi Chaim opened the door for him, he was greeted with, "Fortunate are you, that you have merited to hear the voice of Rabbi Yisrael Najarra!" The next day, Rabbi Yoshia Pinto appeared in a dream to Rabbi David ben Chazan: *"Tell my grandson, Rabbi Chaim, that he should not concern himself with what had occurred with the sefer. I know that it was purely inadvertent. Tell him, in my name, that he should rise from his bed. His swollen foot has now healed. That is the sign."*

Not only had the tzaddik revealed himself to Rabbi David ben Chazan, but he appeared as well to Rabbi Chaim that night, assuring him in the name of Heaven and earth that all was forgiven. "Tomorrow, when you awake, you will see that your foot will be healed."

The next day, Rabbi David ben Chazan came to Rabbi Chaim, to tell him of the dream. "No need," said Rabbi Chaim, "for the same one who came to you appeared to me as well." He then proceeded to rise from bed and stand on two -- now healthy -- feet.



רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר הָיִי זָהִיר בְּתַלְמוּד שֶׁשְּׂגָגַת
 תַּלְמוּד עוֹלָה זָדוֹן. רַבִּי שְׂמַעוֹן אוֹמֵר שְׁלֹשָׁה
 כְּתָרִים הֵם כְּתָר תּוֹרָה וְכְתָר כְּהֵנָּה וְכְתָר
 מַלְכוּת וְכְתָר שֵׁם טוֹב עוֹלָה עַל גִּבְיָהֶן:
 אַבּוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנָה יג

Rabbi Yehudah says: Be careful in study, because an unintentional misinterpretation is considered intentional.

Rabbi Shimon says: There are three crowns — the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship, and the crown of a good name surpasses them all.

Rabbi Yehuda says that one should be careful with his studies, as an unintentional misinterpretation is considered intentional. Rabbi Obadiah M'Bartenura understands this to mean that one's learning should be precise and consistent with *halacha*.

Rabbi Obadiah continues, that if, when deciding *halacha*, one errs because he has not been sufficiently precise in his study and, as a result, winds up permitting that what is forbidden, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* considers it as if he had done this intentionally.

Let us consider the implications of what Rabbi Obadiah is saying. When he talks of someone erring due not having been sufficiently exacting in his study, is he leaving any room for the possibility of an honest mistake? After all, we know that even the Rabbis of the talmud occasionally erred!

One could learn for years and years, with great diligence. Yet, he still could decide incorrectly. Why could it be considered willful? Was the error intentional? Was it necessarily due to negligence?

We now understand why Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura says that he only refers to a case where the scholar was *not* diligent, not where he *was*.

I would like to present an additional idea, based on the gemara in Shevuot 39a, regarding one who has gone to Beit Din to recover money he had loaned

out. Because the person he loaned it to denies key aspects of the transaction, the one who loaned the money is now compelled to take an oath, as a demonstration that he is telling the truth. The gemara says that we apply to such a person the verse (Bemidbar 16:26), **האלה סורו נא מעל אהלי האנשים הרשעים** -- *Turn away now from near the tents of these wicked men.*

Why would such harsh words be applied to someone who, presumably, is telling the truth? Why should such a person be called a *rasha*? The answer, one could understand the gemara to be saying, is that the person was negligent for not having been more careful as to whom he would lend something of value. He lent it to someone who was not particularly trustworthy and is now relying upon taking an oath as a way of getting it back. This oath, like all oaths in Beit Din, requires one to swear by His Name, which is a very grave matter. By not being more careful about whom he was transacting with, and relying upon the option of being entitled to swear by His Name in Beit Din, it is as if he had taken Hashem's Name lightly.

A similar idea is found in Massechet Bava Metzia 75b, regarding one who lends money not in the presence of witnesses. It is said that he transgresses the prohibition of "putting a stumbling block before the blind." By allowing a situation where the borrower could easily dispute the loan (and get away with it), he is tempting him to steal. This is the classic example of "putting a stumbling block before the blind." Reish Lakish, another one of the Rabbis of the Talmud, says that the lender brings a curse upon himself. Presumably, this is because, now that he is accusing the borrower of having stolen from him, but cannot prove it, others will think he is the type of person who makes unjust and unsubstantiated claims against the righteous. (Obviously, the onlookers are unaware that the borrower is hardly righteous and is, in fact, a thief.)

These gemarot show just how important it is to be extremely careful in one's financial dealings. Failure to do so can result not only in a loss of money, but a desecration of His Name. The one who must use an oath to get his money restored is declared a *rasha*.

Obviously, when it comes to teaching Torah, the importance of being careful applies as well. The teacher must make certain that all students have grasped the lesson clearly and accurately. No room may be allowed for misunderstanding. Neither the student who is inclined to misrepresent the Rebbi (and there are some of those) nor the one who does not wish to misrepresent him, but does so

anyway (due to his weak grasp of the material) should be given the opportunity to do so. The Rebbi must therefore make certain to express himself in clear, unambiguous language and anticipate any misunderstandings that the students might have.

Earlier in Avoth, the Rabbis are warned to be “careful with their words.” The context there had to do with *dayanim*, specifically that they be careful to not inadvertently tip off the litigants as to what would constitute a “winning” argument. However, we could extend the maxim to teachers as well, for they bear the responsibility of seeing to it that their students not misunderstand. First, the teacher must make certain that he himself understands the material correctly. Then, he must plan how to present it to his audience, so that they don’t come away with any misunderstandings.

A midrash tells us that before giving it to Yisrael, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* reviewed the Torah four times. One lesson we can learn from this is just how important it is for the “Rebbi” to carefully review whatever he is about to teach.

There are three crowns — the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of sovereignty — but the crown of good name surmounts them all.

One way of interpreting this statement is to say that Rabi Shimon was speaking of someone who errs in deciding a matter of halachah, or any other important matter, and does not insist he is right, but admits the truth and retracts his statement. A prime example of this is found in the story of Yehudah and Tamar. Yehudah thinks that Tamar has committed adultery — until she sends for the articles he left with her, evidence that he is the father of her unborn child through levirate marriage, a fact he had been unaware of until this moment. He then admits that “*She is right; [it is] from me,*” (בראשית לח, כו) even though he could have saved face by lying, and no man would ever have discovered it. But since he admitted the truth, he earned three crowns — and the crown of a good name as well.

He earned the crown of Torah, as we find in the verse, “*He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to direct him to Goshen.*” (בראשית מו, כח) In the Midrash, our Sages bring out a deeper meaning from these words: Yaakov sent Yehudah to establish a meeting place, a yeshivah, where he would teach Torah, and the Tribes would study there. (ב”ר צג, ג) And he merited this even though his brother Yissachar was greater than he in Torah (ספרי דברים שנד), because he knew how to admit the truth.

From that seat of learning in Egypt, the first yeshivah in the Diaspora, all the yeshivot in the world emerged, throughout thousands of years of exile, and the offshoots of that original yeshivah continue to multiply to this day. As our Sages said, “In every place where our ancestors were exiles, they had a yeshivah,” (*Yoma* 28b) and there is no crown of Torah greater than that of one who establishes a yeshivah.

Not a generation has been without a great *rosh yeshivah* or leader of the Torah world from the descendants of Yehudah, in keeping with Yaakov Avinu’s blessing to him: “*The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor the student of the law from between his feet.*” (י, בראשית מט, י) According to the interpretation of the Talmudic Sages, “*The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah*’ — these are the leaders of the Diaspora in Babylonia, who rule over Israel with a scepter; ‘nor the student of the law from between his feet’ — these are the descendants of Hillel, who teach Torah in public.” (ה, א סנהדרין)

The Geonim wrote (אגרת רשיג עמוד 72, שע”ת סי’ ע”א) that when Yechaniah, the King of Judea, went into exile in Babylonia together with the leading scholars, they built a synagogue in Nehardea out of stones and earth which they had brought with them from the Temple in Jerusalem. They called the synagogue “Shaf Yativ,” (עי’ מגילה כט, א) signifying that the Shechinah had moved from the Temple to this spot.

From that day to the present, the Torah has been bequeathed to every new generation chiefly through the descendants of Yehudah, and Jewish practice throughout the Diaspora is rooted in the customs established in Babylonia. The prayers for rain and dew are a good example, (טור אור”ח סי’ קי”ז) and in most matters of law, (עי’ בית יוסף אור”ח סי’ כ”ט) whenever there is a discrepancy between the Babylonian Talmud and the Yerushalmi, we base our practical decisions on the Babylonian Talmud — and all this is in the merit of Yehudah and his progeny.

As for the crown of priesthood, this could be interpreted as referring to the *Reish Galuta*, or Exilarch, whose position in Babylonia was considered as a replacement for both the King and the High Priest of the Jewish nation in their exile, (עי’ אגרת רשיג; רמב”ם סנהדרין ד, יג-יד; סדה”ד דר”ל”ד) and he was treated with great honor, and it was he who appointed the *dayanim* and the halachic decisors.

Yehudah merited wearing the crown of kingship as well, and received his father Yaakov's blessing that "the scepter shall not depart from Yehudah." Yaakov also assured him, "Yehudah, [as for] you, your brothers will acknowledge you," (בראשית מט, ח) which the Midrash interprets to mean, "You acknowledged [the truth] concerning Tamar; your brothers will acknowledge you as king over them." It was not Yehudah alone who merited the crown of kingship, but he and his descendants for all time. Yaakov's blessing, "*The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah*," was also an injunction to all subsequent generations that no one other than a descendant of Yehudah could be king, and no other kingdom could long endure. (עי' רמב"ן שם, רמב"ם מלכים א, ח-ט) No one was to sit in the Temple court but the kings of the Davidic dynasty (סוטה מא, ב) and the future king, the Mashiach, will be Yehudah's descendant. We pray daily for the restoration of King David's dynasty, and every Shabbat we recite the *brachah*, "Make us joyful, HASHEM our G-d, with Eliyahu the Prophet, Your servant, and with the kingdom of the House of David, Your anointed one, on his throne let no stranger sit and let no others inherit his honor." (עי' סופרים יג, יג; מדרש תהילים יח)

And having merited these three crowns, Yehudah also earned the crown of a good name, as our Sages said in the Talmud: "All the forty years that Israel were in the wilderness, Yehudah's bones were turning over in their casket, because he had accepted a curse upon himself, until Moshe stood up and pleaded for mercy on his behalf. 'Master of the Universe,' he said before Him, 'who caused Reuven to admit the truth? Yehudah. And is this to be Yehudah's fate?' (דברים לג, ז) He pleaded for him, saying, 'Hear, HASHEM, the voice of Yehudah.' One by one, his limbs fell into place. But he still was not allowed to enter the Yeshivah of the Upper World. [Moshe] said, 'And bring him to his people.' But he still could not engage in debate with the Sages. [Moshe] pleaded for him, 'May his hands do battle for him.' But nevertheless, [Yehudah] did not know how to analyze a *kushia*. Moshe pleaded for mercy on his behalf, saying, 'And be a help against his foes.'" (מכות יא, ב)

Thus, in the merit of acknowledging the truth and causing others to acknowledge the truth, Yehudah earned all of these crowns — the crowns of Torah, priesthood, and kingship, and in the end, the crown of a good name as well. In the afterlife he merited entering the hall of the *tzaddikim* and debating halachah with the Sages in the *yeshivah shel maalah*. He enjoyed a good name, and both David HaMelech and the future Mashiach who will redeem Israel, are among his descendants. Of him it is said, "*All those around Him will bring a gift*

to the Awesome One.” (תהילים ע, יב) While this verse in its plain meaning refers to G-d, at another level of meaning our Sages said, (ב”ר צח, ח) “This is about the Melech HaMashiach, for in the future they will bring gifts to the Melech HaMashiach, and all the nations will come to obey him.” (רמב”ם, תשובה ט, ב) Yaakov Avinu alluded to the days of the Mashiach in his blessing to Yehudah with the words, “Until Shiloh comes.”

All of this glory and honor came to Yehudah in the merit of his disregarding his own honor and admitting the truth in the episode of Tamar.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

רבי שמעון אומר שלשה כתרים הם

Three foundational secrets were given to three chosen ones. The Ba’ al Shem Tov merited to know the *sod* of *netiliat yadayim*; the Ohr HaChaim Hakaddosh merited to know the *sod* of *Birkat HaMotsi*; the tzaddik Rabbi Kalifa Malka zt”l merited to know the *sod* of *keddushat Keter* (Keter means “Crown.” It is sometimes referred to as the first of the ten kabbalistic *sefirot*. It figures prominently in the congregational refrain of the *kedusha* section of *Musaf*. When our story refers to “*Kedushat Keter*,” it refers to that part of *tefiallat musaf*.)

An amazing story is told regarding this last *sod*.

The time had come for Rabbi Baruch zt”l to marry. His father (Rabbi David zt”l) sent him to Rabbi Kalifa Malka, so that Rabbi Kalifa would find Rabbi Baruch a proper match. The young man was received with great honor, with Rabbi Kalifa Malka promising to do whatever he could to see to it that an appropriate wife be found.

Now, it so happened that Rabbi Kalifa had a daughter who, at the age of thirty, was still single. When Rabbi Baruch heard of this, he decided that this was the woman he would marry. He then went to Rabbi Kalifa Malka and told him that he believes that he had found his match.

Rabbi Kalifa Malka, somewhat surprised, asked whom he had in mind. “Your daughter,” said Rabbi Baruch.

“But, she is quite a few years older than you,” said Rabbi Kalifa.

“What of it,” said Rabbi Baruch. “If she agrees, then so do I.”

After a bit of discussion, Rabbi Kalifa agreed: Rabbi Baruch would become his son-in-law. Having tested the young man in Torah learning and seeing his mastery of the material as well as his personal *keddusha*, Rabbi Kalifa decided that an engagement gift was in order: He would reveal the secret of *keddushat keter* to his prospective son-in-law.

The Rabbi had revealed the secret once before, to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Shlomo Pinto. Now, in honor of Rabbi Baruch's joining the family, he would reveal it once again.

The plan was that Rabbi Kalifa would secretly invite Rabbi Baruch to the Beit Hakenneset. There, they would study together -- and Rabbi Kalifa would reveal the profound secret.

The matter became known, however, to Rabbi Chaim *Hagadol*, who was Rabbi Shlomo Pinto's son and spent most of his time in that very Beit HaKenneset, immersed in Torah. He was twelve-years-old at the time.

Rabbi Chaim watched as Rabbi Kalifa and Rabbi Baruch entered. As they did so, Rabbi Kalifa looked all around, apparently to make certain that the two of them would be alone. To Rabbi Chaim, it was now clear that Rabbi Kalifa would be delving into one of the Torah's hidden mysteries -- and he wanted to be there to listen in. Hoping to not be discovered, he concealed himself under one of the benches,.

Rabbi Chaim listened intently, as Rabbi Kalifa taught Rabbi Baruch profound secrets. Although he heard every single word quite clearly, Rabbi Chaim understood only one aspect, that of how the soul rises from the body. He did not, however, grasp the second aspect, that of how the soul and body could be reunited.

The next Shabbat, as the congregation prayed *Musaf*, the three tzaddikim (Rabbi Shlomo, Rabbi Kalifa, and Rabbi Baruch) grasped hands and performed *aliyat haneshama*, elevation of the soul from the body.

Once the congregational recitation of *kedushat keter* had ended, Rabbi Kalifa turned to Rabbi Shlomo Pinto. "I had thought that the *sod* of *kedushat keter* was known only to us three," he began. "But, as my *neshama* became raised up above, I sensed that a fourth soul from this earth had elevated along with ours. Perhaps you know whose *neshama* this might be?"

Rabbi Kalifa then turned towards the congregation. Suddenly, he saw that Rabbi Chaim was "standing" in place, apparently without signs of "*ruach*

chaim.” Rabbi Kalifa understood right away what had happened: The fourth soul must have been that of Rabbi Chaim. And, apparently, Rabbi Chaim’s soul had not made the return trip.

Rabbi Kalifa turned to tell Rabbi Shlomo. They both began to ponder what could be done to reunite Rabbi Chaim’s *neshama* and physical body.

To go up once again to retrieve it was not a possibility, for the *aliyah* is done only during *keddushat keter*, which is done just once per week. To leave Rabbi Chaim there, without *ruach chaim*? Also not an option.

Immediately, Rabbi Kalifa ordered the congregation to not touch the twelve-year-old.

Rabbi Chaim’s *neshama* did, of course, return from above. There are two different versions of just how that occurred, however.

According to one version, Rabbi Kalifa and Rabbi Shlomo ordered that the Beit HaKenneset’s doors be shut. The congregation was to remain there until *Mincha*. At that time, the two *Rabbanim* once again performed the elevation of the soul. Now that they were back in the upper worlds, they located Rabbi Chaim. They tried to retrieve his *neshama*.

Rabbi Chaim told them, however, that he was not prepared to go with them. Not prepared to leave, that is, until they taught him the entire *sod* -- including the *sod* of how the *neshama* is to return to the world below and reunite with its *guf*. The *Chachamim* complied. They taught him the entire *sod* -- and Rabbi Chaim then returned to the lower realms accompanied by his father and Rabbi Kalifa.

According the other version, once Rabbi Shlomo realized what had happened, he raced out of the Beit HaKenneset, to find a *minyan* that had not yet gotten to *kedushat keter* of *Tefillat Musaf*. There, during *keter*, he once again performed the elevation of the soul, this time returning his son back to this world.

Rabbi Kalifa’s and Rabbi Shlomo’s return *alliyot* apparently came at a price, for they both passed away that week. They are buried, one next to the other, in the cometary of Agadir.



רַבִּי נְהוֹרַאי אוֹמֵר הֲיֵי גוֹלָה לְמָקוֹם תּוֹרָה וְאֵל
 תֵּאמַר שֶׁהִיא תָּבוֹא אַחֲרַיִךְ שְׂחַבְרִיךְ יְקִימוּנָהּ
 בְּיָדָךְ. וְאֵל בִּינְתָךְ אֵל תִּשְׁעֶן:
 מִשְׁנָה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנָה י"ד

Rabbi Nehorai says: Exile yourself to a place of Torah, and do not say that it will come after you, because it is your friends who maintain it in your hands. And do not rely on your own understanding.

This mishnah has Rabbi Nehorai exhorting the Torah scholars to not remain in situations where they lack the opportunity to advance in their learning. Rather, they should “exile” themselves to a place where those opportunities exist, despite the difficulties involved in leaving wherever they happen to be right now. They cannot rely upon the possibility that a great teacher might come to them. Nor may they rely upon having just their colleagues go, in expectation that the returning colleagues will be able to transmit to them all the knowledge they gained in that far-away place.

The mishnah ends by stressing the importance of seeking out both a Rav and a “friend.” It is not proper to trust one’s own judgement. Rather, one should seek the guidance of colleagues and a Rav.

Now that I have summarized the text-oriented, *peshat* understanding, I would like to present a different approach, that of *mussar*.

An unusual statement is found in Midrash Kohelet, telling us that everything that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* created in man, its parallel was put into the larger world as well. For instance, just as man was created with an eye, so was an “eye” put into the larger world, as the verse says, *And [the locusts] covered the “eye” of the land . . .* (*)

(*) *ED NOTE: “Eye” is the literal translation of the hebrew. Classic commentators explain that “eye” is not literal here, but means “the view” or “the appearance” or is metaphoric. Similarly, all other examples cited by this midrash are understood in other sources as poetic metaphor, not literal “creations.”*

I would like to extend the approach taken by this midrash to other examples as well.

For instance, let us look at the creation of man's *mo'ach*, loosely understood as his "brain." It is said that the *mo'ach* is where man's *neshama* "resides." In Hebrew, this means that it is the *mishkan* of the *neshama*. One could say that it parallels the *mishkan* on earth, which was the *mishkan* of the *Shechina*. Our Rabbis equate the *neshama* to the *Shechina*. Furthermore, man's *neshama* is also considered *chelek Eloka mi'me'al*.

Another example is that man's heart could be said to correspond to the holy ark, where the *luchot* and the *sefer Torah* are to reside. The heart is the *mishkan* of *chochma*, as our Rabbis said (Berachot 61b) "The heart understands." All the Torah that one learns enters his heart.

These limbs were created in man to demonstrate that man is like a *mishkan*. The *mishkan* is parallel to the man in this world. Just as the *mishkan* was disassembled, reassembled, and disassembled again at each stopping point on the journey and accompanied Yisrael on all their travels, so must man proceed in this world. He must consider the parallel that was created in the world to correspond to his *leiv* and his *mo'ach*. I refer, of course, to the *mishkan*.

Man must rise higher and higher with each day. Even if he sometimes succumbs and does not "pass" all the tests that life brings, he must still strengthen himself anew in his service of Hashem. Gittin 61b tells us that one does not fully understand words Torah until he has first "stumbled" over interpreting them. The idea is that we must learn from the *mishkan*. It comes apart, only to be put back together the next day, to stand once again.

The *mishkan* parallel is instructive as regards to our mishnah, as well. We can learn from it that a Yisrael must be prepared to "exile" himself to a place of Torah, just as the *mishkan* was "exiled" to wherever Yisrael was going to be that day.

Berachot 64a tells us that Torah scholars have no "rest," neither in this world nor the next. Rashi explains that this means that they go from one place of Torah learning to another and move on from expounding upon one verse to expounding upon another.

We now see why the Torah went to such great lengths to document the journeys of the *mishkan* and the details of its ritual service, not just once, but several times. To my understanding, this was because the passages were

being written not just for the sake of knowing about the *mishkan*, but in order to know more about man, who, as I have said, is like the *mishkan*. Because man sanctifies himself in this world, he is like the *mishkan* and the *Shechina* rests inside him.

The Chumash (Five books of Moses) tells us nothing regarding the Beit HaMikdash that will be built later in history by Shlomo HaMelech. The books of the prophets (Melachim I 6:13) do, however, prophesy **וּשְׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֶעֱזֹב אֶת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, *I will dwell amongst Yisrael, and I will not abandon Yisrael, my nation.*

Furthermore, we have the Kaddosh Baruch Hu saying to Shlomo HaMelech, *“I have heard your prayer and your petition, which you have petitioned before Me. I have consecrated this Temple which you have built to place My Name there forever, and My eyes and My heart shall be there at all times.*

It is noteworthy that Tanach provides few details of how this Beit HaMikdash was built. Neither is the building of the Third Temple described in Chumash. It is first mentioned in Yechezkel’s prophesy. Our Rabbis tell us that once Shlomo (**שלמה**) HaMelech had built the first Beit Hamikdash, the Kaddosh Baruch Hu said to him, “Now, the work of Heaven and earth is completed (**שלמה**). You shall complete (**ותשלם**) the work. This is why he is called “Shlomo,” for the Kaddosh Baruch Hu completed (**שהשלים**) the work of creation through the work of his (Shlomo’s) hands.

Despite this, there is no mention in Chumash of the building a Beit HaMikdash. Yet, through two thousand years of exile, there is nothing we mourn for more. Isn’t it interesting how it is so much on our minds how these two Battei Mikdash were destroyed due to our sins, yet we do not mourn for the loss of the *Mishkan*? This also holds true when it comes to our formal prayers: We ask for the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, but do not speak of the *Mishkan*.

However, according to what we have written here, the question begins to fall away.

The *Mishkan* was not built for any reason other than to be an example to the Bnei Yisrael, that they would gaze upon it and learn from it. They would take it apart on a regular basis, as they were being *goleh* from one place to another. Yet, unlike the case of the Battei Mikdash, the *Shechina* remained

within the Mishkan even when it was not formally standing. The Mishkan, not the Battei Mikdash, was therefore the “*ikar*,” the “primary” thing. For, it was from the Mishkan, not the Mikdash, that the B’nei Yisrael could learn a great deal more. This is the reason, I believe, why the Chumash does not speak of the Beit HaMikdash. For, the Mikdash is only to be built at the directive of the prophet, not the individual. When the time had come to build the Mikdash, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* informed Yechezkel and David HaMelech.



רַבִּי יַנַּי אָמַר אֵין בְּיַדֵּינוּ לֹא מִשְׁלוֹת הַרְשָׁעִים
 וְאֵף לֹא מִיִּסוּרֵי הַצַּדִּיקִים. רַבִּי מַתְיָא בֶן חֶרֶשׁ אָמַר
 חֶרֶשׁ אָמַר הָיִי מִקְדִּים בְּשָׁלוֹם כָּל אָדָם. וְהָיִי זָנָב
 לְאַרְיֹת וְאֵל תְּהִי רֹאשׁ לְשׁוּעָלִים:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה טו

Rabbi Yannai says: It is not in our hands to understand the tranquility of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous. Rabbi Matya ben Charash says: Be the first to greet every person. And be a tail to the lions, and do not be the head of the foxes.

Says Rabbi Yannai in our Mishnah, the tranquility of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are matters that are beyond our ability to understand. Even so, I would like to address the issue of the suffering of the righteous.

A Midrash in Bereishit Rabba says that when tzaddikim are living in tranquility and ask that their lives in this world continue to be in tranquility, the *satan* rises to accuse them. He says, “Is it not enough that [tranquility] is ahead of them, once they get to the Next World? They also ask that their lives in this world be in tranquility?” Know that, in fact, this is what happens. (In other words, know that it is true that the *satan* comes to accuse them at times like this.) Our father Yaakov, because he asked to live in tranquility in this world, became “tangled up” with the *satan* of Yosef. (In other words, Yaakov’s desire to live in tranquility led to his being subjected to the distress of having his son, Yosef, sold into Mitzra’im by his brothers.)

We see that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* grants *Satan* the ability to bring suffering upon *tzaddikim*. (The *Satan* is allowed to make the accusation. Ultimately, it is the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, not the *Satan*, that decides the “punishment” and carries it out. The “ability” granted the *Satan* is the ability to accuse, not the ability to directly cause the suffering.)

I wonder how this midrash is consistent with what we know of our Rabbis tell us regarding certain types of *yisurin*, that they can drive one both out of his

senses and away from his Creator. (See footnote, which brings a possible source for this concept, specifically mentioning the difficulties brought on by poverty.)

We also have stories regarding *yissurin* that were brought upon our great Rabbis. For instance, when Rav Hiyya bar Abba fell ill and Rav Yochanan went to visit him, he said to him: “Are your sufferings welcome to you?” Rav Hiyya bar Abba replied: “Neither they nor their reward.”

It therefore perplexes me why the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* (by allowing *Satan* to accuse) would bring suffering upon someone like Ya’akov Avinu. Didn’t this prevent him from being able to serve Hashem with a relaxed, clear thought process? All twenty-two years that Yosef was not with him, the *Shechina* did not rest upon Ya’akov.

As an answer to my question, I would like to quote Berachot 63b, which says that, unless one “kills” oneself over its study, one’s words of Torah will not “last.” The Torah teaches us (Vayikra 26:3), **אם בחקתי תלכו**, *If you walk in My ways*. Upon this, the midrash says that Hashem yearns for Yisrael’s toil over Torah study. Should they do not do so, they are subject to the ninety-eight curses listed in this Torah portion.

I would now like to present my own view of what the Midrash meant when it says that Yaakov requested to dwell in tranquility. Perhaps this meant that what he really sought was a bit of “rest” from his constant “toiling” over Torah. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*’s response was that as long as Yaakov was “toiling” over Torah, it was the Divine will that He not be distracted by *yissurin*. However, now that Yaakov’s unrelenting drive for Torah study had weakened, the exemption from *yissurin* no longer applied. Not only that, but the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* would expressly bring *yissurin* upon him now.

Sefer Iyov tells us, in its ancient wisdom, that man is “born” to toil. In other words, one must spend his days on this earth in “toil.” If one chooses to not “toil” in Torah and Mitzvoth (to the extent that is appropriate to one on his level), then he will have to “toil” in *yissurin*.

The *yissurin* suffered by tzaddikim ultimately bring atonement to their generation. A midrash that appears in Bereishit Rabba, Tanchuma, and Talmud Yerushalmi cites evidence for this. It says that Rabbi Yehidah HaNassi endured great *yissurin* and anguish for thirteen years. During this entire period, according to the midrash, no women died in childbirth, nor did any suffer a miscarriage, throughout the Land of Israel.

A gemara in Berachot describes the great merit of Rabbi Chanina, who himself got by on a very meager diet. A Heavenly voice would issue forth daily from Mount Chorev, saying, “The entire world is sustained for the sake of Chanina, My son. He, however, makes due with just a *kav* of carobs per week.” One could say that this gemara illustrates once again how the suffering endured by tzaddikim brings merit to the world.

I must point out, though, that these *yissurin* are not something to be desired, for they distract these tzaddikim from their service of Hashem. Yet, the tzaddikim endure this anyway, for the sake of the generation. To me, it would even seem that they are willing to do so, despite its meaning that they thereby don’t have the opportunity to serve Him with a calm and clear mind.

We can now better understand our mishnah. Rabbi Yannai says that the tranquility of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are matters beyond our ability to understand. However, one can read his words literally, to be saying something very different, namely that “we have nothing” from either the tranquility of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous. This means the following: Just as the world “gains nothing” from the tranquility of the wicked, it is our prayer, according to Rabbi Yannai, that we gain nothing as well from the suffering of the righteous.

In other words, we are saying to Hashem that we would rather that the tzaddikim not suffer, even if it means that we would thereby not gain the atonement that their suffering brings us. Not only that, but we are praying that the tzaddikim not suffer even for their own benefit, that is, even so as to make them stronger.

We ask this because we believe that that, despite the benefit they bring, the cost is too great. For, they drive one “out of his mind” and away from his Creator.

We pray that He find other ways of achieving the benefits brought by *yissurin*.

רבי מתיא בן חרש אומר הוי מקדים בשלום כל אדם

Rabbi Matya ben Charash says: Be the first to greet every person. **הוי מקדים** (הוי בשלום) What was Rabbi Matya’s intent here?

Perhaps it is to reinforce the notion that the soul of man is joined to -- or a part of? -- the Divine.

Note that the mishnah says **הוי מקדים בשלום**. The gemara in Massechet Shabbat tells us that **שלום** is one of Hashem’s names.

Perhaps the mishnah is teaching us that man must honor and acknowledge the godliness of his fellow. He does this by asking **בשלמו**. This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai did. Massechet Berachot tells us that he was so zealous about greeting everyone he encountered, that no one, not even a non-Jew, ever had the chance to greet him first. That's how quick he was to greet everyone he met.

אדם, in gematria is the number forty-five, which corresponds (in a certain way of gematria calculation) to the **שם הויה**. This ties in to the idea that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* sustains each and every one of us. And that is why we must greet them (ask **בשלמו**). For this honors the Kaddosh Baruch Hu, whose Name is **שלוש**.

רבי ינאי אומר אין בידינו לא משלות הרשעים ואף לא מיסורי הצדיקים

Our mishnah quotes Rabbi Yannai as saying that “It is not in our hands to understand the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous.” I wonder: Why does the mishnah use the term, “in our hands”?

Perhaps it chose that term in order to teach us to avoid joining with *resha'im* even when it seems most advantageous, that is, when they seem to be on the ascendancy. The converse is true as well: That we should never distance ourselves from *tzaddikim*, even when it seems that there is little practical advantage, for instance, when they are suffering from poverty and of low status.

The message is: One must always distance themselves from *resha'im* -- and, no matter what, always attach themselves to *tzaddikim*.

The mishnah says that neither the tranquility of the *resha'im* nor the tribulations of the *tzaddikim* are “in our hands.” The language parallels the verse in Bamidbar that speaks of the land being taken “*from his hand*,” meaning from his *reshut*. Within the context of our mishnah, this means that the question of why *tzaddikim* apparently seem to thrive and *resha'im* flourish is not something that we should involve ourselves with. And, it should not influence us to band with the *resha'im* at all -- no matter how successful they appear.

רבי מתיא בן חרש אומר הוי מקדים בשלום כל אדם

Rabbi Matya ben Charash says: Be the first to greet every person and rather be a tail to lions than a head of foxes. It is said of Rabbi Matya (in a collection of legends known as Midrash Asseret Hadibrot) that never in his life did he gaze at the face of a married woman.

The Satan singled him out, trying to ensnare him. “Is there such a thing as a man who does not sin?” he asked.

The Satan went up to the heavens to speak to the Kaddosh Baruch Hu and told Him: “Master of the World! Give me the right and I will entrap Rabbi Matya.” The Kaddosh Baruch Hu told him, “Go ahead and try.”

And that is what he did.

He appeared before Rabbi Matya in the form of a beautiful woman.

Rabbi Matya turned to the left.

The Satan/beautiful woman moved to Rabbi Matya’s left.

Rabbi Matya turned right.

The “game” continued. Finally Rabbi Matya, sensing that the *yetser hara* had him in its “gun sight,” told his students that he feared lest he be enticed. “Bring me fire and nails,” he instructed them.

He thrust the nails into the fire, leaving them there until they glowed red-hot. Then he placed them onto his eyes.

Seeing this, the Satan fell upon his face, trembling.

Back up to the heavens went the Satan. “Master of the World! Here is what happened,” he said. “Hadn’t I told you that you would never succeed with him?” declared the Kaddosh Baruch Hu.

Then Hashem called out to the Angel Raphael “Go and heal the eyes of Rabbi Matya ben Charash.”

Raphael went to Rabbi Matya, announcing that he had been sent by the Kaddosh Baruch Hu Himself. “Leave things as they are,” said Rabbi Matya in response.

Raphael went back to Heaven, to tell the Kaddosh Baruch Hu what had occurred. “Go back and let Rabbi Matya know that the *yetser hara* will have never have power over him,” said the Kaddosh Baruch Hu.

Raphael returned, told Rabbi Matya of Hashem’s assurance, and Rabbi Matya told him, “Go ahead and cure me.”

The above legend, although not appearing in the works of our early Rabbis, does have a partial basis in gemara. Massechet Berachot says that it’s better that man walk behind a lion than behind a woman. Another gemara (Baba Bathra 57b) speaks of one who passes by a place where women are standing in the river, legs exposed. If he could have passed some place else, yet did not do so,

he is considered a *rasha* -- even if he averts his eyes. Perhaps this is what Rabbi Matya had in mind.

Rabbi Matya gave up his sight rather than being tempted to glance inappropriately. This might be called “a tail to lions.” In other words, when faced with a choice of paths, where one has a woman and the other a lion, take the path that has the lion -- and not the one that has potential temptation.

The *yetser hara* could be compared to a fox. We see this alluded to in the following way: There is a midrash that compares the *mitzri'im* to foxes. Other midrashim tells us that they were immersed in depravity.

Perhaps, when Rabbi Matya spoke of being “a tail to lions,” he was speaking allegorically. It is a near-certainty that were one to take the path where lions are found, that he will be attacked. The chance of not being attacked is quite small. This is somewhat akin to the animal’s tail, which could be said to be a relatively minor part of its body.

Despite the risk, one is obligated to take that path of lions. This is despite your self-confidence that the “fox,” that is, sin, will not ensnare you. To your mind, you are like the “head,” which is the most important part of the body. Yet, your judgement is overruled; you cannot trust yourself. This is because, when it comes to sexual temptation, one cannot rely solely upon oneself.

The basic principle is that when faced with two options, one that carries moral temptation and another that does not, one should always choose the one that is temptation-free -- and not rely upon outsmarting “the fox.”



רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב אוֹמֵר הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דּוֹמֶה לְפְרוֹזְדוֹר
 בְּפִנֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. הִתְקַן עֲצֻמָּךְ בְּפְרוֹזְדוֹר כְּדִי
 שְׂתַכַּנֵּס לְטְרַקְלִין:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה טז

Rabbi Yaacov says: This world is like a corridor (prozdor) that leads to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the corridor so that you will be able to enter the banquet hall (traklin).

Rabbi Yaakov says that this world is like a a corridor that leads to the World to Come. So as be ready to enter the banquet hall, one should prepare oneself beforehand in the corridor.

The language here seems strange: One “should” prepare oneself? Why is this only a suggestion? Also, both the World to Come and This World are expressed as worldly metaphors. Why? In what sense is there a “banquet hall” in the World to Come (preceded by an “antechamber”)?

We do find similar use of metaphor in the gemara Avodah Zarah 3a. There, it says that he who toils before Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. As to the one who does not toil before Shabbat, from where would he eat on Shabbat? One could say that this gemara is not speaking literally (that he who expects to eat on Shabbat one must prepare beforehand), but as a metaphor. The “work” it refers to is not the earning of money for groceries, the shopping, the cooking, and preparing one’s household. Rather, perhaps it refers to the Torah and Mitzvoth that one must perform in this world so as to merit the reward that one “eats” in the next one.

If one were to say that this reference to Shabbat is a metaphor (as I have), meaning that it refers not to Shabbat, but to the World to Come, it is striking how the metaphor chosen for the World to Come (Shabbat) is unlike that chosen in our mishnah. The mishnah’s is physical (banquet hall), while here it is spiritual (Shabbat). The Shabbat metaphor fits with other sources, which sometimes refer to the World to Come as the “day” that is entirely “Shabbat.” Shabbat is spiritual and the World to Come is spiritual. It is easy to see how

that fits. Why, would our mishnah, though, choose a metaphor (Banquet Hall) that is strictly physical?

My answer is that the two sources differ in their intent. To review: My reading is that the gemara's "toiling before Shabbat leads to eating on Shabbat" refers to the Torah and Mitzvoth that must be performed in this world so as to merit reward in the next. This gemara is telling us what will happen at the time of Moshiach, when the Nations of the world offer their complaints as to not having received "World to Come" rewards.

"Why weren't we given (World-to-Come-earning) mitzvoth for the physical world, just as the Jews were?" they will ask.

The response would be that they were, in fact, offered the Torah and Mitzvoth before Yisrael was, but rejected them.

"And now you ask for reward? He who toils before Shabbat will eat; he who does not, will not. Yisrael said, **נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמַע**, *We will do and we will listen*. They toiled at Torah and Mitzvoth in this world. Therefore, they -- and not you (the Nations) -- will eat on Shabbat. They --- not you -- merit reward in the World to Come."

I would now like to address the anteroom / banquet hall simile.

The mishnah plainly says that This World is comparable to an antechamber and the World to Come to a banquet hall. It seems to me, however, that these are not just being compared to the World to Come and to This World, but to other things as well.

I refer to the gemara (Berachot 17a) that says, *May you see [lit] "your world" provided in your lifetime and may your latter end be for the future world*. There are many ways of understanding this gemara. I would suggest the following: When one's sons and daughters are [successfully] being raised according to the ways of Torah and Mitzvoth, this is called seeing "your world" in "your lifetime." And, if one fully deports himself in accordance with the Torah, and his family life is conducted with purity, his offspring will be like him. They will be his "glory" in this world.

In this sense, his home is like an anteroom before the ballroom. The children are like one's "ballroom" and the glory of one's life, for this is all of his "toil."

However, if one does not conduct himself according to Torah, meaning that he does not live according to its mitzvoth, it is [next to] impossible that the children born from him will be mitzvah observant. If they had not experienced

commitment to Torah and Mitzvoth in their own homes, why would they want to accept upon themselves a “burden” like this later on?

I frequently have parents coming to me, broken and crying because a child of theirs is about to marry a non-Jew. My first question to the parents is whether they have kept the Shabbat and kept kosher. Invariably, the answer is in the negative.

I then must tell them, “What, then, would you have expected to happen? These children had never seen real Judaism in their home, neither Shabbat nor kashrut. How, then, would they know what real Judaism was about?”

“They aren’t fully aware that a Jew may not even consider not keeping the Shabbat. Why should they be fully aware that they may not even consider marrying someone not Jewish?”

“Were your home have had a fully Jewish character, then your children would know that they were Jewish and would never have done this. Just as you have instead gone according to your own hearts’ desires, so have your children. Therefore, it is you who are at fault.”



הוא היה אומר יפה שעה אחת בתשובה
 ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה מכל חיי העולם
 הבא. ויפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעולם
 הבא מכל חיי העולם הזה:
 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ד משנה יז

He used to say: One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than the entire life of the World to Come. And one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come is better than the entire life of this world.

The mishnah says (in the name of Rabbi Yaakov) that a single moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is greater than all the World to Come. On its surface, this statement seems a bit odd. After all, are we put into this world for any reason other than to fulfill Torah and mitzvot and thereby return our souls to an honorable spot in the World to Come? That being the case, why would the Tanna of our mishnah say that even one moment of life in this world (albeit spent in teshuvah) had any advantage over the World to Come?

What I mean is the following: If we are to say (as I do) that life in this world has no value other than as a means of acquiring the World to Come, then how could any aspect of life in this world possibly be more valuable than the World to Come? This world is one of physicality, while the Next World is one of pure spirituality. One could say that this shows that there is no question as to which is superior.

I would ask as well why the Tanna mentions *teshuvah* and *ma'asim tovim*, but not *talmud Torah*. After all, what benefit is there to *teshuvah* and *ma'asim tovim* without Torah and *kiyum haMitzvot*?

One approach to answering my questions may be found in Berachot 34b. There, it says that in the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* are standing, *tzadikim gamurim* do not stand. The gemara appears to be saying that *tzadikim gamurim*, who have never sinned in their lives, are not on as high of a level

as *ba'alei teshuvah* (who, presumably, have sinned -- although they have done *teshuvah*).

An answer to these questions might be found in the verse in Yirmiyahu 2:2,

Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, your following Me in to the wilderness, into an unsown land. Note that the verse adds that the land was unsown. Why is this detail important? Doesn't everyone already know that a **מדבר**, a wilderness, is unsown? Rather, this added detail must be telling us something other than what appears in its plain sense.

I believe that the true intent here is to inform us of the high degree of self-sacrifice exhibited by those who left *Mitzra'im*. Consider: The Torah had not yet been given. The people did not yet have Torah and Mitzvoth. B'nai Yisrael therefore had nothing to protect them from the *yetser hara* or from *mitzri* influence. Still, they did hold on to what they did have, namely the traditions that had been passed down from their fathers. They changed neither their names, their style of dress, nor their language. Hashem never commanded them regarding this, yet they did so anyway. With utmost self-sacrifice, they never deviated from their fathers' and grandfathers' traditions. The dedication shown here is what brought them the merit to leave *Mitzrai'im*.

We now understand what was meant when the verse referred to *your following Me in to the wilderness, into an unsown land*. The verse intends to remind *us* that *our* forefathers were not like we are; they did not have Torah and Mitzvoth to protect them from spiritual threat. "Yet, they followed Me" says Hashem. "They heeded the call of My Voice, in a land that was unsown. Unsown, that is, in terms of not having Torah and Mitzvoth to draw upon." Rather, all they could draw upon was sincere self-sacrifice, which would be their sole resource in not falling prey to the *yetser hara*. The merit they earned thereby made them worthy of being taken out of *Mitzra'im*.

We may now understand why our *Chachamim* gave such praise to *ba'alei teshuvah*. Both the *tzaddik gamur* and the *ba'al teshuvah* must fight the *yetser hara*. The *tzaddik gamur* has Torah and mitzvoth to serve as his weapons. The *ba'al teshuvah*, though, must suddenly break free of the *tumah* and filth that he had been accustomed to for years and years. All desire for the comforts and temptations of the physical world must be cast aside. How is the *ba'al teshuvah* to do this? All he has to marshal is his own ability.

He won't be able to draw upon the holy Torah, for it's unlikely that he has ever even tasted it. And this is why our Rabbis praise so effusively the *ba'al teshuvah*.

The *ba'al teshuvah* has given over his entire self for the sake of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. He has waged battle with the *yetser hara* -- and won. This, despite not having its antidote (Torah) at his service. One such as this is certainly worthy of the highest praise.

I believe that I have now resolved not just the question of how to understand the gemara in Berachot ("Where *ba'alei teshuvah* are standing, *tzadikim gamurim* do not stand"), but also resolves the question I had on our mishnah.

Messirut nefesh is man's highest achievement. It is also the only *middah* that can be attained only in this world, but not the Next. For, how is one to exhibit *messirut nefesh* after one has already passed on to the World of Truth and is no longer alive?

Other sources of merit can be achieved even after one has passed on to the Next World. Torah study is one example. He who has never learned a word of Torah in his lifetime -- and therefore does not have the merit of Torah study -- still has the potential of attaining it after he dies. For, the son he left behind could dedicate his own study to his father. He would thereby elevate the father's soul. Sanhedrin 104a says, as a general rule (not limited to the mitzvah of Talmud Torah), that sons potentially add to their fathers' merit, even after their father has died.

A famous story is told about Rabbi Akiva. It appears in several sources, including Kallah Rabbati, Ohr Zarua, and Machzor Vitri. It says that Rabbi Akiva once went to a graveyard and found there a certain man, who was carrying a heavy load, full of thorns, upon his head. The man was running as fast as a horse.

Rabbi Akiva called out to him, asking that he come to a halt. When the man came before him, Rabbi Akiva asked him why he was doing such taxing work. The man implored Rabbi Akiva do not cause him any delay, lest those in charge of him accuse him of slacking off. "Who are these people?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"I am not from the living," answered the man. "I passed from this world long ago. Each and every day, I am sent to chop down trees"

“And what was your livelihood when you were alive?” asked Rabbi Akiva.

“A tax collector,” he answered. “And, I went out of my way to oppress the poor and favor the rich.” He continued, “Those who are now over me say that were I to have a son who would say *kaddish* for me and *Borchu* and a minyan would answer, I would then be freed of my sins. What am I to do, though? I left behind a wife who was pregnant, but I don’t know whether she gave birth to a son. And, even if she did, who would teach him?”

Rabbi Akiva asked him his name and what city he was from.

Rabbi Akiva then went to that city to ask about this man. The locals answered with a curse: “Let his bones rot!” He asked about the man’s wife and was told: “May her name and memory be erased!” He asked about his son. “He never even had a Brit Milah!” came the answer, with contempt.

Rabbi Akiva went to look for the boy to do Brit Milah upon him and to study Torah with him. He found him and performed the milah, but as for the Torah study, the boy simply could not grasp it.

Rabbi Akiva fasted for forty days -- and the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* responded by opening up the boy’s mind. Rabbi Akiva was then able to learn with him. He taught him Torah, *Kriyat Shema*, *Birkat HaMazon*, and set the young man before a minyan to say *Borchu*.

“*Baruch Hashem HaMevorach*” the congregation responded.

At once, the boy’s father became free.

He appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream: “May it be the will of Hashem that you merit eternal rest in Gan Eden! You freed me from the judgement of *Gehenom!*”

We see from this story that even when it comes to someone who lived and died as a *rasha gamur*, it is still possible that his *neshama* might be elevated after he passed on to the Next World. It all depends upon what good deeds the children he left behind will do in This World.

When it comes to the *middah of messirut nefesh*, however, it cannot be attained any time other than when the individual is still in This World. The reason for this is obvious. For, once one has died, and is no longer amongst the living, how could he possibly give up his life for the sake of His Name?

With that, we can better understand the intent of our mishnah. As you recall, the mishnah says (in the name of Rabbi Yaakov) that a single moment

of repentance and good deeds in this world is greater than all the World to Come. We could not understand how the Tanna of our mishnah could possibly say that even one moment of life in this world (albeit spent in teshuvah) had any advantage over the World to Come. We asked as well why the Tanna mentions *teshuvah* and *ma'asim tovim*, but not *talmud Torah*. "After all," we said, "what benefit is there to *teshuvah* and *ma'asim tovim* without Torah and *kiyum haMitzvot*?"

I think that we now know why the mishnah mentioned *teshuva*, but not Talmud Torah and *kiyum haMitzvot*. For, one who does *teshuvah* in this world and does so with *messirut nefesh* -- and is also someone who has never been exposed to Torah -- has achieved something that the *tzaddik* cannot. Although the *tzaddik* has never sinned, the *ba'al teshuvah* has the advantage of having been *mosser nefesh* solely through the resources of his own self. Even the *tzaddik gamur* can not stand in the place of one like this.



רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר אֶל תְּרַצֶּה אֶת
חֵבְרֵךְ בְּשַׁעַת כַּעַסוֹ וְאֶל תִּנְחַמְנֵנוּ בְּשַׁעַת שְׂמִיתוֹ
מִטַּל לְפָנָיו וְאֶל תִּשְׁאַל לוֹ בְּשַׁעַת נְדָרוֹ וְאֶל
תִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לְרֵאוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁעַת קְלָקְלָתוֹ׃
מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה יח

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Do not appease your friend in his time of anger and do not console him while his dead lies before him. Do not question him about his vow at the time he makes it and do not attempt to see him at the time of his degradation.

The mishnah lists four things here in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar: To not attempt to appease one's friend at his time of anger; to not console him while his dead still lies before him; to not question him about his vow at the time he makes it; and to not attempt to see someone at the time of his degradation (meaning, when he is still embarrassed over just having sinned).

I believe that these four have a common denominator.

Each of these individuals is in a situation of great stress; they will not quite have their wits about them. Let us say that one was dealing with someone who is intoxicated. Would anyone expect that they could get this person to seriously consider some matter that requires serious thought and a clear mind? Everyone knows that, as long as the other fellow is intoxicated, the time is not right for speaking to him about anything of consequence.

So, too, with the cases mentioned in our mishnah: It's simply not the right time to talk to them about such matters right now. Better to wait.

Let's go through each situation and explain why the time is not yet right to speak to them.

The first case was of one who was angry. The Zohar tells us that at the time that one is full of anger, his *neshama* departs from him. This tells us why it would be fruitless to try and calm him: His *neshama* is not with him. He is therefore not the same person!

The second case, to not try consoling he whose dead is still before him, is similar. He has just lost a loved one. The loved one has not yet been buried. Is there any anguish greater than this? He is exempt from Mitzvoth at this time. According to some opinions, the exemption is because he is simply too overcome with anguish.

The third case is that of one who has just made a vow. One who is angry is particularly prone to act rashly and make the kind of vow that he might later regret. In fact, Rabbi Menachem Meiri, a 13th century commentator on the talmud, writes that most vows are the result of anger and unreasonable strictness.

Our Rabbis even say of he who becomes angry, that it is as if he worships idols. The talmud says that he who loses his temper is “taken over” by all kinds of *geheinom*. It says as well that even he who faithfully fulfills his vow is considered a *rasha* for having vowed in the first place. There is even a suggestion that the one who vows might possibly be considered as if he had built a “high place” for sacrifices (and even offered a sacrifice upon it).

This is why one should avoid standing alongside one who is vowing a vow. For, we may assume that he is acting in anger. How much more so should one not even attempt to get him to come to his senses, realize what he had just done, and have him see that his vow was irrational, ill-considered, and something that he did only as an impetuous outburst.

The fourth case was to avoid seeking out his fellow at the time of his *kilkul*. This refers to the time when he is embarrassed over having just sinned. For, when one commits a transgression, his *ruach* departs from him. It is replaced with a *ruach shtut*, a spirit of foolishness. The talmud says of one that commits a transgression, that it must be that a *ruach shtut* must have gotten into him. This *ruach shtut* causes one to forget all of Torah and mitzvoth. It even removes *hashgachat Hashem*, individual providence, from him. Not only that, but it pushes him to transgress.

It is therefore imprudent and unwise to stand alongside one who is the act of transgressing. For, just as we said about he who is exploding with anger, his *neshama* departs from him. He is therefore no longer himself. The original person is not really there. He is a different person at that moment. The *ruach shtut* has entered him.

Wait, then, until his anger has subsided. Even after he has completed the act of transgression, allow a good amount of time to pass.

Only after a period of time has passed, may one begin the process of reproach. Similarly, only after a period of time has passed, may one begin the process of questioning the one who had vowed, so as to join with him in exploring whether the vow was said with conscious commitment.

The same applies to one whose relative has just died. Wait until after he has buried his dead. Allow some time to pass. Only then should he be approached to offer consolation. For, at this point, his *ruach* will have returned to him.



שְׂמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן אוֹמֵר (מְשָׁלִי כַד) בְּנִפְל אוֹיְבֶיךָ
 אֵל תִּשְׂמַח וּבְכַשְׁלוֹ אֵל יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ פֶּן יִרְאֶה יי וְרַע
 בְּעֵינָיו וְהִשִּׁיב מֵעַלְיוֹ אָפוֹ:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנֵה יט

Shmuel HaKatan says: “Do not be happy when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles do not let your heart be joyous, (lest God sees and it will be evil in His eyes, and He will turn His anger from him.” It does not say “burning anger,” but rather “anger,” which teaches us that he is forgiven for all his sins.)

The words expressed in our mishnah by Shmuel Hakatan are a direct quotation from Sefer Mishlei, the Book of Proverbs. Nothing original is added. This fact has been noted by Rabbi Obadiah m’Bartenura and other commentators.

Why would something be brought in Shmuel HaKatan’s name, if he was not the one who actually wrote it? One of the answers brought by the commentators is that, although he did not originate the expression, Shmuel Hakatan considered it so powerful and important that he quoted it frequently, urging and admonishing the people to follow its message.

I wonder about this explanation. Although one could say that the quote from Mishlei is brought here to show that Shmuel HaKatan “lived by it,” that he considered its message of utmost importance, and that he epitomized it, I wonder why the editor of the mishnah, Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, did not bring anything *else* in the name of this great Tanna. Surely, he must have *also* said things that were original and innovative, more than just quotations of explicit verses.

A story told about Shmuel HaKatan in Sotah 48b. I believe that it sheds light on my question. The gemara says that the *chachamim* were once sitting in Bnei Brak. A *bat kol* came to them from the heavens and said, “There is amongst you a certain individual who is worthy of having the *Shechina* hover over him. The generation, however, is not worthy of this happening, though.” All eyes then

turned to Shmuel HaKatan. After he died, they eulogized him, “He was humble; He was a *hasid*; He was a *talmid* of Hillel.”

The Talmud Yerushalmi says, (according to one opinion) “Why was he called HaKatan? Because he made himself small.”

We see from these sources that he was truly humble, a person who “made himself small.” Although the talmud records almost no statements in his name (it does have several stories, though), I believe (based on the gemara’s saying how self-effacing he was) that, despite the talmud’s having no record of it, he did, in fact, teach all kinds of innovative Torah thoughts. Not only that, but I believe that he was also an expert in *chochmot* that other *Chachamim* never became experts in.

The gemara tells us in Berachot 28b that after the destruction of the Second Temple, when Jewish Christians increased in strength and posed a genuine threat of recruiting even more Jews to their beliefs, the *Chachamim* met to decide how to deal with the situation. Amongst them was Rabban Gamliel. He asked the other *Chachamim*, “Is there any one amongst you who ‘knows’ how to frame *Birkat HaMinim* (a new blessing to be added to the standard eighteen blessings of the *Amidah*, which would specifically be directed against these Jewish Christians)?”

The gemara says that Shmuel HaKatan then arose to composed it.

We see from Sanhedrin 11a that he was expert in intercalation, the method of calculating when a new day need be inserted into the calendar, for the gemara reports that he was one of seven who were appointed to join Rabban Gamliel in this task. (See also source quoted below.)

Shmuel was so humble, though, that he never wished to call attention to his own Torah insights. Rather than present his own teachings, he repeated that which he heard from previous generations, to the extent that when offering moral reproach, he quoted *Mishlei* verbatim.

Extending this understanding of mine further, I would suggest that Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, the editor of the Mishnah, purposely excluded Shmuel HaKatan’s original teachings from Pirkei Avoth, in deference to Shmuel HaKatan’s great humility. This was his way of honoring Shmuel HaKatan’s desires, even after his passing.

Let us now move on to discussing what might have drawn Shmuel HaKatan so strongly to these particular verses, which our tradition says were composed

by Shlomo HaMelech. I believe that his identification with these sayings is tied in to his great humility. For, it seems quite logical that one who is truly humble would not wish that his enemies be destroyed. Quite the opposite: He would request mercy upon them, even as they continue to inflict suffering upon him.

Shlomo HaMelech, elsewhere in Mishlei, says *If your enemy, is hungry, feed him bread. If he is thirsty, give him water.* We see as well that David HaMelech requested mercy upon his enemies: *Instead of my love, they persecute me, but I am at prayer.* One way of understanding this verse is that David HaMelech is saying that even though his enemies hate him, he will pray, when they are ill, that they heal.

Other verses in Tehillim (35:12,13) similarly speak of David HaMelech's willingness to pray for his enemies: *They recompense me with evil instead of good, death to my soul. But, as for me, when they were ill, my attire was sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting, and may my prayer return upon my bosom.*

Following this idea, we can now understand the continuation of the verse from Mishlei quoted above by Shmuel HaKatan, **פן יראה יקוק רוע בעיניו והשיב מעליו אפו**, *Lest G-d see, and it will displeasing in His eyes and He will turn His wrath from him [to you]*".

Sefarim (*Shelah, Reishit Chochma*) write that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* sets enemies against people so as to counter harsh judgments that these individuals might otherwise suffer. These are akin to *yissurin* that help achieve atonement.

Micah 7:18 says **מי אל כמוד נשא עון ועבר על פשע**, *Who is a God like You, Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?* The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 17a) expounds upon this verse, asking, "To whom does G-d forgive iniquity? To one who passes over [and is forgiving of] the transgressions [of others]."

We see, then, why it is not proper for one to rejoice at his enemies' troubles. For, according to the *Shelah* and *Reishit Chochma* mentioned above, these enemies are doing Hashem's Will, as He sets these enemies upon us so as to deflect the suffering we would otherwise have to endure. If one were to rejoice at their downfall, it as if he is demonstrating that he does not acknowledge that these enemies had been sent by Hashem for the benefit of the one who has the enemy harassing him. Further, he is not accepting Hashem's decision with love.

It is also as if he is saying that the suffering he endured due to this tormentor was not really from Hashem and something he did not deserve.

One could say that this means that the rejoicing person would now be subject to the full punishment originally intended for him. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will now redirect the anger He had against the enemy (the cause for Hashem's having the enemy suffer) and direct it to the individual who rejoices. We now see, in my opinion, why it would be an exceedingly great error to rejoice. For, this enemy serves to mitigate the even greater *yissurin* that Hashem originally had in mind for you. With that enemy's downfall, the judgment for greater *yissurin* will be reinstated.

שמואל הקטן אומר (משלי כד) בנפל אויביך אויבך אל תשמח ובכשלו
אל יגל לבך

Shmuel HaKatan says: "Do not be happy when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles do not let your heart be joyous." *Shmuel HaKatan* is quoting here verbatim a verse from the Book of Proverbs. My grandfather Rabbi Yoshaya Pinto zt"l wrote a commentary to the Book of Proverbs. I would like to tell you what he says there on this verse:

The verse is warning the *tzaddik* that when he sees his enemy (the *rasha*) fall, to not rejoice. And similarly, when the *resha'im* stumble the *tzaddikim* should not take pleasure in this. This is because you should take heed that when Hashem sees this, He will not approve. We know this because Hashem does not wish for the downfall and decimation of the *resha'im*, as we see from Sefer Yechezkel (18:32): *For I do not desire the death of the one who should die*. If Hashem does not rejoice in their death, it's only logical that this is how the *tzaddik* should react as well. Rather, he, like Hashem, should wish that the *resha'im* do *teshuvah*. What Hashem wants is not that the *resha'im* be destroyed, but that the *resha*, that is, their sins, be destroyed. Note that Tehillim 104:35 says that *sin* (rather than *sinner*s) be destroyed.

I would like to expand a bit on my grandfather's holy words. I would also like to give my own explanation as to why Shlomo HaMelech, the author of the Book of Proverbs, seemingly repeated himself when saying *Do not be happy when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles do not let your heart be joyous*.

Let us begin with a gemara from Pesachim 118a. When Nimrod threw Avraham Avinu into the furnace, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* Himself intervened in order to save him. This incident is hard to understand. What kind of threat did Avraham Avinu pose to them? When Sarah was held captive, it was a *malach* that was summoned to help, not Avraham. (Kerem David quotes Bereishit Rabba 41:2 here).

Even where we see that Avraham went to war against Nimrod, to save Lot from his hands, he did not kill him, despite the fact that he could have. Consider that when Avraham spared him, he was sparing someone who had caused the entire world to rebel against Hashem. It must be that Avraham knew that Hashem did not wish that *resha'im* would die, but that they be granted to opportunity to do *teshuvah*.

Perhaps one might say that Shlomo HaMelech penned our verse in *Mishlei* based on what we noted above, namely Avraham's not killing Nimrod despite being justified in doing so. The *Do not be happy when your enemy falls* corresponds to Nimrod's *falling* before Avraham in war. As regards to *and when he stumbles do not let your heart be joyous*, perhaps that corresponds to Nimrod's downfall in the wake of trying to compel Avraham Avinu to worship idols, only to have Avraham arise from the furnace.

Had Avraham killed Nimrod, people might have said, "Where is Avraham's righteousness? What kind of person is he to take revenge on those who hate him?" Perhaps that would have been a *Chillul Hashem*.

Accordingly, Avraham Avinu overcame his natural inclination and did not to anything to Nimrod. Instead, Avraham attached himself to the Hashem's trait of *chessed*. As we know, the world is built on *chessed*. Thus, this is how Avraham conducted himself -- even towards *resha'im*.

In the end, Nimrod did fall -- at the hand of Avraham's grandson, Esau. (This is according to a Midrash that says that he killed in a dispute over beautiful clothes that had been handed down from Adam HaRishon.) Recall what our Rabbis said in Massechet Shabbat, that merit flows from those who have merit and conversely, punishment from those who deserve punishment. Esau was a "man of the field," which some interpret to mean a murderer, that Nimrod's death happened through him.



אֶלִישֶׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אֹמֵר הַלּוֹמֵד יְלָד לָמָּה הוּא
 דּוֹמֶה לְדָיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיֶר חֲדָשׁ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד זָקֵן
 לָמָּה הוּא דּוֹמֶה לְדָיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיֶר מְחוּק. רַבִּי
 יוֹסִי בַר יְהוּדָה אִישׁ כָּפַר הַבְּבֵלִי אֹמֵר הַלּוֹמֵד מִן
 הַקְּטַנִּים לָמָּה הוּא דּוֹמֶה לְאוֹכֵל עֲנָבִים קְהוֹת
 וְשׁוֹתָה יַיִן מִגְּתוֹ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַזְּקֵנִים לָמָּה הוּא
 דּוֹמֶה לְאוֹכֵל עֲנָבִים בְּשׁוֹלוֹת וְשׁוֹתָה יַיִן יָשָׁן. רַבִּי
 אֹמֵר אֵל תִּסְתַּכֵּל בְּקִנְיָן אֶלָּא בְּמָה שְׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ.
 יֵשׁ קִנְיָן חֲדָשׁ מֵלֵא יָשָׁן וְיָשָׁן שְׁאֵפְלוּ חֲדָשׁ אֵין בּוֹ:
 מִשְׁנָה מִסְכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ד' מִשְׁנָה כ

Elisha ben Avuya says: One who learns Torah as a child, what is he like? Like ink written on fresh paper. And one who learns Torah in his old age, what is he like? Like ink written on paper that has been erased.

Rabbi Yosse bar Yehudah from Kefar HaBavli says: One who learns from youngsters, what is he like? Like one who eats unripe grapes and drinks new wine. And one who learns from elders, what is he like? Like one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.

Rebbe says: Do not look at the container but at what is in it. There are new containers full of old wine, and old containers that do not even have new wine in them.

It would seem -- according to the commentaries of both Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartneura and the Rambam -- that Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) disagrees with Rabbi Yossi bar Yehudah. Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartneura is quite explicit: רַבִּי יהודה פליג אדרבי יוסי בר' יהודה. Rabbi Yossi says that learning from seasoned

and experienced teachers is like drinking nicely-aged wine, while learning from younger ones is like drinking wine that has not yet ripened. Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi), on the other hand, says that one should not over-generalize: just as there are older teachers who lack wisdom, so are there younger ones who have it. In other words, according to Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi), one should not always judge a book by its cover.

Specifically, Bartenura and Rambam understand Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) as saying that the young teacher's thinking could potentially be free of the doubts and uncertainties that typically inhibit young people's clarity of thought. Neither of these commentators is saying that the young *talmid chacham* is potentially the equal of a wise elder when it comes to all other aspects of wisdom -- and certainly not when considers the all-encompassing wisdom of an elder sage. (Let us not forget that Rambam published his commentary on *Avoth* while still in his early twenties!)

However, because there are those who might misread the Rambam and Bartenura or fail to look at their commentaries, I have felt it important to clarify their approach.

I would now like to present my own approach to this mishnah.

No one would question that it is certainly possible to encounter older people who lack wisdom. But, on the other side of the coin, it seems highly unlikely that any young person would be wise, in its most all-encompassing sense, to the same degree that elder *chachamim* might be.

A mishnah further ahead in *Avoth* (5:21) says *בן ארבעים לבניה בן חמשים לעצה* . *forty-years-old to wisdom, fifty-years-old to advice-giving*. Certainly, wisdom and the ability to give sound advice comes with life experience and time. A young person, no matter how clever, will have limited ability to advise those significantly older than himself, assuming their life experience is richer as well. One is reminded of the saying, *אין חכם כבעל הנסיון* -- *There is none as wise as he who has experience*.

Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) never intended to disagree with Rabbi Yossi bar Yehudah, in the sense that both agree that the young person, no matter, how clever, would not match the elder sage in all-encompassing wisdom, given the difference in life experience. Rather, their disagreement was over something far different.

Not everyone looks at a given vessel in the same way. Especially when it is of great value, not everyone will have the expertise to recognize what it is really worth and how it is best used. The same applies to the spiritual aspects of the vessel.

It is said that great tzaddikim have been known to actually have had the ability to tell whether or not a certain vessel had been properly immersed in a mikveh beforehand. Not only that, but it is said that some great tzaddikim could even be able to look at a vessel and know all that passed through the mind of the craftsman who made it. The average person, of course, looking at the very same vessel, would see none of this.

Stories are told of the Ba'al HaTanya (*Beit Rebbi page 46, footnote 1*) that several days before his passing, he asked his grandson (Rabbi Menachem Mendel, author of *Tzemach Tzeddek*), "Do you see the ceiling?" The grandson was astonished by the question. He answered, "Rebbi, believe me, at this point, my eyes do not see that which is physical. All they see is the *Ohr HaElyon* (The Great Light) that allows the ongoing existence of the physical."

Similar to the above is what the Ba'al HaTanya wrote regarding himself (*Tanya, Sha'ar HaYichud v'HaEmunah, perek shlishi*): "That which every created thing and every activity appears to have a tangible (or perceived) reality, is only due to the limitations of our eyesight, which is limited by our eyes being made of flesh and blood. They therefore cannot perceive the metaphysical forces that Hashem puts into each created thing. However, had the eyes been permitted to perceive the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of these things, meaning that which flows to it from Hashem's emanations, then we would never even see their physical aspect."

Of course, it is beyond our ability to understand or even imagine the heights that *tzaddikim* attain. However, we can attempt to study the steps they took in order to reach those great heights, meaning their ability to "see" hidden things, that which cannot be seen by common man.

The way of *tzaddikim* is to always seek out the G-dliness and the holiness inherent in all creation. Their wish is to utilize that which is in the world only for the sake of His name and only for His Service. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* therefore provides for them measure for measure. He opens their "eyes" to "see" the evidence of His Presence and the hovering of the *Shechina* over every physical thing.

I believe that the Torah itself hints at this.

It says in Parashat Bereishit (3:21) **ויעש יקוק אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור** **וילבשם**, *And Hashem G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.* To this, the midrash comments, *In Rabbi Meir's Torah it reads clothing of אור.* (That is, “ohr” with an aleph, meaning “light,” rather than “ohr” with an ayin, meaning “skin.”)

Upon pondering the meaning of this, I have come up with the following: Let us consider an additional midrash, which might shed some “light” on what Rabbi Meir is saying. That midrash may be found in Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer. It says that the garment made for Adam was passed on to Noach. Cham removed it from the ark and passed it on to Nimrod, his grandson. When Nimrod would wear it, passing amongst the flocks and wild animals, they would fall down before him, in deference to the garment’s holiness. Those who witnessed this thought that it was happening due to Nimrod’s mightiness. They therefore anointed him king and ultimately built the Tower of Bavel.

The midrash later says that Esau, some time later, became jealous of Nimrod’s garment and killed him in order to steal it. He then used it for hunting, as the prey would fall to the ground before him, due to their sense of the garment’s holiness.

The midrash seems somewhat difficult. After all, if the animals were so greatly awed by the garment’s holiness, why wasn’t man? Not only were they not “bowing” to its holiness, but Nimrod and Esau conducted themselves as *rasha'im* even while actually wearing it! And, they were not “mere” *rasha'im*, but rebelled against Hashem and practiced idolatry! Nimrod went so far as to entice others to rebel against Hashem. All of them bowed to idols and to strange gods.

The answer, I believe, is actually quite simple. For, we know from the Rabbis of the Zohar (*Tikkunei Zohar, tikun 21, 50a*) that sin and the *yetser hara* blind one’s vision. Now, animals have neither a *yetser hara* nor an inclination to sin. It therefore seems to me that they are not hindered by yetser-hara-induced blindness and their eyes are therefore “open” to seeing the spiritual. This would explain why they, but not the men of that generation, were receptive to “seeing” the garment’s holiness. They, but not the men of that generation, were able to see the garment’s *Ohr* Hashem. This is why they bowed to Nimrod.

I would say that the situation with Bilam’s donkey was similar. As you surely recall, the donkey sensed that it had encountered a *Malach Hashem* “blocking” its path. Bilaam, however, “saw” nothing, until the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* “opened” his eyes.

It says in the Zohar that animals are able to “see” the *tzelem Elokim* with which man was created. When man sins, that *tzelem Elokim* abandons him -- and animals no longer fear him. This *tzelem Elokim* can not “seen” by any men other than those whose “eyes” and body have been shielded from contamination and maintained in purity. Further, they would have to be the type of people who seek only to “see” the holiness and G-dliness inherent in each physical thing.

Perhaps one could find a hint to these ideas in the Torah. It says that Moshe Rabbeinu was one-hundred-and-twenty when he died; his eye had not dimmed and his vigor had not diminished. One might say that the “eye” which had not dimmed was his “eye” for the spiritual. Moshe was able to “see” that which other men were incapable of, meaning the spiritual, for he had purified himself so greatly. *Yet, You have made him, but slightly less than the angels . . .*

We may now understand why the generation of the flood did not fear Noach, despite his wearing the holy garment. They were blind to its holiness, due to the quantity and magnitude of their sins. It was infused with holiness, but they saw nothing other than physical cloth. This is consistent with the Ba'al HaTanya quoted above, which said that “. . . had the eyes been permitted to perceive the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of these things, . . . then we would never even see their physical aspect.” Here, too, had their eyes been permitted to do so, the people of that generation would have seen the holiness of the garment and been just as fearful of it as the animals were. Rather than having seen a garment of עור (skin), they would have seen one with אור (light) upon it.

Nimrod's generation was so blind that they saw the opposite of *keddusha* in the garment: What they (thought they) saw was *tumah*. Seeing the effect that the garment had on the animals, they mistook it for some strange god and wished to join in its worship.

So it is with all things that are *kaddosh*. Those who wish to have its *keddusha* flow to them, will find that this is what happens. Those who do not yearn for *keddusha* will find that none flows to them.

The opposite occurs as well; there is even an example where that which has the greatest *keddusha* could have an effect that will be bad for some. This is what is one of the great Torah commentators (Rashbam) says in relation to the Land of Israel, in Devarim 11:10. The verse describes how the Land of Israel is different than the land of Mitzrai'im. One could raise crops in Mitzrai'im simply through the hard work of planting, irrigating, and watering. In other words, it is possible to be self-reliant and to succeed in agriculture, even if

one is not a *tzaddik*. However, this is not necessarily the case in the land of Israel. Rashbam encapsulates this by saying that the Land of Israel is “good” for those who keep Hashem’s commandments, but “bad” for those that do not. His context is that Eretz Yisrael, unlike Mitzrai’im, is wholly dependent on rainfall. This means that it is wholly dependent upon Hashem’s blessing, as Hashem’s blessing is what causes rainfall to occur. Since Eretz Yisrael is wholly dependent on Hashem’s blessing, this will be “good” only for those who keep His mitzvot. Those who do not keep the mitzvot will not receive the blessing. As Eretz Yisrael - unlike Mitzrai’im -- does not have natural sources of irrigation, that person will discover that Eretz Yisrael’s being wholly dependent upon Hashem’s blessing works out to his detriment. Even though this is part of what makes Eretz Yisrael *kaddosh*, from his perspective it will be “bad.” This “bad” is not an inherent “bad,” but merely the withholding of the “good.”

Limmud HaTorah is another example of something that would seem to be entirely good, due to its great *keddusha*. However, just like Eretz Yisrael, it has the potential to affect someone detrimental under certain circumstances. In fact, the gemara (Shabbat 88b) says that it has the potential both to “kill” and to “sustain life” -- depending upon the person and the circumstance.

Why are the words of the Torah compared to a prince? To tell you: just as a prince has power of life and death, so have the words of the Torah [potentialities] of life and death. Thus Rabba said; To those who go to the right hand thereof it is a medicine of life; to those who go to the left hand thereof it is a deadly poison.(Soncino translation)

The generally accepted distinction between those for whom Torah would be a “medicine of life” and those for whom it would be a “deadly poison” is whether or not their motives to study it are sincere.

Let us now return to our mishnah and my idea of linking it to the midrash regarding a garment of אור rather than a garment of עור, meaning that Adam HaRishon wore a “garment” of Light. We said that the “light” was a spiritual metaphysical quality that could not be “seen” by ordinary men. Rather than see אור, these common folk would see עור, meaning the physical aspect alone.

It is interesting to note that this midrash is brought in the name of Rabbi Meir. Those who know Hebrew will immediately see what is so noteworthy: “Meir” in Hebrew means “to illuminate.” True to his name, the eyes of this great *chacham* were able to “see” what other people could not. The gemara (Eiruvin 13b) says:

“Rabbi Meir was not his real name, but it was actually Rabbi Nehorai. Why, then was he called, “Rabbi Meir?” Because he illuminates (Me’ir) the eyes of the Rabbis in halacha. . . . Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) said, ‘My being sharper than all my colleagues can be attributed to my having learned with Rabbi Meir and seeing him from the rear. Had I seen him from the front, however, I would be even more sharp than I am now.’”

We see from this gemara that, as great as Rabbi Meir’s talmid (Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) was, by virtue of having learned from him directly and in his physical presence, he would have been even greater had he been able to see Rabbi Meir from the front rather than from the rear. One could say, as some commentators do, that the advantage of seeing his face is practical. When one can read a teacher’s lips and see his facial expressions, it is quite obvious that this makes it far easier to follow what he is saying and far easier to learn from him. One could also say, though, that the advantage in our case was not just practical, but mystical as well. In other words, it was Rabbi Meir’s shining countenance, the “light” that went out from him, that illuminated others, including Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi).

If one proceeds with the mystical interpretation I suggested, one sees something truly wondrous. Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) was Rabbi Meir’s *talmid*. In our mishnah, he says that one should not look at the vessel, but at what it contains. As I have explained, the *tzaddik* always seeks to “see” that which is Divine, even within every physical thing. He thereby merits to “see” that which is invisible to everyone else. I refer to his being able to “see” that which is wholly spiritual. This is why Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) says to not look at the vessel, but at what it contains.

Allow me to elaborate.

In order to do so, I will need to explain what I see as a distinction between two hebrew words: **בו** and **בתוכו**, both of which roughly translate as “inside (it).” When Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) wished to express the idea that one should look not at the container, but rather at what is inside it, he used **בו**, not **בתוכו**. I believe this is significant, for I would think that **בתוכו** is the more appropriate word when referring to a liquid (such as wine) that is inside a container. When distinguishing between the vessel and that which is inside, a gemara in Kiddushin 48b uses **בו** to refer to the vessel and **בתוכו** to refer to its contents (which happened to be wine, water, or honey). Based on this, I would suggest that our mishnah be read

the same way: When Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) says look not at the vessel, but what is **בו**, he means “Look not at the physical, superficial aspect of the vessel, but at its spiritual essence.” He referred, of course, to that which only the *tzaddik* sees: What the artisan was thinking at the time he made the vessel. And, the *tzaddik*’s ability to see the holiness that radiates from holy garments. So, more accurately, we can say that he was saying: “Look at the *whole* vessel, not just its externals.” So, when the mishnah says that there is potentially a new vessel “filled with old,” it is saying that the external aspect is not decisive. One could see a garment and be perfectly unaware of its holiness. Similarly, there could be a vessel that seems beautiful, but in fact contains nothing, not even the “new.” It could actually be worthless, due to the improper thoughts that went through the artisan’s mind while forming it.

The statement of Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) is brought following that of Rabbi Yossi bar Yehudah, who said that Torah learned from the young has a certain deficiency. Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) then says, according to my reading, that it is proper for one to do *teshuvah* from one’s sins. Through that process, one purifies his “vision.” This, in turn, leads to his being able to “see” *all* of the vessel, meaning its “true” nature. Things are often not what they seem. That which looks precious often is not (at least in its true sense); that which seems fairly worthless could very well be quite precious (at least in its true sense). The outside often tells nothing of the inside.

Rambam and Bartenura, whom we quoted at the beginning of this essay, maintain that Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) disagrees with Rabbi Yossi bar Yehudah. Rabbi Obadiah m’Bartenura leaves no room for doubt as to his position: **רבי יהודה פליג אדרבי יוסי בר’ יהודה**. I, however, have taken a different approach in the course of this essay. I maintain that the two teachers of our mishnah do *not* disagree. As I read it, Rabbi (Yehudah HaNassi) actually *agrees* with his predecessor; he merely intended to add to that which Rabbi Yossi bar Yehudah had left unsaid.



רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר הַקַּפֵּר אָמַר הַקְנָאָה וְהַתְאָוָה
וְהַכְפֹּז מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם׃
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ד', כֹּא

*Rabbi Elazar HaKapar says: Jealousy, desire,
and honor remove man from the world.*

Rabbi Elazar HaKapar would say: “Envy, lust and honor drive a man from the world.” Of all the bad *midot* to choose from, why did Rabbi Elazar HaKapar pick these three? And, what did he mean when saying that they “drive a man from this world”?

One approach might be found in the words of Shlomo HaMelech (Koheleth 7:14): *Be pleased when things go well, but in a time of misfortune reflect: G-d has made the one as well as the other so that man should find nothing after Him.* My interest is in the phrase *G-d has made the one as well as the other.*

Each of us was created with two drives, the *yetser hara* and the *yetser hatov*, competing to influence man’s actions. The Torah itself says (Devarim 30:15) *Behold, I have placed before you the life and the good as well as the death and the bad.* Several verses later (Devarim 30:15), it says . . . *I have put before you Life and Death, blessing and curse. Choose Life --- if you and your offspring will live -- by loving the Lord your God . . .* The Zohar Chadash (Yitro 52:1) says that just as there are forty-nine “gates” of *kedusha*, so are there forty-nine “gates” of *tumah* that correspond to them.

When it comes to most of the *middoth* considered “bad” by our Rabbis, it is my opinion that one is never allowed to utilize them. Examples would be anger, pridefulness, and stinginess. There are, however, other *middoth*, which are “bad” only when used for “bad,” but are permitted -- even obligatory -- in situations where they may effect something “good.” Theoretically, these might sometimes advance the *Shem Shamayim*. In that latter category are the *middoth* listed in our mishnah.

Let us first discuss **קנאה**, envy.

קנאה is illegitimate when it is directed towards others, when it is a manifestation of envying someone else. As Mishlei 14:30 describes it, . . . **קנאה**

rots the bones. There is, however, a **קנאה** that is constructive. I refer to *kinat sofrim*, the permitted envy that talmidei chachamim have for each other's Torah. Of this kind of *kinah*, the talmud (Bava Bathra 21a) says **סופרים תרבה חכמה קנאת** - *Scholarly envy increases wisdom*. This is so because both parties become motivated to accomplish even more and *both* of them increase in wisdom.

Ta'ava, lust, is the second *middah* listed in our mishnah and, while it can be something that is truly harmful, it can also be used for benefit in *Avodath Hashem*, as we see in Tehillim: *Behold I "lust" for your commands . . .* Another use is elsewhere in Tehillim, *I "lust" for Your salvation, Hashem, and Your torah is my "plaything."* The "lust" spoken about in this verse is the "lust" to study Torah and for *Avodath Hashem*. Tehillim 84:3 offers another example: *My soul yearns, indeed it pines, for the courtyards of Hashem*. Yet another example is Tehillim 63:2:.. *I seek You, my soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You . . .*

Kavod, honor, is the third *middah* that our mishnah lists. "Honor flees those that pursue it." This shows that one should not pursue it. A talmid chacham, however, is obligated to maintain and defend his honor (as the honor due him is not his own, but that of the Torah). One who insults the talmid chacham must pay according to his honor. Because it is the Torah's honor he is defending, rather than his own, one opinion in the gemara holds that the talmid chacham is not permitted to forgive his honor. (Our halacha, however, does not go with this opinion. Rather, it goes with the opinion that says he *is* permitted to do so.)

As I read it, the mishnah is saying, that if one *can* utilize any of these three *middoth* for the good, then one *may* do so. If one uses them for anything *but* the good, they will drive him from the world. This is what occurred with Korach, who rebelled against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon. All three of these *middoth* were exhibited by him.

He was envious (**קנאה**) that Elizaphan ben Uziel, rather than himself, was named Nassi. He lusted (**והתאוה**) for the priesthood. He yearned for the honor (**והכבוד**) that went with being leader of the Jewish People in Moshe Rabbeinu's stead. And what was his end? He was swallowed into the ground. In other words, he was driven from the world, just as Rabbi Elazar HaKapor of our mishnah said would occur to those who exhibit these traits and use them for something other than for the good.

Let us now consider Moshe Rabbeinu. Never was he envious of any other man. Quite the opposite. Upon being told that Eldad and Meidad were prophesying in the camp, and Joshua bin Nun's telling him to "Incinerate them!" his reaction

was **לִי הַמְקַנָּא אַתָּה** - *Are you being zealous (המקנא) for my sake? Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets, if Hashem would but place His spirit upon them.*

Moshe Rabbeinu never sought (והתאוה) prestige or honor (והכבוד). He did not wish to be the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu's* agent for redeeming the Jewish people from Mitzrai'im, as we see during the episode of the burning bush. There, he said *Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh? Will I bring Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrai'im?*

He also said, *“Please my Lord, send through whomever you will send.”*

He did not pursue honor. Accordingly, honor pursued him. He rose to the greatest of heights. No other member of Bnei Yisrael would ever attain the level achieved by Moshe, as we see from the Torah itself: *No other prophet arose amongst Yisrael comparable to Moshe, whom Hashem knew Face to face.*



הוא הִיָּה אֹמֵר הַיְלֻדִים לָמוֹת וְהַמֵּתִים
 לְהַחְיֹת וְהַחַיִּים לְדוֹן. לֵידַע לְהוֹדִיעַ וּלְהוֹדֵעַ
 שֶׁהוּא אֵל הוּא הַיוֹצֵר הוּא הַבוֹרֵא הוּא הַמְּבִיֵן
 הוּא הַדִּין הוּא עֵד הוּא בֹעַל דִּין וְהוּא עֲתִיד
 לְדוֹן. בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁאֵין לְפָנָיו לֹא עוֹלָה וְלֹא
 שְׂכָחָה וְלֹא מְשׂוֹא פָּנִים וְלֹא מִקַּח שׂוֹחַד שֶׁהַכֹּל
 שָׁלוֹ. וְדַע שֶׁהַכֹּל לְפִי הַחֲשָׁבוֹן. וְאַל יִבְטִיחַךְ יִצְרָךְ
 שֶׁהַשְּׂאוֹל בֵּית מְנוּס לְךָ שֶׁעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֲתָה נוֹצֵר
 (וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֲתָה נוֹלָד) וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֲתָה חַי וְעַל
 כְּרַחֲךָ אֲתָה מֵת וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֲתָה עֲתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין
 וְחֲשָׁבוֹן לְפָנָי מְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ד', כב

He used to say: Those who are born will die, and the dead will be revived, and the living will be judged. To know, to make known, and to be aware that He is God. He is the Fashioner, He is the Creator, He is the Discerner, He is the Judge, He is the Witness, He is the Plaintiff, and in the future He will judge. Blessed be He, before Whom there is no iniquity, no forgetfulness, no favoritism, and no acceptance of bribery, for everything is His. And know that everything is according to the reckoning. And do not let your evil inclination promise you that the grave will be a place of refuge for you. For against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you will die, and against your will you are destined to give judgment and accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

The meaning of this mishnah is somewhat elusive. Nevertheless, I would like to offer a few ideas as to what I think it is saying.

The mishnah begins with “*Those who are born will die.*” In other words, in the same breath as first mentioning that a child is born, it already mentions that he is destined to die. I consider this remarkable, for, to me, this seems contrary to a midrash that says that one rejoices at the birth of a child despite knowing that it is also destined to die. The midrash says, “At the time of *simcha*, *simcha*; at the time of sadness, sadness.” In other words, why think of death at the time of a birth? Accordingly, at the time that one is celebrating a *simcha*, others should not be reminding him of tragedy.

Although our mishnah is making a philosophical point and speaking in the abstract, as opposed to advocating that those celebrating a *simcha* be reminded that their child’s destiny is to die, I believe that question I raised is worth considering.

I consider it curious as well that resurrection of the dead is brought up in the first part of our mishnah -- and not in the second part, where it only says that upon death there will be “judgement and accounting.” Missing in that second part is that there will also be a time of *Moshiach*.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* brings man into this world at a stage where he is nothing more than a helpless infant, barely able to visually focus or to hear a full spectrum of sound. The newborn cannot walk or sit, nor is he able to reason. These skills develop only after a considerable amount of time. Focused vision, full-spectrum hearing, sitting, walking, and standing are achieved during the first years, but mature reasoning does not come until the age of forty. As one ages, he presumably gains valuable life experience as well. At the age of fifty, one is able to advise others. (I explain this in the next chapter of *Avoth*, where the mishnah (*Avoth* 5:21) says **בן ארבעים לבניה בן חמשים לעצה**)

Another feature of mankind is that each of us is unique in appearance and manner of thought (or personality). Some of us are born with a pronounced tendency to anger, others with a pronounced tendency towards conceit. By contrast, others might have a natural tendency towards humility. Some take pleasure in humiliating others -- or even to committing murder, while others seem innately good natured and drawn to helping others.

In my estimation, Hashem created us this way so that we would have the possibility of changing negative tendencies. The famous midrash that says that

the mitzvot were not given for any reason other than to “forge” Yisrael (or mankind) supports this idea, I believe.

All that occurs began with a calculated decision from the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. It is He who determines that the child being formed will tend to be a *chacham*, rather than a fool -- and vice versa. He determines, at the time of conception, whether the child will likely grow up to be poor or wealthy, timid or heroic.

As we all know, negative, ingrained tendencies, whether they are innate or by habit, are extremely difficult to change. An entire lifetime might not suffice. Negative tendencies can become so ingrained and resistant to being changed that it becomes next to impossible to revert to one’s original nature. As I see it, this difficulty is intentional: The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* designed our nature in a way that would allow us to earn maximum reward for our struggle. Therefore, one should not get discouraged, nor should one rest for even a moment, from striving to uproot negative aspects of one’s personality and character.

Among the 613 mitzvot, there are some that one is never exempted from; they follow us constantly throughout the course of our lifetime. One example is the commandment to honor one’s parents, which is in force not only during the course of the parents’ lifetime, but after their deaths as well. It depends neither upon time or place. The more *kibbud av v’eim* one performs, the more reward awaits him in the next world. And, when does *any* mitzvah, it leads to other mitzvot, as we saw earlier in Avot.

Although we might be born with certain tendencies, this does not mean that they are unchangeable. The Rambam says that “only the fools amongst the Nations” and “Jews incapable of intelligent thought” would say that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* predetermines that one will be a *tzaddik* or *rasha*, rich or poor, kind or cruel. Rather, each and every Jew has the potential to become a *tzaddik* like Moshe Rabbeinu or *rasha* like Jeroboam. Each of us is personally responsible for our character traits and cannot blame them on a Divine, fixed decree. Therefore, says the Rambam, we must undertake to change bad habits and realize that it is in our power to do teshuvah. Given the importance of this Rambam and its relevance to the points I wish to address here, we quote it below in full.

I would like to add to the Rambam’s explanation what I said previously, that the possibility of changing ingrained tendencies creates possibilities for being rewarded for all that hard work in the next world.

The talmud tells us (Niddah 30b) that a fetus is taught “the entirety of Torah” in its mother’s womb. Why is this done? In my opinion, it is in order to show that mortal man, born of his mother’s womb, is capable -- and has the tools for -- learning “the entirety of Torah.” What he needs, though, is to work hard at it. This is why a *malach* strikes him before he is born, causing him to forget all he had learned. He will now have spend the rest of his days striving to learn all of it once again.

Anyone with understanding will recognize that this is his mission. In return for his great effort, he will be rewarded in the World to Come, where his soul will find pleasure in Gan Eden.

Man was placed on this earth for no reason other than to bring satisfaction to his Maker and to prepare his soul for pleasure in the World to Come, after it leaves the physical body and has completed its requisite time in *Olam Hazeih*. At the time of resurrection of the dead, people will be rewarded in proportion to the merits they earned during their *Olam Hazeih* lifetime. We see this in the gemara (Bava Bathra 75a), which says:

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will make seven canopies for every righteous man; for it is said: And the Lord will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory shall be a canopy. This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, will make for everyone a canopy corresponding to his rank.

(Soncino translation)

...

Let us now return to our mishnah.

In my estimation, the Tanna of our mishnah intended to teach what I have just outlined. Already when one is born, he is to be told that he must immediately begin the life-long process of endeavoring to recapture the Torah that, just a moment before, he had been compelled by the *malach* to forget. This must occur as soon as he enters the airspace of the physical world. Why so soon? Because, he is destined to die and to pass to the Next World. *The new-borns will die and those who die (physical death) will live* (continue living, that is, in the World to Come).

In accordance with how ever he lived his life in the physical world (meaning the effort he put into talmud torah and into mitzvah performance), will he

receive reward in the next. This refers to the time of Moshiach, the period that is “entirely Shabbat and entirely rest.”

Those who are truly a tzaddikim suffer no sadness when anticipating their own death, for it is just one more preparation for the time that will be “entirely Shabbat and *menucha*,” the time when the dead will arise.

The purpose of everything is nothing other the bringing of *nachat ruach* to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. At the time of Moshiach, it will be evident to one and all that Hashem is the One and only G-d. All will see that He grants reward to those who fulfill the Torah, while punishing those who do not.

The mishnah says *the living will be judged. To know, to make known, and to be aware that He is God. He is the Fashioner, He is the Creator, He is the Discerner, He is the Judge, He is the Witness, He is the Plaintiff, and in the future He will judge. Blessed be He, before Whom there is no iniquity, no forgetfulness, no favoritism, and no acceptance of bribery, for everything is His.* Perhaps this means that birth, death, and resurrection are for one purpose alone, and that is to know and make known that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* is One and is unique.

The mishnah continues: *For against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you will die, and against your will you are destined to give judgment and accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.* The mishnah is telling us that all these stages of existence are against man’s will. This emphasizes that they are not ends unto themselves. Rather, they are means towards actualizing a final outcome.

And what is this desired outcome? The answer is in the mishnah: *The Dead are destined to live.* This refers to the resurrection of the dead and the revelation of His kingship. This last element is not “against man’s will,” but in line with man’s desires. This is the reason why man was created. And then the words of the prophets (Yeshiyahu 11:9) shall be fulfilled: . . . *for the land shall be full of knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea bed.*

May it be His will that we merit to witness this with our own eyes, speedily in our days.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

ועל כרחך אתה חי

Many times, the cities of Morocco were hard-hit by drought. The wheat would remain in the ground as seeds, never to grow, all the hard work of planting having gone for naught. Shortages in the marketplace of wheat followed soon after, resulting in higher prices.

The year תרס"ו (5666) was one notable example. Almost no rain fell. Prices rose drastically. Many families lost almost everything, left with little more than what to live on from one day to the next.

A certain resident of Mogador, a silversmith, was particularly hard-hit that year. With less money available to them, people cut back or eliminate all non-essential purchases. In Mogador, that meant that the market for items of silver and gold virtually disappeared. It happened that this Mogador silver and goldsmith not only lost his income, but did so at a time that was particularly inopportune, for he owed a great deal of money for items purchased for his craft.

The man had eight children, whose support rested solely upon his shoulders. Winter began and it wasn't long before he had to begin selling off his possessions, lest the family starve to death. The proceeds were used for the bare minimum: bread, a few vegetables and a bit of fruit. Slowly but steadily, one item followed by another, clothing and household items were sold off. By the time the month of Nissan arrived, there was nothing left to sell. The man's family was now practically without clothes and penniless.

As a *ma'amin*, the man turned to Hashem and prayed.

The days of Pesach were approaching -- and still, there was nothing. Despite his faith, the man was feeling more and more disconsolate. Now, it was two days before Pesach. Nothing had changed and the man felt that the situation was hopeless. Things were not getting any better. There was nothing left at home. His creditors were after him. He could take it any more. The sight of his wife and children suffering in poverty was too much for him to bear.

So, he decided that his only option was to end his life. He would throw himself into the sea.

Before leaving, he bid his family farewell, telling them only that he felt compelled to escape the tension. With creditors banging on the door daily,

demanding payment, he needed to get away. He would return, he said, after a few weeks or months, once things settle down.

After having walked out the door, he turned to the street where Rabbi Chaim Pinto the Younger was living. There, he poured a full glass of liquor for himself, hoping it would render him sufficiently intoxicated to carry out his deadly plan. Before drinking it, though, he paused to say *Keriyat Shema* and to recite *viddui*.

Having downed the liquor and now completely inebriated, he headed towards the ocean. His plan was to go to a certain beach famous for its exceptionally deep waters. It was known that once someone fell into those waters, his body would never be found.

In order to reach that spot, however, he would first have to pass the graveyard where Rabbi Chaim Pinto the Elder was buried. Surely enough, as he headed past the graveyard, he encountered none other than Rabbi Chaim Pinto the Younger, whose practice it was to visit the grave of his illustrious grandfather daily and to prostrate himself upon it.

Seeing the silversmith, Rabbi Chaim called out to him. As the man drew close, Rabbi Chaim offered a blessing and the silversmith kissed the Rav's hand, as was the custom.

Before the smith could say a word, however, Rabbi Chaim said to him, "I order you to go back home, returning the same way that you got here. Along the way, exit the city walls; there you should enter through the Bab Asbah Gate. If you do as you are told, I assure you that the Pesach holiday will pass for you and your family in joy and blessing.

Depressed and disconsolate as he was, the smith did not believe Rabbi Chaim's words. To rid himself of the Rabbi, the man said that he would do as told, but first wanted to fall upon the grave of Rabbi Chaim the Elder and pray there.

Rabbi Chaim the Younger realized, of course, the man's true intent. After praying, he would proceed directly to the seashore. Then, he would fling himself into the waters.

So, Rabbi Chaim told him, "Why don't I just wait for you? Then, we can walk back together."

Rabbi Chaim waited for the man to finish praying, just as he said he would. He then blessed him that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* should send him a *yeshua gedolah*, a solution to his problems, an easier life, good livelihood, and success.

With that, the man was consoled. He decided to not attempt the drastic action he had intended. Instead, he would return home.

Along the way, he encountered someone who appeared to be a servant, but was someone he had never seen before. In the servant's hands was a box. It was filled with gold coins.

"Take this box from me," said the servant. "Use the coins to buy all that you will need for the *chag*. Enough will be left over to allow you to clear your debts as well. That which remains, keep with you. After the *chag*, I will come to visit you, to commission you to make for me new utensils from the gold."

With that, the servant was gone.

The man could not believe his own eyes.

Joyfully, he raced home, to share with his family the news of the great salvation, sent them by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

Then, he set out to purchase new clothes for his family and all the household necessities of Pesach. With what remained, he paid off his debts. Just as he'd been promised, the family enjoyed a Pesach more wonderful than any they'd ever experienced before.

After the *chag*, the man returned to work and awaited the appearance of the servant who said he would hire him to fashion new utensils from the remaining coins. The man waited, waited, and waited. But, the servant never appeared.

The man went to Rabbi Chaim, having decided to admit to him the truth: that the Rabbi had redeemed him from being killed in the crashing waves.

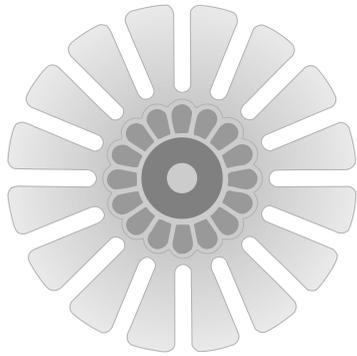
Rabbi Chaim asked him, "So, did all you were promised come to pass?"

The man answered that, in fact, all of it had.

Now, he would like to thank teh Rabbi and to reward him with some of the newly-acquired riches.

Rabbi Chaim declined. For him, it was enough that he had helped bring this Jew back from death and onward to life.





Chapter Five

בעשרה

מאמרות

נברא העולם

ומרה | תלמוד

לומר

ורחל במאמר

אחד

יכול

להבראות

אלא להפרע מן

הרשעים

שמאבדין

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העולם

שנברא בעשרה

מאמרות

בַּעֲשָׂרָה מֵאֲמֵרוֹת נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם. וּמָה תִּלְמוּד
 לֹוֹמֵר וְהֵלֵא בְּמֵאֲמֵר אֶחָד יָכוֹל לְהַבְרִאות אֶלֶּא
 לְהַפְרֵעַ מִן הַרְשָׁעִים שְׂמֵאֲבָדִין אֶת הָעוֹלָם
 שֶׁנִּבְרָא בַּעֲשָׂרָה מֵאֲמֵרוֹת וְלִתֵּן שָׂכָר טוֹב לְצַדִּיקִים
 שֶׁמְקִיְמִין אֶת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בַּעֲשָׂרָה מֵאֲמֵרוֹת:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה, א

The world was created with ten utterances. What does this teach us? Surely, everything could have been created with one utterance. Rather, it is to punish the wicked, who destroy a world that was created with ten utterances, and to give reward to the righteous, who maintain a world that was created with ten utterances.

This mishnah speaks of the world's creation, saying that it was done with ten utterances. This was in order to increase the reward of tzaddikim and to make the wicked accountable for destroying a world that was created with utterances. It is the first mishnah of this chapter.

I would like to discuss how this mishnah relates to those that follow it.

One section of the second mishnah speaks of the patience of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and the difference between the generation of Noach and that of Avraham. The ten intervening generations angered the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and were worthy of punishment, but Avraham earned great reward. My way of expressing this would be to say that the wicked of Noah's generation caused the world to be destroyed, but Avraham saved them from destruction, inspiring many to convert and gathering them under the wings of the *Shechina*. Thus, the numbers of *tzaddikim* and those of good character increased, while the number of evildoers declined.

The third mishnah says that Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and withstood them all, to make known how much he loved Hashem. I would extend this literal reading. I would think that it also alludes to the idea of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* testing *all* tzaddikim (not just Avraham Avinu) in this world, to increase their reward in the world to come.

Avraham's ten trials correspond to the ten generations between Noah and himself. In other words, Avraham Avinu's being tested ten times, passing the

tests, and receiving reward corresponds to what occurred during the previous generations, where ten generations did not withstand their own tests and therefore received no reward. Through this, it became evident that he caused the continued existence of the world, which had been created with ten utterances.

Bereishit 2:4 says, **אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם** - *These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created on the day that Hashem G-d made earth and heaven . . .* The Rabbis of the midrash note the alliterative similarity between **בהבראם** (*When they were created*) and **אברהם**.

They say, **בהבראם באברהם בכותו של אברהם** - *B'hibaram -- b'Avraham. Through the merit of Avraham.* This is to say, that the world was created through the merit of Avraham. Although Noah was a tzaddik as well, he was not worthy of receiving a reward equivalent in magnitude to compensate for “everyone” else. His faith was inadequate. In the face of the tests presented to him, his *emunah* was not strong enough.

Another midrash contrasts Avraham and Noah. It points out that Avraham is told to walk “in front” of Hashem, while Noah walked “with” Him. To the midrash, this indicates that Avraham was greater.

The fourth mishnah notes that Hashem performed ten miracles in Mitzrai'im and then at the Sea. It then notes that the B'nei Yisrael tested Hashem ten times in the course of the desert wanderings. I read this as saying that the merit of Avraham's withstanding ten trials led to the ten miracles that later occurred in Mitzrai'im and at the Sea.

As to the second part of that mishnah, which notes the ten times that B'nai Yisrael tested Hashem in the desert, my understanding is that it shows that the degree to which there is a proliferation of *keddusha*, there is an equivalent degree of *tumah*. Also, the *Satan* harnesses all of his strength at times like this, to try and influence B'nai Yisrael to sin. His goal is to draw them away from Hashem, His mitzvoth, and His Torah.

We see that even though they tested Hashem ten times in the wilderness, He did not destroy them. He recalled the merit of the forefathers, who had withstood tests and drawn others under the wings of the *Shechina*.

I would like to present an original approach that, I believe, allows us to better understand Hashem's declaration (Bamidbar 14:22) **וינסו אתי זה עשר פעמים** - *And they tested Me, these ten times.*

At first glance, the very concept seems puzzling. Can flesh-and-blood man, in fact, “test” the Supreme Being? I think not.

I would therefore like to suggest that when the verse says, *And they tested Me*, it refers to not to B'nei Yisrael, “testing” Hashem, but to the Satan “testing” Him. In other words, what happened was that the Satan was “testing” Hashem to see whether He would heed his accusations and *chas v'Shalom* destroy B'nei Yisrael.

In that instance, Hashem did not “listen.”

Even Bilaam the *rasha* was compelled to acknowledge that *He saw no iniquity in Jacob, and saw no perversity in Israel*. To this, our Rabbis quote Bilaam as saying that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does not gaze upon Yisrael's transgressions.

I wonder, though, why Bilaam would think that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does not gaze upon Yisrael's transgressions. How would that square with the foundational principle of reward and punishment, as found in the ten commandments? . . . *a jealous God, who visits the sins of the fathers upon children to the third and fourth generations, for My enemies*.

The principle is found as well in the Torah portions *b'Chukotai* and *Ki Tavo*, which contain multiple instances where the verse warns, *If you do not follow My ways . . .*

Similarly, the Talmud (Bava Kamma 50a) says *whoever says that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu is disregarding of sin, his life shall be disregarded*. The Rambam counts acceptance that Hashem rewards and punishes as one of the thirteen foundational essentials of belief.

The answer, of course, is obvious: B'nai Yisrael are rewarded when they follow Hashem's will and punished when they do not. Neither the verses I quoted, nor the Rabbinic sources, nor my interpretations of them contradict this. What these sources *are* saying, though (as I interpret it), is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* pays no heed to the claims of “accusers” who attempt to convince Him that B'nei Yisrael have sinned and therefore “deserve” one punishment or another.

When Bilaam said *He saw no iniquity in Jacob, and saw no perversity in Israel*, the intent is that Hashem does not “look” at what these accusers point to, nor does He “listen” to or “believe” their claims. Bilaam experienced this personally, when he attempted to curse the B'nei Yisrael but was thwarted by Hashem.

Stated once again, my pont here is to say that Hashem most certainly punishes those who transgress. However, He ignores the pleadings of those whose

“profession” it is to accuse. We see this in Moshe Rabbeinu’s saying (Devarim 23:6 - emphasis on first part of the verse) *But Hashem, you God, refused to listen to Bilaam, and Hashem your God, reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem, your God, loved you.*

The Day of Atonement, Yom Hakippurim, is on the tenth day of Tishrei. I would like to suggest that the reason it is set for the tenth of the month is to remind us of all the “tens” mentioned here. We have ten utterances of Creation, ten tests of Avraham Avinu, and ten times that the Satan enticed B’nei Yisrael in the wilderness to sin against Hashem (so as to seal their decimation). In the end, not only were the B’nei Yisrael not destroyed, but the Mikdash was built and ten miracles occurred there.

The fact that the miracles numbered ten was not incidental, for the ten parallels the number of utterances and trials. This correspondence teaches that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does not seek to punish, but rather seeks to forgive.

Our Rabbis teach us (Yoma 20a) that on Yom Hakippurim, the Satan is denied the authority to accuse. The gemara uses gematria to show how we know that Satan has no authority to accuse on this one day. I would like to add my own reason, which is that on Yom Hakippurim, Hashem acts as He did in the wilderness, when He refused to pay attention to the accusers and denied them the ability to incite. He did this as well to Bilaam the *rasha*.

Three times per year, there is a mitzvah for B’nei Yisrael to “go up” to the temple in Yerushalayim. Rabbi Don Yitzhak Abarbanel, one of the great medieval commentators, offers several reasons as to why Hashem commanded this. One reason he gives is that their witnessing the priestly service and its attendant miracles will increase their love of the *mikdash*. I would add the rationale I have been proposing until now in my explanation of our mishnah.

The idea is that B’nei Yisrael would be reminded of Hashem’s *chesed* in not paying attention to the *Satan*’s accusations and recalling the *chasdei Avoth*. Also, that B’nei Yisrael would be reminded that their fulfillment of the Torah and mitzvot upholds the world that was created with ten utterances.

Our Rabbis say (Berachot 55a) that Betzalel, in building the *mishkan*, knew how to join the letters through which the heavens and earth were created. This means that the *mishkan* is like the created world, an *olam katan*, a microcosmos. Just as the world was created with ten utterances, so were there ten miracles that occurred in the *mikdash*. This recalls what we have said up to this point.

עֲשָׂרָה דוֹרוֹת מֵאָדָם וְעַד נֹחַ לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה
 אַרְךְ אַפִּים לְפָנָיו שֶׁכָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין
 וּבָאִין עַד שֶׁהֵבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מִי הַמַּבּוּל. עֲשָׂרָה
 דוֹרוֹת מִנֹּחַ וְעַד אַבְרָהָם לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אַרְךְ
 אַפִּים לְפָנָיו שֶׁכָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבָאִין
 עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם וְקִבֵּל (עָלָיו) שְׂכָר כָּלָם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה,ב

*There were ten generations from Adam to Noah.
 This teaches you how slow God is to anger, for
 all those generations continued to anger God,
 until He brought the floodwaters upon them.*

*There were ten generations from Noah to
 Avraham, to teach you how slow He is to anger.
 For each of those generations continued to anger
 God, until Avraham Avinu came and received the
 reward of them all.*

The mishnah says that there were ten generations from Adam to Noah and ten from Noah to Avraham. It says as well that the ten generations prior to Avraham angered Hashem, as did the ten prior to Noah. The parallel ends there, however. For, it says that Avraham reaped reward for those ten generations. But it fails to say the same regarding Noah.

I wonder why.

A brief answer to this question appears in one of my earlier derashot (see hebrew edition of Kerem David). I would now like to now expand upon this matter.

I will begin by quoting the commentary to the Torah by Rabbi Obadiah m'Seforno. Bereishit 6:8 says that Noah found *chein* in Hashem's "eyes." To this, the Seforno says that although Noah was a *tzaddik* and did warn others to change their ways, his merit was still lacking. According to Seforno, this was because, rather than tell them that they had to change their ways because this is

what proper service of Hashem demands, he asked that they do so because that is what social and political morality demands. The difference is that had he used the first rationale, that they should live in accordance with Hashem's conception of morality, there would at least have been hope that they might have ultimately returned to Hashem and done *teshuvah*. The second rationale, that they should follow natural or man-derived morality, held no such promise. For, at the end of the day, the argument was nothing more than that they should abide by Man's -- as opposed to Hashem's -- conception.

Hashem speaks to Noah several verses later (Bereishit 7:1) *Then Hashem said to Noah, "Come to the Ark, you and your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation."* The Torah tells us (Bereishit 7:5) that, after having been told which family members and which animals would go onto the ark, Noah did "*as Hashem commanded him.*" Apparently, Noah and his family ascended the ark without offering any further pleas that the rest of the generation be spared.

According to Rashi, the rain began slowly, to give the people one more opportunity. If they would do *teshuvah*, the rain would be for a blessing; if they would not, it would be for a flood. It is interesting that although Rashi tells us that Hashem offered a final opportunity for *teshuvah*, we are not told that Noah was sufficiently moved to intercede. I would therefore assume that Noah did not.

Noah is variously referred to as "lacking faith" or of "little faith." The midrash says that, had the water not reached his ankles, he would not have entered the ark. As I read it, this midrash shows that even as he witnessed the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu's* words becoming actualized, he still did not think to plead that He not bring the flood.

By contrast, Avraham Avinu endeavored to motivate "the entire world" to gather under the wings of the *Shechina*. He opened his home to wayfarers, gave them drink, and fed them. When the time came for them to show their gratitude and bless him for what he had done, Avraham Avinu would direct them to bless instead the One who was ultimately responsible for there being food to serve. The guests would then bless the One who brought the entire world into existence.

Avraham would convert the men; Sarah would convert the women.

When the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* informed Avraham Avinu that He would be destroying Sodom because of the evil being done there, Avraham immediately

beseech Him (Bereishit 18:23-25), *Will You also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked?*

Would You still stamp it out rather than spare the place for the fifty righteous people within it? It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous along with the wicked. . . . It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the Judge of the earth not do justice?

Amongst our Rabbis, there are those who saw Noah's *tzidkut* in a very limited sense, that he was a "tzaddik" only relative to his contemporaries. In Rashi's version, had Noah lived at the time of Avraham, he would have been considered a "nothing."

Had Avraham been alive in Noah's time, and faced the same circumstances that Noah faced, he -- unlike Noah -- would have pleaded on behalf of that generation and properly reproached them for their sins. Perhaps the outcome would have been different, namely that Hashem would not have brought the flood. This was not only because Avraham would have pleaded on their behalf, but that he would have sought to motivate the people to change for the right reason, namely that Hashem demanded it. This could have generated real *teshuvah* and thereby made them worthy of being saved.

Hashem does not wish that evildoers perish. Rather, He prefers that they do *teshuvah*, as we see from Yechezkel 33:11, *As I live -- the word of the Lord Hashem/Elokim --[I swear] that I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather the wicked one's return from his way, that he may live. . . . Why should you die, O House of Israel?* This verse from Yechezkel is addressed specifically to B'nei Israel. We see, however, that the concept of Hashem's not wishing to see the wicked destroyed extends even to the Mitzri'im.

After their oppressing B'nei Yisrael and then pursuing them, Hashem drowned the Mitzri'im in the Sea. At the sight, the administering angels wished to sing in praise. Famously, the gemara (Megilla 10b) offers Hashem's response: *My handiwork is drowning in the sea -- and you wish to sing praises?*

I have noted that Noah, unlike Avraham Avinu, was not described in our mishnah as having received everyone else's reward. To my mind, it was because he was unworthy, due to his having failed to admonish the sinners of his generation. I would add another one of my own ideas, which is that those destroyed by the flood were perhaps considered less accountable for

their sins because of Noah's failure. They had a tzaddik amongst them. But, he did not reproach them as he should have.

The talmud (Gittin 56a) describes an incident where a terrible injustice occurred in the presence of some of the greatest Rabbis. They did nothing to stop it, nor did they protest. The gemara there interprets their silence as implicit acknowledgement that the transgression was with their consent.

Let us contrast all of this with Avraham Avinu. As we said above, he brought many people to belief in Hashem and this is why he merited reward "for them all." For, all the Torah and mitzvot performed by subsequent generations are traced back to Avraham's efforts at bringing their ancestors closer to Hashem.



עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָה אֲבִרָהּ אֲבִינוּ עָלָיו
הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעִמָּד בְּכֻלָּם לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל
אֲבִרָהּ אֲבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת הַג

Avraham Avinu was tested with ten trials and withstood them all. This teaches you how great was the love of Avraham Avinu.

The mishnah tells us that Avraham was tested ten times and withstood them all. However, it does not specify which incidents in particular it had in mind as Avraham's "ten "tests." Obviously, there are many possible candidates, as one peruses both the written Torah and the midrashim. Rashi, Rambam, and Rabbeinu Yonah, among others, try to fill in that gap. I would like to do so as well.

Let us begin to count some of them.

The *akeidah*, Avraham's binding of Yitzhak, is explicitly stated in the Torah as a "test." Right after that incident, the Torah tells us that Sarah died (Bereishit 23:2): **וּתְמַת שָׂרָה בְקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע**. - *And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba.*

A midrash connects the event of Sarah dying with the binding of Yitzhak. According to the midrash, at the time that Avraham was binding Yitzhak, the Satan appeared to her, in the guise of Yitzhak. The Satan (disguised as Yitzhak) proceeded to relate to her that Avraham had taken him up to a mountain, built a sacrificial platform, placed there gathered wood, bound him, and placed him upon it. He related that Avraham then picked up the knife and would have slaughtered him, were it not for the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu's* having appeared to instruct him to not do so. The midrash says that, before the Satan finished telling the story, Sarah's soul departed her body. In other words, it was at this time that she died.

It would seem to me that this incident should qualify it as one of the ten tests of Avraham. Yet, the classic listings of the ten tests do not include it.

I wonder why.

I would like to expand the question further.

We see that the chumash reports, regarding each of the Avot, that, prior to their passing on to the next world, they were elderly or ill. About Avraham, it

says (Bereishit 24:1) **ואברהם זקן בא בימים**, *And Avraham was old, advanced in days*. Shortly afterwards, it says (Bereishit 25:8) **ויגוע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה זקן ושבע ויאסף אל עמיו**, *And Avraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people*. Regarding Yitzhak, it says (Bereishit 27:1) **וייהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיניו מראת**, *It came to pass when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see*. Later, it says (Bereishit 47:29) **למות ישראל ימי יקרבו**, *And the time for Yisrael [Yaakov] to die drew near*. And, it says (Bereishit 48:1) **הנה אביך חלה**, *behold your father is ill*. Afterwards, it says (Bereishit 49:33), **ויאסף אל עמיו: ויכל יעקב לצות את בניו ויאסף רגליו אל המטה, ויגוע**, *And Jacob concluded commanding his sons, and he drew his legs [up] into the bed, and expired and was brought in to his people*.

As regards to the *Imahot*, the Torah relates the circumstances of Rachel's death, juxtaposing her having difficulty in childbirth (Bereishit 35:17) **ויהי בהקשתה בלדתה** *and it came to pass when she had such difficulty giving birth* . . . with her passing away in the following verse **ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה**, *And it came to pass, when her soul departed, for she died*. Regarding Sarah, however, the Torah does not say that she was ill prior to her death. I would conclude from this omission that her death must have been sudden. As I see it, this would have been, for Avraham, a *nisayon*.

True, the Torah does say that Sarah was old (Bereishit 18:11), **ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים**, *And Avraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years*.

However, this was not the same type of old-age that as Avraham's. A midrash says that it was an old-age that had "youthfulness." Also, we see that immediately after she was told by the *malach* that she would bear a son, she resumed her monthly cycle. A gemara says, in reference to Sarah, "After the flesh is worn and the wrinkles have multiplied, the flesh was rejuvenated, the wrinkles were smoothed out, and beauty returned to its place." In other words, even after old age had "taken hold of her," it disappeared. There is no additional mention of her being "old" sometime closer to the time she died.

I can think of another reason why this would have been a *nisayon* for Avraham, namely that he was not with Sarah when she died. This would follow from the midrash quoted above, which seems to indicate that Avraham must have still been on Har HaMoriah at the time. Another midrash is more explicit. It says specifically that Avraham was on Har HaMoriah, with Yitzhak, when she died.

Another reason may be found when one looks at the relationship that Sarah had with Yitzhak. It seems to me that Sarah took charge of Yitzhak's development, to ensure to raise him to follow the pathways of Hashem.

For example, when Sarah saw that Yishmael had threatened Yitzhak by shooting arrows near him, she demanded that Yishmael be sent away from the house. When Avraham refused, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* told him to listen to whatever Sarah said, for Yitzhak would be Avraham's primary offspring.

Our Rabbis tell us that Sarah's level of prophecy was higher than Avraham's. Avraham therefore evicted Yishmael and his mother, just as Sarah had demanded.

Yitzhak had risen to the highest levels of serving Hashem, namely that he had shown himself ready to lay down his life (literally!) in order to sanctify His Name. He had become an "*olah temimah*." Sarah, however, never had the opportunity to see the fruits of her labor, for she never saw Yitzhak again. And Avraham was never able to let his wife know what Yitzhak had achieved. To my mind, this is one of the greatest *nisyonot* imaginable.

The midrash says regarding the verse (Mishlei 12:4), *אשת חיל עטרת בעלה*, *a woman of valor is the crown of her husband* that Avraham was "crowned" by his wife, but she was not "crowned" by him. In other words, for all his married life, Avraham prided himself in his wife, for she was superior to him (in prophecy). And now, when they have seen the fruits of their joint effort, Sarah would die?

I believe I have demonstrated the extent to which Sarah's death was a great *nisayon* for Avraham. Given that, I would now like to ask how to reconcile this with what appears in another midrash, which says that immediately following the *akeidah*, Avraham told the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* that he "would not budge" from Har HaMoriah until Hashem promised to not give him any additional "tests." The midrash says that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* consented to this.

If that is the case, how, then, could the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* have given Avraham the *nisayon* I have just described?

I would ask in addition, why Avraham made this request of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* only after the *akeidah*.

The version of events depicted in the midrash would seem to resolve these questions. Following that midrash, one could say that the *akeidah* and Sarah's death occurred at the same time. If one were to say that she died at the moment that Avraham and Yitzhak were preparing to sacrifice the ram, then it could be said that both events constitute a single *nisayon*, given that Sarah's dying was connected to the *akeidah*.

I would like to take the midrash a step further and say that we might assume that, although he was not present, Avraham must have sensed that Sarah had died. She was his helpmate in life and superior to him in prophecy. I know of no source that says that anyone had to come to Avraham to notify him that Sarah has died. Nor, do we have a source that says that, upon Avraham's arrival in Chevron, he was surprised to find out that Sarah was dead.

The Torah only records that Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron. in the Land of Canaan, and that Avraham came to eulogize and to cry for her. Given that the Torah does not mention that someone had to inform him, this shows that Avraham must already have known. He arrived already intent on eulogizing and crying for her.

When Sarah died, Avraham must have sensed it, for he had lost an integral part of his life. The gemara says that he who lacks a wife remains without joy, *beracha*, and without goodness. If this is true as regards to simply being without a wife, how much more so would it apply when the man went from being married to a wife like Sarah *Imeinu* to being without her! Regarding Sarah *imeinu*, the midrash says that as long as she was alive, a "cloud" was tied to the entrance of their tent and the dough of her bread had *beracha*. This shows the degree to which her presence in Avraham's life generated *beracha*.

As I see it, the *nisayon* of the *akeidah* was actually two *nisyonot*. This sets this *nisayon* apart from those that preceded it. Having said that, it now becomes more clear why this particular *nisayon* was the one that caused Avraham to ask that he not face any more. For, this was a double-*nisayon*. In other words, all Avraham was asking for was that there be no more double-*nisyonot*. To this, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* agreed.

It then follows that it was never Avraham's intention to ask that he never be tested again. He understood that man was brought to this world for no reason other than to be tested and thereby rise to greater heights.

I would like to give some examples of this principle.

The talmud says (Gittin 43a) that, until he has "stumbled" over them, one does not fully understand words of the Torah. Another gemara says that *tzaddikim* are "greater" than the ministering angels. Man, unlike ministering angels, is subjected to *nisyonot*. And the *tzaddikim* always "pass." This combination of being tested and passing those tests is what makes them "superior."

A gemara in Sanhedrin 107a gives us yet another insight.

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: One should never intentionally bring himself to the test, since David, king of Israel, did so, and fell. He said unto Him, "Sovereign of the Universe! Why do we say [in prayer] 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,' but not the God of David?" He replied, "They were tried by me, but you were not." David Hamelech replied "Master of the Universe, examine and try me."

This gemara gives a reason why, unlike the case with the *Avoth*, Hashem does not join His Name to David Hamelech. The reason given is that he, unlike them, had not been tested. This is yet one more insight as to the value of being "tested" -- and of "passing" that test. (The gemara then describes David's requesting that he, too, be given a *nisayon*. Hashem complied, by testing him with Batsheva. However, unlike the outcome of the *nisayonot* given the *Avoth*, David Hamelech "failed.")

Returning to my original question, I believe that the answer I provided above is the most logical one. For, once we say that the episode with Sarah *imeinu's* death was a *nisayon* for Avraham, we must then deal with how Avraham could have been "tested" subsequent to the *akeidah*, given that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* had promised to not do so. We know that, regarding the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, it says (Tehillim 89:35), . . . *neither shall I alter the utterance of My lips.*

My approach, that Avraham requested only that Hashem not bring him any more double-*nisayonot*, and that this was all that Hashem agreed to, resolves all difficulties raised by my questions.

We now know why the Rabbis mention only ten tests. It was because the death of Sarah was not an independent *nisayon*, but part of the test of the *akeidah*.



עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נַעֲשׂוּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂרָה
עַל הַיָּם. (עֲשָׂר מַכּוֹת הֵבִיא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל
הַמִּצְרַיִים בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂר עַל הַיָּם). עֲשָׂרָה
נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִסּוּ אַבוֹתֵינוּ אֶת הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא
בַּמִּדְבָּר שְׁנַאֲמַר (בַּמִּדְבָּר יֵד) וַיִּנְסוּ אֹתִי זֶה עֲשָׂר
פְּעָמִים וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', ז

Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in Egypt, and ten on the Sea. The Holy One, blessed be He, brought ten plagues upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and ten on the Sea. Our ancestors tested the Omnipresent with ten tests in the desert, as it says, “They tested me these ten times and have not listened to My Voice.”

A famous midrash says, regarding the miracle of the splitting of the sea, that even a simple maidservant saw there things greater than anything seen even within the prophecies of Yechezkel and Yeshiyahu. I wonder: How was it that Yisrael merited a miracle as great as this?

The Zohar Chadash says that Yisrael descended, in Mitzrai'im, to the 49th gate of impurity. A midrash says that the Ministering Angels claimed that Bnei Yisrael had engaged in idolatry and were therefore unworthy of passing on dry land through the sea. Even the sea voiced objection to splitting on their behalf, saying that the Bnei Yisrael did not deserve it.

It would seem that the splitting of the sea was a great miracle, done for them due to the merit Bnei Yisrael had at that particular moment. I would therefore like to explore the question of how they suddenly merited such miracles and how they merited the Shechina's being revealed, matters that were beyond the experience of great prophets of later times.

I would answer that their merit came from the *messirut nefesh* they had for fulfilling the Word of Hashem. For instance, their offering the Pesach sacrifice

demanded great *messirut nefesh*, given that the Mitzri'im worshipped sheep, the very animal that Bnei Yisrael would be slaughtering for the sake of their own deity. When the Mitzri'im saw that the sheep had been tied to the bed post, in preparation for its slaughter, they set upon the Bnei Yisrael with swords. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* intervened to prevent the Mitzri'im from killing them.

Similarly, I would say that they demonstrated *messirut nefesh* at the Sea. The gemara (Sotah 36b) says that when the Bnei Yisrael stood were standing by the Sea, the *shevatim* were contesting with one another as to who would have the honor of being first into the Sea. This shows how eager they were to fulfill the Word of Hashem.

Shemot 14:15 says, *Speak to the children of Israel and let them travel*. Rashi understands this to mean that Hashem is telling them that they have nothing to do but to travel, for the sea will not stand in their way. Rashi continues, "The merit of their forefathers, their own merit, and the faith they had in Me when they came out of Egypt are sufficient to split the sea for them."

The gemara (Sotah 37a) quotes a midrash that brings a seemingly different version of events. After bringing the opinion we cited earlier, that the Bnei Yisrael contested with one another to be the first to jump in, the gemara quotes Rabbi Yehudah: *That is not what happened; but each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nahshon the son of Aminadav and descended first into the sea* Perhaps one could say, though, that once Nahshon ben Aminadav descended into the sea, the tribes *then* contested as to who would have the merit to be the first one to follow him.

We see, then, that the entire nation was prepared to be *moser nefesh* to fulfill the Word of Hashem. Let us recall the examples I previously cited. The Bnei Yisrael were fully ready to prepare the Pesach sacrifice, despite the risk of slaughtering an animal that the Mitzri'im considered their god. And, the Bnei Yisrael were fully ready to follow Hashem's will and to enter the Sea, even while they were still in Mitzrai'im, immersed in the worst kinds of *tumah*.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* saw that Yisrael were ready to give up their lives in His service. This is why they were worthy of a miracle. The Sea split on their behalf -- and the Mitzri'im were drowned.

It is my opinion that, as a general principle, any generation prepared to be *moser nefesh* to Sanctify His Name is worthy of having miracles performed on their behalf. The Rabbis (Berachot 20a) applied this to former generations.

Said R. Papa to Abaye: How is it that for the former generations miracles were performed and for us miracles are not performed? . . . when Rab Judah drew off one shoe, rain used to come, whereas we torment ourselves and cry loudly, and no notice is taken of us! He replied: The former generations used to be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of [God's] name; we do not sacrifice our lives for the sanctity of [God's] name. There was the case of R. Adda b. Ahaba who saw a heathen woman wearing a red headdress in the street, and thinking that she was an Israelite woman, he rose and tore it from her. It turned out that she was a heathen woman, and they fined him four hundred zuz.

We mentioned earlier that the generation that left Mitzrai'im merited to see things that even the great prophets never saw. We asked what would account for this. My answer is that what made the difference was the degree to which this generation was *mosser nefesh* for the mitzvoth Hashem.

That generation did not fear the Mitzri'im. Their reward was *middah k'negged middah*, measure for measure. The generation that was *mosser nefesh* did not make calculations based upon *derekh hateva*. According to strict rules of nature, the people could have been killed, yet they persisted in wanting to fulfill the Torah and mitzvoth.

The *middah k'negged middah* was that The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* similarly did not pay attention to the laws of nature. As I view it, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* suspends natural order to bring blessing to the world, when mankind needs it.



עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נַעֲשׂוּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.
 לֹא הִפִּילָה אִשָּׁה מֵרִיחַ בֶּשֶׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְלֹא הִסְרִיחַ
 בֶּשֶׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ מֵעוֹלָם וְלֹא נִרְאָה זָבוּב בְּבֵית
 הַמִּטְבָּחִים וְלֹא אָרַע קָרִי לִכְהֵן גְּדוֹל בְּיוֹם
 הַכַּפּוּרִים וְלֹא כָּבוּ גִשְׁמִים אֵשׁ שֶׁל עֶצִי
 הַמַּעֲרָכָה וְלֹא נִצְחָה הַרִיחַ אֶת עַמּוּד הָעֵשֶׂן
 וְלֹא נִמְצָא פָּסוּל בְּעֹמֶר וּבִשְׁתֵּי הַלֶּחֶם וּבְלֶחֶם
 הַפָּנִים עוֹמְדִים צְפוּפִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים רוּחִים וְלֹא
 הִזִּיק נָחֶשׁ וְעֶקְרָב בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם מֵעוֹלָם וְלֹא אָמַר
 אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ צַר לִי הַמָּקוֹם שְׂאֵלַיִן בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה, ה

Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Temple. No woman ever miscarried because of the smell of the meat of the sacrifices, the meat from the sacrifices never became putrid, a fly was never seen in the place where the meat was butchered, the High Priest never saw seminal emission on Yom Kippur, the rain never extinguished the fire of the wood on the Altar, the wind never dispersed the column of smoke, there was never a disqualification in the Omer, the Two Loaves, or the Lechem Hapanim; when the people stood they were crowded, yet when they bowed there was ample space; a snake or scorpion never caused harm in Jerusalem, and no one ever said to his friend, "There is no room for me to sleep in Jerusalem."

The mishnah lists ten miracles done for our forefathers in the holy temple. The first mentioned is that no woman ever miscarried because of the aroma of the sacrificial meat. The traditional commentators understand this as meaning that, although one might have expected that the unsatisfied craving for this meat would cause some women to miscarry, this never occurred as regards to

the aroma coming from the Beit HaMikdash. I would like to offer a different explanation. I believe that this miracle is tied to the gemara (Yebamoth 20a) that says that one should make oneself holy through that which is permitted.

This concept is generally understood as meaning that it is not enough to avoid that which the Torah forbids, but to also selectively restrict oneself even from some of things that are technically permitted, but spiritually harmful. For example, while the Torah permits consumption of hard liquor, this concept tells us that we should avoid drinking to excess and frequenting the gathering places of those who *do* drink to excess.

I would like to offer my own understanding of this concept, which is that this “sanctifying oneself through that which is permitted” (*kadesh atzmecha b’mutar lach*) is akin to making oneself into a *mikdash me’at*, a small sanctuary. This is akin to having reached a spiritual level where one’s own flesh becomes holy, **בשר הקדוש**, in the words of our mishnah. When one’s *basar* is *kodesh*, when one’s flesh is holy, then the *yetser hara* will not be able to seize control over him.

An example of this is the holy Rav Acha. The gemara (Ketubot 17a) tells us that, in celebrating a wedding, he was known to hoist the bride upon his shoulders and dance with her, in fulfillment of the mitzvah to bring gladness to the bride. The Rabbis asked him whether this was something that they could do as well. He replied in the negative: “If, for you, the bride is like a beam, then it is permitted. If not, then you are not permitted.”

In other words, the holy Rav Acha, one of the greatest talmudic scholars, sanctified his body to the highest degree. So much so, that he was completely unaffected by having a young bride rest upon his shoulders.

Another gemara (Berachot 20a) speaks of Rav Gidel. He would position himself at the entrance to the mikveh and instruct the ladies how to immerse themselves. His students asked him, “But isn’t our Rav concerned as to the *yetser hara*?” He answered, “To me, they are like white geese.” In other words, viewing them had no effect on him.

I recall regarding my own father, my master, that I never saw him perspire -- even in the hottest weather. This must be because his entire body was holy and spiritual. When someone’s body is spiritual, it is unaffected by physical events.

I would like to extend my reading of this mishnah even further. As I see it, the miracle of no woman miscarrying teaches us that when a person sanctifies himself to derive no benefit at all from this world, he could potentially attain the

level where his flesh would not decay after his dies. The *yetser hara* will carry no power over him. He becomes something like a Beit HaMikdash.

I see a hint to the above in the verse (Shemot 25:8): **ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם**, *They shall make for me a Mikdash and I will dwell amongst them*. Some commentators wish to read this as saying that Hashem (the Shechina) will potentially dwell within the individual Jew. In other words, the Jew can potentially become the Mikdash. I would extend this to mean that all the miracles done in the Mikdash were done within the individual Jew as well.

The gemara tells us that when Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon was dying, he ordered his wife that after his death, his body not be buried. He gave her certain reasons for this request. According to the gemara, his body remained in the attic of their house for many years. His wife would regularly ascend to the attic and examine his hair. She reported that whenever a single hair would fall from his head, blood would appear there, seemingly indicative of his body still being “fresh.”

The fact that Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon had died was not well-known. Although he had already passed, people continued coming to his home to resolve their disputes. The gemara says that they would stand at the entranceway to his house and state their claims. A voice would come from the heavens and announce, “Litigant Shimon, you are obligated to pay. Litigant Reuven, you are innocent.”

(Note: Within normative halacha, cases are not decided by voices from the heaven, but through trained and living judges within Rabbinical courts. In fact, it would be unacceptable to decide law based on heavenly voices. Therefore, some of the commentators suggest that Rabbi Elazar was not actually deciding cases from beyond the grave, but that the heavenly voice would inspire the two litigants to reach an honorable compromise. It would help them recognize what type of settlement would be fair.)

Eventually, the fact that Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon had died became widely known. He was then brought for burial.

The gemara says that, before he died, Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon requested that physical suffering be brought upon him, as an act of atonement. Through this physical affliction, I believe, his flesh became holy. It therefore did not decay upon his death, nor did it attract worms, even during the long period of time following the departure of his soul.

עֲשֶׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרָאוּ בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת בֵּין
הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת וְאֵלוֹ הֵן פִּי הָאָרֶץ וּפִי הַבְּאֵר וּפִי
הָאֵתוֹן וְהַקֶּשֶׁת וְהַמָּן וְהַמָּטָה וְהַשְּׁמִיר וְהַכְּתָב
וְהַמְּכַתֵּב וְהַלּוּחֹת. וַיֵּשׂ אֹמְרִים אֶף הַמְּזִיקִין
וְקַבּוּרְתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה וְאֵילוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אַבְיָנוּ. וַיֵּשׂ
אֹמְרִים אֶף צָבַת בְּצָבַת עֲשׂוּיָהּ:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', ו

Ten things were created at twilight on the eve of the Sabbath: The mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the donkey, the rainbow, and the manna, and the staff, and the shamir, the writing, and the letters, and the Tablets. Some say also the demons, and Moshe's burial place, and the ram of Avraham Avinu. Some say also the first tongs, from which all other tongs were made.

The mishnah lists ten things created during the twilight period of Shabbat eve. This period is known as *Bein Hashemashot*. The Shulkhan Arukh (OH 261:1) refers to it as a time of “doubtful” sunset. In other words, it is unclear as to whether its status is as day or night, the difference being whether Shabbat (and its attendant prohibitions) has begun. Because of this uncertainty, we are not permitted to do “work” during the Shabbat *Bein Hashemashot* period.

My son asked me the following: The Torah tells us that we are not to do *melacha* on Shabbat because Hashem Himself refrained from *melacha* on that day. *And the B'nei Yisrael shall guard the Shabbat . . . for in six days did He create the heavens and earth, and He rested on the seventh.* In other words, we are to emulate Hashem in this. Just as He rested from His work on the seventh day, so must we.

My son's question was: This mishnah in Avoth says that Hashem performed *melacha* Erev Shabbat, during *Bein HaShemashot*. Given that this was the case, it should follow that we, too, would be permitted to perform *melacha* during this time period.

To answer this question, we will first examine why, in my opinion, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* created these things during the *Bein HaShemashot* period, rather than during the six days preceding it.

It seems to me that these ten things have one very significant thing in common, namely that, were it not for the sin of Adam HaRishon, they would never have been created. There would have been no need for them, for the *yetzer hara* appeared within man only after the Sin. This was when it was decreed that all living things would no longer live forever. Given this new reality, the creation of these ten things then became necessary.

I will now explain this in detail.

פי הארץ, the mouth of the earth, which swallowed Korach, is the first miracle listed in our mishnah. It was needed only because of the *yetzer hara* that encourages *mahloket*.

פי הבאר, the mouth of Miriam's well, was opened following the incident of Bnei Yisrael's complaining. This, too, occurred due to the *yetzer hara's* enticement. **פי האתון**, the mouth of Bilaam's donkey, comes next. It was Bilaam's *yetzer hara* that led up to this.

הקשת, the rainbow that appeared in the sky after the flood is the fourth *bein hashemashot* miracle. It was shown to Noah after the entire generation was destroyed by the flood waters. This, too, was instigated by the *yetzer hara*.

והמן, the manna descended to the earth only after Bnei Yisrael complained, saying, *If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in Mitzrai'im, . . . when we ate bread to our fill! For you have brought us out into this desert, to starve this entire congregation to death.*

המטה, the staff, is next. It was used by Moshe Rabbeinu to counter Pharaoh's not wanting to send Yisrael from Mitzrai'im. Of course, it was Pharaoh's *yetzer hara* that led him to resist doing Hashem's will.

השמיר, the *shamir*. The early commentators describe this as a worm that could cut any other substance, with its glance. It was used by Moshe to engrave the names of the twelve tribes upon the stones of the Kohen Gadol's breast plate, the *ephod*. It was also used to cut the stone for Shlomo Hamelech's temple, as he could not use iron tools for this.

The word, "shamir" appears as well in Yirmiyahu 17:1, where the verse says that, *The sin of the kingdom of Yehudah is written with an iron pen and*

with a stylus made from “*Shamir*.” The commentators there say that *Shamir* in this context is a kind of very hard metal.

The Rabbis of the Zohar quote this verse in Yirmiyahu and say that the *shamir* would be used to engrave the sins of Yisrael.

The *shamir* of our mishnah is a worm, according to the commentators to our mishnah. The *shamir* of Yirmiyahu is not a worm, but a very hard metal used for engraving, according to the commentators to tanakh. The verse that the Zohar quotes when saying that the *shamir* would be used to engrave Yisrael’s sins seems to refer to a metal tool, not the miraculous worm of our mishnah.

However, I would like to suggest that since both things are called *shamir*, they must be associated with one another. One can then say that the *shamir* of our mishnah is also associated with the sins to be written down with the *shamir* of Yirmiyahu -- and therefore the *yetser hara*.

והלוחות, והמכתב, והכתב is traditionally understood as the shape of the letters, the way that the inscription could be seen from all four sides, and the physical tablets of the Ten Commandments. I would like to extend this to include the second set of tablets. These second tablets would not have been needed, were it not for the sin of the golden calf. As you recall, Moshe shattered the first set due to the golden calf episode.

This second set of tablets were fashioned by Moshe himself. According to the midrash, Hashem placed a lode of sapphire in his house, specifically for the occasion. Perhaps one could say that this sapphire lode was created Erev Shabbat, *bein hashemashot*. If one were to say that, one could say that the *ketav* mentioned in our mishnah would have been created then as well. This would be because the letters from the first set had “flown away,” once the tablets were shattered.

המויקין, the spirits of destruction, are mentioned next. According to the Zohar,

they are only permitted to harm sinners.

קבורתו של משה, Moshe Rabbeinu’s burial place, is next. Were it not for the original sin, which allowed the *yetser hara* to cause death, Moshe Rabbeinu would have never needed a burial place.

אילו של אברהם is “Avraham’s ram,” that is, the ram he used during the akeidah. The mishnah says that it was “created” at twilight. I would say that this was when the decree ordering that this ram become entangled in the bushes

during the akeidah. According to the midrash, the *Satan* tried holding the ram back, to prevent it from walking to the spot of the akeidah, so that Avraham would have had to slaughter Yitzhak in the ram's place.

I would now like to explain why all these things were not created during the six days of creation and why Hashem waited until twilight, Erev Shabbat.

The reason, I believe, is that Hashem was waiting for Adam HaRishon to do teshuva. However, once Adam HaRishon gave the excuse, *The woman whom You gave to be with me -- she gave me of the tree, and I ate*, Hashem saw fit to expel him from Gan Eden. And when was he expelled? According to the midrash, it was *bein hashmashot*.

At once, He then created the ten things mentioned in our mishnah.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* had no "satisfaction" with producing these particular things. Were it not for Adam's sin, they would not have been created. The world had no use for them. Therefore, they were not part of the six days of creation. ". . . *for in six days did He create the heavens and earth* did not apply here. They were, as I said, a different creation. One that would not have come into the world, had it not been for the Sin.

Creation of the world ended prior to *bein hashemashot*. Because that is when creation of the world ended, our creative *melacha* must cease then as well.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

עשרה דברים נבראו בערב שבת בין השמשות

Rabbi David ben Hazaan had the custom of going Erev Shabbat to the marketplace, to purchase fish. One particular week, he went as usual -- only to discover that there was no fish available. The vendors explained that there had been a storm at sea. The fishermen had not been able to spread their nets.

Rabbi David was very disappointed. So, he went to have his meal with Rabbi Chaim Pinto, for he knew that Rabbi Chaim had fish available to him.

The two great Rabbis spent their time discussing Torah, Aggada, and Halacha. They were so engaged, that they did not realize how late it had become. Once he saw just how late in the evening it was, Rabbi David felt that he should head home immediately. At that time in history, all sorts of gangs roamed the nighttime streets.

The anxiety in his guest's eyes was obvious. Rabbi Chaim therefore summoned one of his *sheidot*, "spirits." Her name was *Gededailah*. She appeared before him. Rabbi Chaim ordered her to protect Rabbi David on his way home.

Rabbi David departed, accompanied by the *sheid*. Along the way, the *sheid* stuck out her tongue. Out came a fiery bolt of flame.

"I am afraid you might have desecrated Shabbat!" Rabbi David cried to his walking partner.

She replied, "The prohibitions of Shabbat apply only to human beings, but not to those like me, who were created from fire."



שְׁבַע דְּבָרִים בְּגֵלָם וְשִׁבְעָה בְּחָכְם. חָכָם אֵינוֹ
 מְדַבֵּר בְּפָנָיו מִי שֶׁהוּא גָדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ בְּחָכְמָה וּבְמִנְיָן
 וְאֵינוֹ נִכְנָס לְתוֹךְ דְּבָרֵי חֲבֵרוֹ וְאֵינוֹ נִבְהַל לְהַשִּׁיב
 שׁוֹאֵל כְּעֵנָן וּמַשִּׁיב כְּהֶלֶכָה וְאוֹמֵר עַל רֵאשׁוֹן
 רֵאשׁוֹן וְעַל אַחֲרוֹן אַחֲרוֹן וְעַל מָה שֶׁלֹּא שָׁמַע
 אוֹמֵר לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי וּמוֹדָה עַל הָאֱמֶת. וְחִלּוּפֶיהֶן
 בְּגֵלָם:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', ז

Seven things are characteristic of an unrefined person, and seven are characteristic of a wise person. A wise person does not speak before one who is greater than him in wisdom and age, and does not interrupt his friend's words, and does not hurry to answer. He asks relevant questions and answers properly, and he answers the first thing first and the last thing last. And concerning what he has not heard, he says, "I have not heard it," and he admits to the truth. And the reverse of these is true of an unrefined person.

The mishnah says that there are seven things that characterize a boor and seven that characterize a wise man. It lists the seven characteristics of the wise man. Then, rather than list what would characterize the boor, it simply tells us that if we wish to know what characterizes the boor, all we have to do is consider what characterizes one who is wise -- and then think of the reverse. In other words, we learn the features of the boor by negative example; he is the opposite of one who is wise.

I find the structure of this mishnah somewhat peculiar.

It starts by saying that there are seven things that characterize a boor. Then it says that there are seven that characterize the wise one. Then it details the seven features of the wise one. Then it ends by saying that the boor is the reverse.

This is curious.

I would have thought that rather than begin with the boor and end with the boor, having the definition of the wise one sandwiched in between, it would have been structurally more sound to first speak of the boor, finish with him, and only afterwards speak of the wise one.

The above constitutes my first question.

My second question involves my trying to understand the Rambam's commentary here, specifically as to how he defines גולם, which we are calling "boor" in our English translation.

The word גולם literally means "form" or "mold." Rambam uses his commentary to this mishnah to explain what distinguishes several different "types" mentioned by our Rabbis, both here and elsewhere. Rabbi Obadiah m'Bartenura's definition is somewhat similar to Rambam's, only more concise. He describes the גולם as something akin to an unfinished vessel. He says that the person who is a גולם is undeveloped, both in *middoth* and wisdom.

Rambam, however, is more specific. In order to understand his definition of גולם, however, one must put it within the context of the other personality types he contrasts it with.

Rambam lists three types that are deficient: The *boor*, the *am ha'aretz*, and the *golem*. The *boor* is essentially empty, neither negative nor positive, like an uncultivated field. The *am ha'aretz*, on the other hand, has a somewhat-developed character, but is ignorant of Torah. The גולם, however, has a somewhat logical thought process and a somewhat developed character. However, they are not well integrated or systematic. In his case, these traits are poorly focused and confused.

Rambam says that the *golem* is like a sword or knife in the blacksmith's shop, still in its raw, unfinished state. The *golem* lacks the refinement that an artisan would add to its incompleteness.

I wonder how these words of the Rambam are consistent with the words of our mishnah.

The mishnah says that the *golem* is the opposite of the *chacham*. To my mind, this is to be taken literally. In other words, he speaks before those who are greater than him in wisdom or age, interrupts his fellow's words, is quick to answer, his questions are off the subject, and his answers are irrelevant. He fails to answer questions in a logical order, he claims to know things that he in fact does not, and he does not concede the truth.

To reiterate: when it says that the *golem* is the reverse of *chacham*, in my opinion it means this quite literally. Therefore, as I see it, the mishnah is not merely saying that the *golem* is not as careful as the *chacham* in these matters. Rather, it is saying that he is the literal opposite.

If I am right and the mishnah is to be read literally, then I am compelled to say that the Rambam's definition of *golem* does not seem to fit the mishnah's description.

As I interpret it, the *golem* of our mishnah is the type of person who *never* acts properly. He is not merely an "unfinished vessel," as the Rambam and Bartenura would have it. Rather, he is a person who lacks even the most basic qualities.

We are then forced to ask why would he be included in Rambam's and Bartenura's definition of a *golem*. Given the discrepancy between the way I wanted to read the mishnah and the way that Rambam and Bartenura seem to, I would like to alter my understanding of how the mishnah could be read.

I would now like to say that the *golem* of our mishnah is indeed an individual who has certain positive qualities. It could very well be that he interacts with his fellow man appropriately and pleasantly.

However, those positive qualities are manifest only in his day-to-day life.

In the Beit HaMidrash, though, he is stubborn and unreceptive to other people's opinions.

In other words, I would like to read this mishnah as saying that the *golem* is only a *golem* in terms of his conduct in the Beit HaMidrash -- but not in any broader terms.

Were one to look only at his personal tendencies, the *golem* of the mishnah could have been called a *chacham*. Unlike the *chacham*, however, he is nothing more than shapeless physicality.

Why would I say that he is nothing other than shapeless physicality? Because Yisrael takes its form only from Torah. What I mean to say is that a Yisrael, unless he studied Torah, cannot be considered a *chacham*. That applies even to those who interact with their fellow man in a wholly appropriate fashion.

The gemara (Ta'anit 7a) says that just as water flows to a low place, so with Torah: It flows to those in a "low place." This means that it stays only with those who are humble.

All the characteristics spoken of in our mishnah are related to Torah learning. I see it, this shows that when it says "*golem*," it is not referring to a *golem* in the

broadest sense. Rather, it is speaking of one who is a *chacham* in terms of how he functions in the outside world, but a *golem* in terms of how he functions in the Beit HaMidrash.

We now better understand why the mishnah is structured as it is.

It begins with the *golem* and ends with the *golem*, with the only description being that of the *chacham*. For, it is not really speaking of a *golem*, but someone who is actually a *chacham*. The mishnah is speaking of one who has all the characteristics of a *chacham* --- until he sets foot in the Beit HaMidrash.

Once he enters the Beit HaMidrash, our *chacham* is filled with conceit and pride. In all the characteristics listed by the mishnah, he fails.

Why, then, is he called a *golem*? It is because, as I said previously, we are formed by Torah. Without Torah, we are nothing more than a *golem* -- no matter how much of a *chacham* we might be in the outside world.



שְׁבַעַה מִיַּי פְּרַעֲנִיּוֹת בְּאִין לְעוֹלָם עַל שְׁבַעַה
 גּוֹפֵי עֲבֵרָה. מְקַצְתָּן מְעַשְׂרִין וּמְקַצְתָּן אִינן
 מְעַשְׂרִין רָעֵב שֶׁל בְּצֻרַת בָּאָה מְקַצְתָּן רָעִיבִים
 וּמְקַצְתָּן שְׁבַעִים. נְמָרוּ שְׁלֹא לְעֵשֶׂר רָעֵב שֶׁל
 מְהוּמָה וְשֶׁל בְּצֻרַת בָּאָה. וְשְׁלֹא לְטוֹל אֶת הַחֲלָה
 רָעֵב שֶׁל כְּלֵיהָ בָּאָה. דְּבַר בָּא לְעוֹלָם עַל מִיתוֹת
 הָאֲמוּרוֹת בְּתוֹרָה שְׁלֹא נִמְסְרוּ לְבֵית דִּין וְעַל
 פְּרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית. חָרַב בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עֲנוּי הַדִּין
 וְעַל עֲוֹת הַדִּין וְעַל הַמּוֹרִים בְּתוֹרָה שְׁלֹא כִּהְלָכָה:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה, ח

There are seven different types of suffering that come to the world for seven different types of sin. If some separate tithes and some do not, there is famine caused by drought; some will starve and some will have food. If everyone decides not to separate tithes, there is famine caused by upheaval and drought. If they decide not to separate challah, there is famine caused by total drought.

Pestilence comes to the world because of death penalties ordained by the Torah that were not carried out by Beis Din, and because of improper use of the fruits of the Sabbatical year.

Sword comes to the world because of delaying judgment and perverting justice, and because of those who interpret the Torah not in keeping with halachah.

It might not be immediately apparent, but this mishnah and the one that follows it show the severity of theft. All of the transgressions listed in our mishnah are

somehow related to stealing. Theft is the most serious of all transgressions, as we see from the opinion that its prevalence was the ultimate reason that Hashem decided to destroy the world through flood. This was despite the fact that, according to the gemara, this generation had already transgressed “everything” else.

Theft is particularly insidious, as it inevitably leads to other transgressions as well.

I would now like to show you how I see in our mishnah a connection to theft.

The mishnah begins by noting that when “some tithed and others do not, . . . a hunger by turmoil ensues.” Failure to tithe essentially means not turning over to someone else that which rightfully belongs him. It is as if he is now keeping stolen property in his possession.

The mishnah’s continuation speaks of entire societies that fail to tithe and of those who do not separate *challah*. This is theft, as the levi’im and the poor are the proper recipients of *ma’aser* and the Kohanim are the rightful owners of the *challah* that should have been separated.

The mishnah then discusses fruit of the sabbatical year. As in the previous cases, this potentially involves withholding that which belongs to someone else. The mishnah does not specify what type of misuse was done with the Sabbatical produce, but I would surmise that it involves something that ultimately meant that the poor were denied the opportunity to benefit from these crops.

The next examples have to do with miscarriages of justice. Obviously, this too involves theft, as such things result in innocent parties having to pay while the guilty ones get off scott-free.

Next are the matters of needless oaths, sexual impropriety, and murder, which are among the transgressions mentioned in the mishnah that follows ours. These are outgrowths of theft. The thief desired that which belongs to another, whether it was cash or some other material good. If he has to murder in order to get that which he desires, he will do so. He has chosen to not reign in his desires. Given that history, if he craves not a man’s cash but his wife, his pursuit of her will know no restraint.

What is it, then, about theft, that so many other transgressions follow from it? As we mentioned previously, theft was the catalyst for Hashem’s destroying the world through flood. even though many other transgressions preceded it.

The answer, I believe, is that the world was created as an act of *chessed*. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, of course, had no “personal” need to create the world. He did so in order to “do good” for His creation. Once the world was created on this basis, its foundation of *chesed* continues as its operative force. As we say in our prayers, “He illuminates the world and those who dwell upon it, with mercy. In His goodness, He renews daily the act of creation.”

In other words, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* daily causes His *chessed* and His *rahamim* to flow to those who dwell upon the earth. Every day, a new *chessed*. It is for this reason, I believe, that the Rabbis formulated our daily prayers to include, . . . *and for Your miracles that are with us daily, and for Your wonders and Your good at every moment --- evening, morning, and afternoon. The good, for Your rahamim never ceased. The Merciful One, for Your chesed never ended. We have always awaited You.* In short, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does miracles for us daily, allowing our continued existence.

Ramban, in his commentary to Torah, famously expresses that one does not have a portion in Torah unless he firmly believes that there is Divine Providence, with reward and punishment, for all our daily events. Nothing we do goes unnoticed. Daily life consists of ongoing “miracles” which appear to the observer to be nothing more than *teva*.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* determined, during the six days of creation, that there would be sunshine by day and darkness at night. This cycle repeats itself daily, without it being apparent that this occurs only due to the *chesed* of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. This is why we say every morning, **המאיר לארץ ולדרים** **עליה ברחמים**, *He illuminates the earth and those who live upon it, with mercy.* This is *rahamim* that is not apparent to the eye. Ramban calls these “hidden miracles,” as opposed to mechanical *teva*.

There are other things, however, which are “hidden miracles” as well, but, because they don’t follow a predictable cycle, might be considered more obviously directed from *rahamim* above. One good example of this would be rainfall. In Eretz Yisrael, at times of extended drought, the Rabbis might declare a fast day and call the public to special prayers that appeal to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* for mercy. *Selihot* prayers are recited, in the hope that Hashem will answer with rainfall.

The public rallies for rainfall reinforce the notion that rainfall is directly associated with Hashem’s mercy. Seeing Hashem’s mercy in rainfall is obvious. Once we understand this truth about rain, then we learn to recognize that

everything, even that which is cyclical, like sunrise and sunset, is only due to *rahamim*. Daily existence depends upon rain falling at its proper time and in proper amounts.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* could have set the world up in any way He wished to. Why, then, did He make it entirely depend upon His *chesed*? Surely, He could have just put the world on “automatic pilot.”

The answer, I believe, is to set a model for man. It is to teach us that we, too, need to do *chesed* for one another on a constant, ongoing basis. Most certainly, we are not to do anything that causes anguish.

Massechet Shabbat encapsulates it thus, “Abba Shaul interprets the verse, *and I will be like him* to mean, “You, be like Him. Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so should you be gracious and compassionate.”

Gemara Sotah is more specific:

What means the text: You shall walk after the Lord your God? Is it possible for a human being to walk after the Shechina? Has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked . . . so should you clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick,

. . . so should you visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, . . . so should you comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, . . . so should you bury the dead.

We now better appreciate the severity of thievery. For, the thief conducts himself in a way that is directly opposite to how the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* does. The thief’s conduct is in direct opposition to the way that the world runs, for the world is built upon *chesed*. I would say that the thief “destroys” the foundation. He attacks the very intent of creation, for as we said, the world was created as an act of *chesed*, as a way of “doing good” for the creation.

The thief interferes with people’s ability to enjoy the material good that Hashem has blessed them with. He is absolutely “destroying” the world. This is why *gezeilah* is so terrible. From a conventional, legal standpoint, there are other transgressions that are certainly more severe. But, *gezeilah* stands out in that it is an attack upon creation itself.

Shabbat 31a lists the questions that are asked of man on the day of judgement, after death. First on the list is, “Have you conducted yourself with honesty and integrity?” I believe that this is asked first because it indicates whether the person had contributed to the continued existence of the world.

If the answer is negative, this shows that this individual had never acknowledged the good that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* puts into the world. One can assume that such a person had transgressed not only the prohibition of theft, but many other severe transgressions in the course of his life. Our Rabbis tell us (Koheleth Rabba, Midrash Shmuel) that “He who denies *gemilut chasadim* is considered as if he had denied the very foundation.” This means that he who trivializes the significance of *gemilut chasadim* has negated a foundation of our faith.

In our mishnah’s list of seven transgressions, the first is that of being negligent as regards to tithing. Two types of *gezel* are inherent in failure to tithe. One is that he is holding to something that he has no right to, as it belongs to the Levi’im. The second is that he has failed to recognize that the bounty of his field was due to Hashem’s having blessed him with *chesed*. The field was given to him by Hashem. Without it, the farmer would not have had a livelihood. By not taking tithes, he has struck at creation in two ways.

Midrash Vayikra Rabba emphasizes the connection between tithing and recognition that without Hashem’s help, one would not have had a field or a flock to tithe from. Tithing is one of the ways we show that we acknowledge the good that Hashem Has done for us.



חַיָּה רָעָה בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל שְׁבוּעַת שְׂוֵא וְעַל
חֲלוּל הַשֵּׁם. גְּלוּת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה
זָרָה וְעַל גְּלוּי עַרְוֹת וְעַל שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים וְעַל
הַשְּׂמִטָּה הָאֲרָץ. בְּאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים הַדִּבֵּר מִתְּרַבָּה.
בְּרַבִּיעִית וּבְשִׁבְעִית וּבְמוֹצָאֵי שְׁבִיעִית וּבְמוֹצָאֵי
הַחֹג שְׁבֹכֵל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. בְּרַבִּיעִית מִפְּנֵי מַעֲשֵׂר
עֲנִי שְׁבַשְׁלִישִׁית. בְּשִׁבְעִית מִפְּנֵי מַעֲשֵׂר עֲנִי
עֲנִי שְׁבַשְׁשִׁית. וּבְמוֹצָאֵי שְׁבִיעִית מִפְּנֵי פְּרוֹת
שְׁבִיעִית. וּבְמוֹצָאֵי הַחֹג שְׁבֹכֵל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה מִפְּנֵי
גְּזֵל מִתְּנוֹת עֲנִיִּים:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', ט

Wild animals come to the world because of vain oaths and because of desecration of God's Name. Exile comes to the world because of idol worship and because of sexual immorality and bloodshed, and as a result of not keeping the Sabbatical year. There are four times when pestilence increases: in the fourth year, in the seventh year, at the conclusion of the seventh year, and after Succos every year. In the fourth year, because of the Tithe for the Poor in the third year. In the seventh year, because of the Tithe for the Poor in the sixth year. And at the conclusion of the seventh year, because of the fruits of the Sabbatical year. And after Succos every year, because of the theft of the gifts for the poor.

The mishnah tells us that there are four time-periods when plagues increase. The last occurs following each festival, due to “robbing the poor of the gifts that are due them.”

A story I heard from Rav Shach z”l of Bnei Brak sheds some light on this matter.

He relates that one year, just before Pesach, he offered a sizeable donation to a poverty-stricken yeshiva man. The man’s response was that he did not need it.

“Baruch Hashem,” he said. “Others have been generous with me and I already have what I will need for the *chag*.”

“Baruch Hashem that you have what you need for the *chag*,” answered Rav Shach. “But what will be after the *chag*? Yes, everyone is quite generous before the *chagim*, knowing how great the expenses are and knowing that it is a specific obligation to help at this time. However, what will be with you afterwards? You will need to live then as well.”

“One might even say,” said Rav Shach, “that the need for money will be even greater after the *chag*, due to the debts that piled up beforehand.”



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּאָדָם. הַאֹמֵר שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשֶׁלְּךָ
 שְׁלְךָ זֶה מִדָּה בִּינוּנִית וַיֵּשׁ אֹמְרִים זֶה מִדַּת סְדוּם.
 שְׁלִי שְׁלְךָ וְשֶׁלְּךָ שְׁלִי עִם הָאָרֶץ. שְׁלִי שְׁלְךָ
 וְשֶׁלְּךָ שְׁלְךָ חֲסִיד. שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשֶׁלְּךָ שְׁלִי רָשָׁע:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה, י

There are four types of people: One who says “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours” is average, but some say this is the trait of Sodom. “What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine” is an am ha’aretz. “What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours” is pious. “What is yours is mine and what is mine is mine” is wicked.

The mishnah lists four types of people. “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours” is considered by one opinion a “mediate characteristic.” Another opinion considers it not median, but Sodom-like.

“What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine” marks the *rasha*.

I would like to consider the opinion that maintains that the one who conducts himself with an attitude of, “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours” is Sodom-like. One may assume that being “Sodom-like” is worse than being a *rasha*. If so, then it should follow that the attitude of “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours” must be worse than the attitude of “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine.”

But, does that make sense?

My son Moshe, may he live, offered a nice explanation to this.

For the purposes of a certain law having to do with Jewish divorce, our Rabbis assume that deep-down, a Jew always prefers to do *mitzvot* and to stay away from *aveirot*. More precisely, the Rabbis apply this principle in a case where, in the end, the person did the right thing, whether that meant the performance of a *mitzvah* or the refraining from a transgression.

Therefore, in a case where someone has been ordered by Beit Din to give his wife a divorce but refuses to do so, the Beit Din can order that he be beaten until such time as he says, “I agree.” Despite the fact that the Beit Din had to beat

him in order to have him comply, his giving of the *get* is still considered an act of free-will. This is because it is assumed that deep-down, he wanted to do the mitzvah of listening to the Beit Din. His *yetser hara*, however, had been trying to thwart him. The beating, therefore, was to defeat the man's *yetser hara* and allow the man's true *ratzon* to emerge.

The Rambam in *Hilchot Geirushin* (quoted below) limits the application of this principle to a case where the individual does the right thing in the end. He says that we may retroactively assume that his final action is what he wanted all along. I would like to extend this principle and suggest that we can assume that every Jew, at some point in his life, will take a spiritual accounting and come to the conclusion that he wishes to do *teshuva*.

I would say that we may assume that even a *rasha gadol* will, at some point, regret all his transgressions and do *teshuva*.

I would now like to apply my interpretation to our mishnah.

Let us assume that one who reveals himself to be a *rasha* to the extent that he says, "What's mine is mine and what's your is mine" will, in the end, do *teshuva*. How much more so regarding one who not only declares his justification of theft, but thieves actively, that he will inevitably do *teshuva*.

We make these assumptions based upon a belief that the Jewish soul is holy and that when a Jewish thief takes a sincere accounting of his spiritual condition, his conclusion will certainly be to return that which he stole, an integral part of the *teshuva* process.

Let us now consider the individual who had not done an actual act of evil, but had only expressed a not altogether "kosher" attitude. For instance, he had said, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is yours." There is nothing he said that might cause someone to point to one chapter or another in Shulkhan Arukh and declare, "Sir, you are in violation of chapter X, paragraph Y." For, he has not really done anything. Nor is he in technical violation of any part of *halacha*.

He has, however, abandoned the trait of *chesed*.

The problem is that, because he knows that he has not violated any law or committed any transgression, his conscience will never bother him. Even when he does a spiritual accounting, he will not do full *teshuva*, for he will only be considering actual transgressions.

Lack of *chesed* is the worst of all character flaws. It makes one worse than a *rasha*. For, we may assume that the *rasha* will ultimately do *teshuva*. We cannot,

however, from the same assumption when it comes to he who embraces the traits of Sodom, for he will never realize that he has anything to do *teshuva* for.

The gemara (Bava Metzia 30b) declares that Yerushalayim was destroyed due to their submitting all their disputes for adjudication according to the strict letter of the law, rather than negotiated compromise. For this, the temple was destroyed and the Jews sent to exile.

I would like to tie this gemara to the idea I have been proposing. Why, amongst all improper behaviors, would this be the cause of the destruction? Perhaps it was because, as I said before, they were engaged in something that, although improper, was in technical compliance with the *halacha*. It was therefore not possible to reproach them. Technically, they were not sinners. So, when the prophets railed against the people, urging them to repent from their sins, these people imagined that the reproach had nothing to do with themselves. After all, they thought, they were free of sin and in full compliance with Torah law.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, however, did not view things as they did. He understood that they were a people who had abandoned the trait of *chesed*. This was so serious, from His perspective, that it could not be overlooked or forgiven.

This theory I am proposing as to our mishnah allows a new insight into a Torah verse as well. Specifically, I refer to Bereishit 13:13, *And the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful toward Hashem, very greatly*. The people of Sodom are described in Sanhedrin 107b as one of the types that have no portion in the world to come. The gemara there lists their various sins and describes the gravity of those sins.

Despite the gemara's listing a host of sins that they were guilty of, it is curious to me that the Torah verse (as I read it) never says that the people of Sodom were of evil character. Of course, it does say that they were *wicked and sinful toward Hashem (very greatly, no less!)*. However I maintain that one could read that verse in such a way as to mean that while it is true that they were *wicked and sinful*, but that was only "against Hashem." The emphasis is that their evil was *toward Hashem*. In my opinion, this shows that they were not necessarily of terrible character, in general.

Let us contrast this description of the people of Sodom with that of the generation of the flood. Regarding these, the Torah says *Now the earth had become corrupt before Hashem and the earth had become filled with robbery*. There, the Torah explicitly says that they had engaged in robbery. It spells out as well that *all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth*.

The contrast between the flood generation and Sodom descriptions uncovers new meaning to the Sodom verse. I would like to interpret the verse in the same way that I interpreted our mishnah. My suggestion is that their behavior, although terrible, was within the technical letter of the law. No specific law could be pointed to and be said, “You have transgressed such and such halacha!” The Beit Din, operating within a legal system, could not declare them evil doers.

Their sin was “in the eyes of Hashem.” They had abandoned the practice of *chesed* and *gemilut chasadim*. So much did they epitomized this terrible quality, that it became known as “*middat Sodom*.”

שלי שלך ושלך שלך חסיד

Our mishnah characterizes one who lives by “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is yours” as a “*chasid*.” In this category have been both righteous gentiles and Jews. Avraham Avinu (see Sotah 10a) is said to have opened his home to all who passed by, offering both food and drink.

A midrash tells us that all the years that Moshe Rabbeinu journeyed in the wilderness, he never asked anyone to transport any thing on his behalf. Berachot 10b tells us that Shmuel HaNavi took his “home” with him, no matter where he went. Rashi explains that this was due to his not wishing to “benefit” from anyone else.

The Book of Shoftim relates how Shimshon, held prisoner by the Philistines, considered just how he would “bring the house down” upon his captors. He asked the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* to give him strength: “*O Lord God, remember me and strengthen me now, only this once O God, that I may be avenged the vengeance for one of my two eyes from the Philistines.*” The Rabbis expand upon this in Sotah 10a. There it says, according to Rav, that, in pleading to Hashem, Shimshon invoked the merit of never having ordered anyone to carry his staff from one place to another.

Here was Shimshon the powerful, who had been a judge in Israel for twenty years. Surely, he accumulated many merits. Yet now, in his final hour, what merit does he invoke? That of never having asked anyone to carry his staff!

This virtue put him in such good stead that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* granted him the strength to bring down the palace, killing some three thousand enemies in the process, more than he had killed in all his other battles.



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּדַעוֹת. נוֹחַ לְכַעוֹס וְנוֹחַ לְרָצוֹת
 יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהִפְסָדוֹ קָשָׁה לְכַעוֹס וְקָשָׁה לְרָצוֹת
 יֵצֵא הִפְסָדוֹ בְּשְׂכָרוֹ קָשָׁה לְכַעוֹס וְנוֹחַ לְרָצוֹת
 חֲסִיד. נוֹחַ לְכַעוֹס וְקָשָׁה לְרָצוֹת רָשָׁע:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יא

There are four types of temperament: One who is easily angered and easily appeased — his gain is outweighed by his loss. One who is angered with difficulty and appeased with difficulty — his loss is outweighed by his gain. One who is angered with difficulty and easily appeased is pious. One who is easily angered and appeased with difficulty is wicked.

This mishnah mentions four types of temperaments. The previous mishnah mentions four types of character traits, specifically as they apply to one's relationship to doing *chessed*. I would like to suggest -- by way of *derash* -- a moral lesson that might be derived from the way these *mishnayoth* have been ordered.

The second mishnah could be understood as a corrective to a misimpression some might have. It is speaking to the type of person who acknowledges that the Torah obligates us to concern ourselves with improving the state of our fellow man, but mistakenly believes that no obligation exists to improve his own self -- even when that individual happens to be excessively demanding and quick to anger.

Some people just have a false sense that whatever their personal flaws, the *tzedaka* they give will more than compensate -- with no need for them to refine their own character and personality.

The truth, of course, is that this is not so.

Hashem tells Avraham (Bereishit 17:1): **והיה תמים** *Be perfect*. The commentators say that, in the case of Avraham, this refers to *brit milah* or his being

commanded regarding certain philosophical truths. I would extend this command to apply to all of us. In our case, however, it would be telling us that we must strive to be “complete” or “perfect” in character and deed.

Bamidbar 15:41 twice uses the phrase **אני יקוק** - *I am the Eternal, your G-d*. (The verse is: *I am the Eternal, your G-d who brought you out of the land of Mitzrai'im to be your G-d. I am the Eternal, your G-d.*) Rashi understands the first instance of **אני יקוק** to mean, “Who is faithful to give you reward.” Rashi explains the second instance as follows: “Why is this stated again? In order that Yisrael should not say [because of the first **אני יקוק**], ‘Why did Hashem say **אני יקוק**? Was it not so that we could perform the commandments and receive reward? Given that this is the case, let us choose to *not* perform the commandments and forgo the reward!’ This is why the verse repeats **אני יקוק**. It is to tell them that they do not have that option, for He is their king.”

This is why the Tanna of our mishnah says that being a generous in tzedaka is not sufficient. One must have good character as well. Having one or two good personal qualities is not enough. Rather, one must fight the *yetser hara* and work at improving all aspects of one’s self.

I could cite some other reasons why one may not ignore one’s character and believe that the merits of doing *chessed* and giving tzedaka will suffice, for one’s lack of *middoth tovoth* is bound to impact (in a negative fashion) the way one does the mitzvot of *tzedaka* and *chesed*. For instance, even when contributing generously, one could ill-treat the recipients, perhaps becoming impatient and showing anger or contempt. He could tell the poor that they are no longer welcome and then refuse to be back down. The poor will stop coming and he will no longer have whom to give tzedaka to or to do *chesed* for.

The formerly generous person of ill temper will then be left with no merits whatsoever.

This is one more reason as to why one absolutely *must* work a developing themselves and not just rely upon good deeds.



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּתַלְמִידִים. מֶהָר לְשִׁמוּעַ וּמֶהָר
 לְאַבֵּד יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהִפְסָדוֹ. קָשָׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ וְקָשָׁה
 לְאַבֵּד יֵצֵא הֶפְסָדוֹ בְּשְׂכָרוֹ. מֶהָר לְשִׁמוּעַ וְקָשָׁה
 לְאַבֵּד חָכָם. קָשָׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ וּמֶהָר לְאַבֵּד זֶה חֶלֶק
 רָע:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת הַיָּב

There are four types among students: One who is quick to learn and quick to forget?—?his gain is outweighed by his loss. Slow to learn and slow to forget?—?his loss is outweighed by his gain. Quick to learn and slow to forget? is wise. Slow to learn and quick to forget?—?this is a bad portion.

This mishnah, as the one before it, lists several types of *middoth*. The *middoth* listed here revolve around one’s ability to assimilate and retain one’s learning. Rabbi Obadiah m’Bartenura and the Rambam, in their commentaries to this mishnah, point out that this mishnah does not praise those with the “desirable” *middoth*, nor does it criticize those with the “undesirable” *middoth*. This is because, according to these commentators’ understanding of our mishnah, the qualities described here are the type that are beyond one’s ability to control.

The qualities listed are innate; in my opinion, there is little one can do to significantly change one’s ability to assimilate information. As I see it, trying to change something like that would be like someone hard-of-hearing trying to improve their hearing or someone with poor vision trying to improve their ability to see. (I mean, of course, their doing so without resort to surgeries or external devices.)

I therefore wonder why the mishnah, in referring to a person unable to assimilate information, says that “his loss negates his gain.” As I read it, this statement is pejorative. As I read it, this characterization judges him as if were guilty of something.

After all, the traits listed here are nothing like those listed earlier, which are in one’s hands to change. Anger, conceit, stinginess, and resentment are all things that one has the ability to change.

If we read the mishnah as I do, that “his loss negates his gain” means something pejorative (rather than factual, as Rambam and Bartenura read it), then we are left with the question as to why the Rabbis would criticize those who can do nothing to improve their innate abilities.

As a response, I would suggest that the Rabbis are not referring to one who lacks natural ability. Rather, they refer to one who has the ability, but is not concentrating well because he allows his thoughts to stray to other matters.

For instance, let us say that one who is burdened with worry decides to go to the Beit HaMidrash anyway, determined to maintain his learning schedule. Despite his best efforts, though, it turns out that he is unable to block out his personal concerns. He therefore feels that he must rush through the learning, studying it in the most superficial fashion.

In a sense, the person is merely trying to fulfill his obligation, but not more than that.

The Tanna would say in this case that the man’s reward is great (after all, he *did* make the effort despite the challenges involved). However, it is inevitable that he will forget all he learned, given that his learning was not done with concentration and composure. Regarding him, then, one might say that “his loss negates his gain.”

Take the case, though, of one who is successful at blocking his worries from his mind and manages to study with concentration, as if those worries did not exist. Needless to say, this requires great effort and skill.

Regarding one like this, the Tanna says that “he will not easily forget that which he learned.” This did not come easily to him; much time and effort was expended. However, that time was not “lost.” Rather, his “loss” has been cancelled out by his “gain,” in the words of the mishnah.

Torah study that has been earned through this level of dedication and seriousness of purpose will “last.”

A verse in Koheleth 2:9: **אף חכמתי עמדה לי** - *also, my wisdom remained with me* could be understood to hint at this idea. Midrash Yalkut Shemoni quotes Rav Pappa as saying, based on this verse, that the Torah he learned *b’af* “lasted” within him (that is, he did not forget it.) Various interpretations exist as to what Rav Pappa meant with that statement. An interpretation I like is that it means **צער**, that is, “through suffering, trouble, pain.”

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּנוֹתַי צְדָקָה. הַרוֹצֵה שְׂיִתֵּן וְלֹא
 יִתְּנוּ אֲחֵרִים עֵינָו רָעָה בְּשָׁל אֲחֵרִים. יִתְּנוּ
 אֲחֵרִים וְהוּא לֹא יִתֵּן עֵינָו רָעָה בְּשָׁלוֹ. יִתֵּן וְיִתְּנוּ
 אֲחֵרִים חֲסִיד. לֹא יִתֵּן וְלֹא יִתְּנוּ אֲחֵרִים רָשָׁע.
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יג

There are four types among those who give charity. One who wants to give himself but does not want others to give, begrudges others. If he wants others to give and he will not give, he begrudges himself. If he wants to give and wants others to give as well, he is pious. If he does not want to give and does not want others to give, he is wicked.

The mishnah lists four types of contributors to charity. So that we might better appreciate what the mishnah is telling us, I would like to clarify what constitutes the mitzvah of tzedaka. I will quote several sources that mention tzedaka.

The gemara in Rosh Hashana 4a quotes a baraita, “He who says, ‘This coin is for tzedaka so that my sons will live or so that I may merit the afterlife’ is [nevertheless considered] an absolute tzaddik.”

Later on, on page 5b, the gemara discusses the negative prohibition of “not being late” as it applies to vows. The verse says, *When you make a vow to the Lord, your God, you shall not delay in paying it, for the Lord, your God, will demand it of you, and it will be [counted as] a sin for you.* The phrase, “*the Lord your God*” appears twice. The gemara apparently considers the second instance redundant. They therefore say that it comes to extend the prohibition to include *tzedaka*, tithes, and first-born pledges.

Rashi to that gemara notes that the association with *tzedaka* is based on Devarim 24:13. That verse says that when one is holding a poor man’s night time cloak as security, he must return it each day at nightfall. Doing so is considered by that verse as an act of *tzedaka before Hashem, your God* -- **ולך תהיה צדקה** -- לפני יקוק אלהיך.

The connection, then, is that the verse uses the word *tzedaka* and, like the verse regarding not delaying fulfillment of one's vows, says "*before Hashem, your God.*"

To me, this demonstrates that *tzedaka* is very, very dear to Hashem.

Mishlei 10:2 says that *tzedaka* will save from death. This could be considered *middah k'negged middah*, measure for measure. Just as *tzedaka* saves the recipient from death by hunger, thereby sustaining his life, so does it have the same effect on the contributor, causing a decree to go out that the donor not die before his time.

For the reasons I have just given, one is not allowed to prevent his fellow from fulfilling the mitzvah of *tzedaka*. What I mean is that one might very well wish to accrue all the benefit for oneself and wish to support a certain cause single-handedly, not allowing others to contribute to it as well. Not only are the possibilities for giving *tzedaka* endless, but there is practically no limit to what can be given.

Worthy recipients abound. There are the indigent, the Torah institutions, the sick amongst the Jews, and "captives" who need to be redeemed. The Torah tells us that there will always be the impoverished.

No matter how many thousands of dollars any one individual will give, there will always be a need for more. To say that others should refrain from giving stems from jealousy and shows one as being evil of heart. It is as if he does not wish that those other than himself reap the rewards brought by being generous with *tzedaka*.

It does not matter how many individuals contribute, for all will receive *beracha* in their lives. Even if one hundred were to give to a particular cause, not only will each be rewarded, but each person's reward will be equivalent. Nothing that any one person gives will diminish the reward of anyone else and nothing given by someone else will diminish the reward earned by oneself.

There is one more point I would like to make. It is that one who is resentful of others' contributing to the same causes as himself reveals that his true intent was not to help the poor recipient. Nor was it even to earn the Heavenly reward that comes from doing a *mitzvah*. Rather, he is showing that his primary interest was in self aggrandizement. For, if his intentions were proper, he would be very happy to know that others were helping as well. He would be glad that they, too, would be rewarded -- and would be confident that his own reward will not be compromised.

The poor benefit from each and every dollar. The fact that one wishes to deny the poor this added gain shows that one does not really have the poor's interests in mind. Rather, he is just looking for personal honor.

For “*tzedaka*” such as this, there is no reward. Rather, there is punishment. Shulkhan Arukh (Yoreh Dei'ah 249:13) states this openly. This does not apply, however, to one who asks that his name be associated with something he dedicates in order that he or a loved one be thereby remembered. This is not only permitted, but, according to Shulkhan Arukh, is something to be encouraged.

What about the case where someone solicits others, but -- despite being able to afford it -- contributes nothing himself? This indicates not just a stinginess when it comes to his own money, but a lack of regard for the money of others. I would go so far as to say that it shows that his real motivation was not to help out a *tzedaka*, but to engineer a way of making his friends less wealthy. As I see it, it must be that he thinks that those who give money to *tzedaka* have less money as a result. For, if he truly believed that giving money to *tzedaka* brings even more wealth to the donor, he would have wanted to join in that blessing and therefore would have contributed as well.

The mishnah next speaks of one who not only solicits others to contribute, but does so himself. This type is called a *chasid*. I would say that such an individual is thereby demonstrating that he is generous and is not giving simply in order to draw attention to himself.

The mishnah finally speaks of the type that neither contributes himself but discourages others from giving. This type is called a *rasha*.

To my mind, there is no evil greater than one such as this. For, why should he be so concerned lest someone else give a poor person his daily bread so that he not be overcome with hunger?

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

ארבע מדות בנותני צדקה

Rabbi Chaim Pinto's students were well-aware that the Rav's Beit HaMidrash time with them was dedicated exclusively to that day's learning topic. Discussing other matters with him was not permitted. Not only that, but even if the question one had was a learning question, he was not allowed to raise it with the Rav at that time unless he was one of the Beit HaMidrash *talmidim*.

It once happened that, in the middle of the *shiur*, Rav Chaim got up and walked out of the yeshiva building -- with no explanation. For those who knew the Rav's ways, this was not only unusual, but inexplicable. Although the *talmidim* were quite puzzled by the matter, none dared to inquire as to the reason.

The Rav's attendant, though, quickly got up to join the Rav once he saw him exit to the street. The attendant followed as the Rav continued walking. Eventually, the Rav arrived at certain place and stood there, as if he were waiting for someone. The attendant stopped there as well.

It wasn't long before a man who was both one of the community's wealthiest and one of its stingiest passed by.

The Rav immediately approached him for a contribution -- and the man refused, continuing on his way.

The Rav then turned to his attendant: "Quick! Follow him! For the time has come for him to die."

The Rav then explained that he would not want that the man would die without someone's having said *keriat shema* for him. He told the attendant to follow the man and fulfill that role when the time came.

The attendant did as he was told, while the Rav proceeded back to the Beit HaMidrash, where he picked up where he had left off in *shiur*.

Sure enough, the wealthy man reached his doorstep and promptly collapsed. As instructed, the attendant then stood over him and read the *keriat shema* on his behalf.

The attendant walked back to the yeshiva and waited there for the Rav to finish his *shiur*.

The *shiur* completed, the Rav summoned the attendant: "It had been revealed to me that a decree had gone out that this wealthy man will die. I tried to have it canceled by interrupting my *shiur* to approach him for *tzedaka*. Had he given even a few coins, the decree would have been cancelled, as it says *Tzedaka saves from death*. He was too stubborn, though, to part with even a tiny amount for the sake of the poor. And so, he was not spared the decree."

"Seeing what was to come, I then sent you to be there when his soul departed, so that it could be accompanied by *keriat shema*."

The wondrous event became known throughout the city, teaching both the community and the *talmidim* the power of *tzedaka*. From that point onward, all the townsfolk were especially careful about *tzedaka*. There was not a Jewish home in that city where a charity box from Rav Chaim would not be found.

Another story from the city of Mogador parallels the story just told quite strikingly.

Every Monday and Thursday, Rabbi Chaim would sit at his entranceway. As they passed by, people would hand *tzedaka* to the Rav.

One Thursday, a wealthy man returning from the market with his Shabbat purchases passed by. Rabbi Chaim asked him for *tzedaka*, but the man -- who was known to be stingy -- refused, continuing on his way.

Rabbi Chaim immediately summoned his attendant, as he knew that this man was about to die. Rabbi Chaim instructed his attendant to follow the man home and say *keriyat shema* over him once his moment of death arrived.

The events took place just as Rabbi Chaim had predicted.

When the attendant returned to Rabbi Chaim's home, the Rabbi revealed to him that he had heard that a decree had been issued against the miser and that the *tzedaka* episode was an attempt to cause the decree to be annulled.

Once the man had refused to offer *tzedaka*, his death was to be imminent. At least, though, the attendant would be there to recite *keriyat shema*.



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּהוֹלְכֵי לְבַיִת הַמִּדְרָשׁ. הוֹלֵךְ
 וְאֵינוֹ עוֹשֶׂה שְׂכָר הַלֵּיכָהּ בְּיָדוֹ. עוֹשֶׂה וְאֵינוֹ הוֹלֵךְ
 שְׂכָר מַעֲשֵׂה בְּיָדוֹ. הוֹלֵךְ וְעוֹשֶׂה חֲסִיד. לֹא הוֹלֵךְ
 וְלֹא עוֹשֶׂה רָשָׁע;
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יד

There are four types among those who go to the study hall: One who goes but does not do has the reward for going. One who does but does not go has the reward for the deeds. One who goes and does is pious. One who does not go and does not do is wicked.

The mishnah lists four types who attend the study hall. The first is he who goes, but does nothing once he arrives. Of him, the mishnah says that he receives reward for having gone.

This seems peculiar. To me, it would seem that he would have been better off staying home. This is because -- as I read the mishnah -- it does not refer to one who has gone there and tried, without success. Rather, as I understand the mishnah, it refers to one who willfully intends to not listen.

The last part of the mishnah says that he who neither goes nor does is a *rasha*. Following my reading, it comes out that this part of the mishnah is just as problematic as the first. For, why would someone who seeks to avoid willful transgression be considered a *rasha*? Don't we know (from Beitzah 30a) that it is better to be a *shogeig* (inadvertent) than to be a *mazid* (knowing and intentional)?

As I understand it, the person who stays away is somewhat akin to a *shogeig*. The first type goes to the Beit HaMidrash with full intent to not listen. As I see it, that would make the first type into something like a *mazid*. The last type, however, is like someone who chooses to avoid being a *mazid*. In my view, that is like keeping oneself a *shogeig*. And don't we know that it is "better" to be a *shogeig* than a *mazid*?

Let us have a look at Kiddushin 30b. I believe that it will shed some light on my question.

The gemara there says that the solution for one being tempted by the *yetser hara* is to drag it to the *Beit HaMidrash*. “If he is like a stone,” says the gemara, “he will dissolve. If he is like iron, he will shatter.”

I wonder how one might reconcile that gemara with the one in Berachot 5a that seems to advocate a different strategy for dealing with the *yetser hara*. There, it says that one should “always” do as follows: First, “declare war” against it. If that works, then “fine.” If not, the second tack would be to study Torah. If that does not work, then one should recite *keriat shema*. If that does not work, then the fourth step is to “remember the day of death.”

According to the first gemara, the strategy is to drag the *yetser* to the Beit HaMidrash. According to the second, it is [at least in step #2] to study Torah. My question is: Why does the first gemara say that it is sufficient to draw the *yetser* to the Beit HaMidrash? Does it not seem from the second that merely being in the Beit HaMidrash is not enough? Doesn't he have to involve himself in actual learning?

My resolution is this: It comes to show that even the mere going to the Beit HaMidrash and doing nothing more than sitting down and opening a sefer serves to conquer the *yetser hara*, provided that the individual is sincerely motivated. Several sources bear this out, I believe.

Midrash Vayikra Rabba notes what David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 119:59, *I considered my ways and returned my feet to your testimonies*. To this, the midrash says “Every day I would consider and say that I will go to so-and-so place. My feet, [though], would take me to Houses of Prayer and Houses of Study.”

Perhaps one could interpret this midrash as saying that David Hamelech “directed” his feet to take him to the Beit HaMidrash, not because he was interested in being in the Beit HaMidrash per se, but only so that he not go to some other place. Thus, the “walking” alone is what caused him to not be somewhere else.

We see as well that David said (Tehillim 119:45) *And I will walk in the broad pathways, for I have sought Your precepts*. Rashi there comments that the “broad pathways” upon which he is *holeich* means “halacha” that is widely known and broadly disseminated amongst Yisrael.

Our Rabbis tell us (Yerushalmi Yebamoth) that when Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya was an infant, his mother brought his crib into the Beit HaMidrash so that he be exposed to words of Torah.

Another example of the value of simply going in a place where Torah is heard might be found in Chagiga 3a. There, it asks why the Torah specifies that even infants should be brought to the public Torah reading of *hakheil*. It answers, "In order to reward those who brought them."

What we said about the value of going to the Beit HaMidrash and doing nothing more than opening a sefer is not necessarily limited to those who lack the ability to learn properly. For, even those who have a learning background become faced with situations where the *yetser hara* is challenging them and they are unable to concentrate on a sefer. Perhaps, even, the reason they are unable to concentrate is that *yetser* himself will not allow it.

In such a case, even the experienced scholar should tell himself that he should, at the very least, sit himself down in the Beit HaMidrash. He should add that he is doing so not in order to learn, but only to see what is going in between those four walls.

He will thereby outsmart the *yetser*.

The *yetser* will become subdued by the very walking.

For, had he not wished to battle the *yetser*, he would not have gone to the Beit HaMidrash at all. Once he gets there, he is bound to hear something novel. We know that because the gemara assures us (Chagiga 3a), "There is no such thing as Beit HaMidrash without presentation of a novel idea."

Getting back to our mishnah, note that it specifically says, "He goes and does not do." That is to say, he does not do a thing. But, if he goes there and distracts others from learning, his punishment is very great.

Of such a person, the mishnah says that it is better that he not go at all -- if the alternative is that he will go there and be a nuisance to those who *are* trying to learn.



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּיוֹשְׁבֵי לִפְנֵי חֲכָמִים. סָפּוֹג
 וּמִשְׁפָּךְ מִשְׁמֶרֶת וְנֶפֶה. סָפּוֹג שֶׁהוּא סוֹפֵג אֶת
 הַכֹּל. מִשְׁפָּךְ שֶׁמְכַנֵּס בָּזוּ וּמוֹצִיא בָּזוּ. מִשְׁמֶרֶת
 שֶׁמוֹצִיָּאָה אֶת הַיַּיִן וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַשְּׂמֵרִים. וְנֶפֶה
 שֶׁמוֹצִיָּאָה אֶת הַקֶּמַח וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַסֵּלֶת:
 אבות ה, טו

There are four kinds of people among those who sit before the Sages: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve. A sponge absorbs everything. A funnel takes in from one end and lets out from the other. A strainer lets the wine out and retains the dregs. A sieve lets the flour dust out and retains the best flour.

The mishnah lists four types who “sit before the sages.” The compilation “Me’am Lo’ez,” explains that the concept of “to sit before the sages” could be understood quite literally. Specifically, it could mean that success in learning is greatly tied to how much time one spends in the physical presence of our Rabbis. Not only that, but it also depends on where one sits. Seeing them “face to face” is much more advantageous than seeing them merely from the back or the side.

Proof for the above might be brought from Eiruvin 13b: “Rabbi [Yehudah HaNassi] said, ‘How is it that I am sharper than my colleagues? Because I saw Rabbi Meir from the rear. Had I seen him from the front, though, I would have been even sharper!’”

The above could be understood as a matter of practicality, alluding to the obvious benefit of not just hearing what the Rabbi is saying but also being able to read his facial expression. It is, of course, inevitable that more is gained by seeing those added nuances than by not seeing them. That holds true even in simple conversation and any type of class or meeting.

Me’Am Lo’ez uses a different approach, however. He compares the situation of being in the Rabbis’ presence to that of walking in to a store that sells fragrances. Even if one walks out without having bought a thing, he leaves with

fragrance clinging to his clothes. So, too, with having been close to the presence of the great Rabbis. One leaves having assimilated something of their spiritual purity.

I would like to take this idea a bit further.

Rabbi Akiva, in Pesachim 22b expounds upon the verse, *Hashem, your God, you should fear*. There is a technical issue with one part of the verse, the seemingly extra word **את**. Rabbi Akiva says that the extra word comes to extend the meaning of **את יקוק אלהיך תירא** to include Torah scholars. Recall our explanation of Avoth 4:12, which ends by saying **רבך כמורא שמים ומורא** -- “and the awe [you should have] of your Rebbi should be like the awe you have of Hashem.” Even when one is not engaged with their Rav in formal study, but merely gazes at him, the student still benefits. For, he assimilates *Yirat Shamayim*.

We see something comparable that applies to the *Shechina*. Berachot 17a says that the Next World has neither eating nor drinking. Rather, what happens there is that the *tzaddikim* sit with their crowns upon their heads as they enjoy the glow of the *Shechina*. As I see it, the situation of one who sits before his Rebbi is somewhat similar. The Rebbi emanates holiness and fear of Heaven. Merely gazing upon his countenance allows one to absorb something of that fear of Heaven.

The tanach tells us of those who attempted to enjoy the Shechina’s radiance improperly. Shemot 24:11 says that Nadab and Avihu *perceived God and they ate and drank*. Rashi brings midrashic comments that they would gaze upon the Shechina while occupied with food, drink, and frivolity. For this, they were punished. It was as if they considered themselves to be like the Kaddosh Baruch Hu. They deserved to have been killed immediately, measure for measure by the actual G-d -- Hashem.

Similarly, we find mere students who sit before their teachers and see themselves as their teachers’ equals. Accordingly, they disregard what ever they hear. In truth, all depends upon the degree to which the student subordinates himself to his teacher.



כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר בְּטֵל בְּדָבָר
 בְּטֵלָה אֲהָבָה. וְשֵׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר אִינָהּ בְּטֵלָה
 לְעוֹלָם. אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה הַתְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר זֶה אֲהָבַת
 אֲמֵנוֹן וְתָמָר. וְשֵׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר זֶה אֲהָבַת
 דָּוִד וַיְהוֹנָתָן:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', טז

Any love that is dependent on a specific factor, when that factor is gone, the love is gone. If it is not dependent on a specific factor, it will never end. Which is a love dependent on a specific factor? The love of Amnon for Tamar. And which is a love not dependent on a specific factor? The love of David and Yonatan.

Our mishnah speaks of love.

Love that depends on some other thing will not last. That which is not dependant, however, will.

Parashat Kedoshim tells us of command to love one's fellow. *Thou shalt love one's fellow as one's self.* On a superficial level, this command sounds somewhat unrealistic. Traditional commentators resolve this difficulty in various ways. Ramban and Rambam interpret the commandment to mean not that one has to love all other Jews exactly as one loves oneself (in an emotional sense), but that one should want for all others the same things he wants for himself. He should concern himself for their property, their honor, and their good reputation just as he cares about those things for himself.

It seems quite impossible that the Torah is commanding us to love (in an emotional sense) others the same way we love ourselves. For, the commandment is not even limited to ordering us to extend this "identical love" to our friends, but is saying that this "identical love" should be extended to *all* good Jews -- even strangers!

I would like to present my own, simple answer to this question.

Does it ever occur to someone to tell his own body: "If you do as I say, I will love you. If you don't, I won't!"? Of course, everyone knows that the categories

of “love” and “hate” do not apply to how one feels about one’s own body, with that feeling being dependant upon the extent to which his body obeys his will. If the body disappoints him by being sickly, whether it be a mild illness or a serious one, one would not tell it, “You have let me down. You have endangered my existence. I hate you from now on!”

Rather, one will continue living with his body. Not only that, but he will fight for its welfare. If his body is racked with illness, he will do all he can to extricate it from danger.

Now that we know how a person would (and would not) act towards one’s own body, we know how he is to act towards other good Jews.

Even if others are not doing what he would personally would have liked that they do, this is not cause to say, “From here on in, I will hate you!”

When one’s fellow needs one’s help, one must help him, as if there was no history between them of the other person’s having disappointed him in some way.

“True loving” of one’s fellow is to ignore the superficial aspects. Rather, the love should always be there. This is what promotes love between men.

The Torah says that one must love his fellow “like oneself.” This comes to emphasize that just as one would never “hate” his physical body because it had let him down, but “loves” it without ever considering whether or not his body is doing what he wants it to, so should he feel about his fellow man. In other words, the love one has towards his own body is not dependant on any thing. So, should his love for his fellow not be dependent on any thing. One “loves” his body whether or not it “loves” him back. So, too, with one’s fellow.

Moshe Rabbeinu was a model of this.

Moshe Rabbeinu loved every Jew, without ulterior motive or self-interest -- even as they rebelled against him. They were the indirect cause of his not being able allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. Yet, Moshe Rabbeinu never ceased to pray on their behalf.

In the aftermath of Bnei Yisrael’s having sinned with the golden calf, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* told Moshe (Shemot 32:10): *And now, desist from Me! Let my anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation.* Moshe, of course, would not accept that idea. He immediately began to plead on their behalf. And, according to the account in Berachot 32a he also became physically weakened, temporarily unable to speak.

Some of the commentators connect his becoming weakened with Hashem's just having demoted him. He had been promoted to leadership so that he would guide the Jewish People. Now that they were about to be destroyed, his "job" had become redundant. Accordingly, Moshe feared that Hashem would now be less likely to heed his pleas.

However, once Moshe heard Hashem asking him to "release Him" do that He may destroy them, Moshe realized that he still had the power to protest. Now emboldened, he arose to plead that his People be forgiven.

The teachers of the gemara suggest several arguments used by Moshe in beseeching Hashem. None of them having worked, Moshe offers his own life: "Erase me now from Your book."

In the end, Hashem heeded the cries and spared the Jewish People from being wiped out and replaced by another nation.

Let us return to our mishnah now.

Given what we have learned about Moshe Rabbeinu, I wonder why our mishnah did not cite his relationship to Yisrael as a model of "a love not dependant on any thing."

The answer to that, I believe, is that the love of Moshe to Yisrael is beyond human; it is inconceivable that anyone other than Moshe could achieve such love for his fellow man.

It is said of Moshe that he was *very humble, more so than any other man on earth*. The commentators say that there was no other like him in humility, in the sense of there being no one comparable in not wishing to lord themselves over their brethren. In my opinion, the verse demonstrates as well that there was no one comparable when it came to love for their fellow man.

From my reading, one sees why Moshe would not have been a useful example for the rest of us. For, the mishnah sought to teach even the simplest Jew. There is no reason why it would have used a model whose *middah* of love was beyond what any of us could ever hope to attain.

The love David had for Yehonatan, however, is within the realm of human attainment. What is needed, though, is that we yearn for it sufficiently and devote ourselves to achieving a love like that.



כָּל מַחְלֻקַּת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם.
 וְשֵׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם אֵין סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם.
 אִיזוּ הִיא מַחְלֻקַּת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם זֶה
 מַחְלֻקַּת הַלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי. וְשֵׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם זֶה
 מַחְלֻקַּת קֶרַח וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יז

Any argument that is for the sake of Heaven will have a constructive outcome. And any argument that is not for the sake of Heaven will not have a constructive outcome. What is an example of an argument for the sake of Heaven? The arguments of Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of an argument that is not for the sake of Heaven? That is the argument of Korach and his congregation.

The mishnah discusses disputes. It says that Hillel and Shammai embodied the concept of dispute “for the sake of Heaven.”

I wonder why they, in particular, were chosen. It could not have been because they were the first pair to have engaged in dispute, for we know from other sources (Chagiga 16a) that others preceded them.

I would add that, in my opinion, the disputes between Hillel and Shammai were no different than any other dispute engaged in by our Rabbis.

Let me suggest, then, that the mishnah is not really referring disputes between Hillel and Shammai.

Rather, it refers to what occurred in the subsequent generation.

Specifically, it refers to the fact that this dispute -- unlike all others throughout the talmudic period -- was that of “many” against “many.” All other disputes pitted two individuals, one against the other, or one individual against the many.

There are the disputes of Rabbi Eliezer and *Chachamim*, Rabbi Meir and his colleagues, Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish,

Abaye and Rava, but not “many” against “many.” There was no other case of one yeshiva or Beit [Midrash] versus another.

The period of the Amoraim and Gaonim (6th - 10th centuries) in Babylonia largely centered around two academies. Their legal customs were quite similar, by and large. Against that background, let us revisit the situation with Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai.

I would like to propose that later generations might have misconstrued Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai’s intent. Perhaps the later generations would look at the relative uniformity and unity of their times and think that Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai’s disputes were *not* for the sake of Heaven. “How could two schools have so many disputes between them?” they would ask.

The Tanna of our mishnah therefore choose to highlight the dispute of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, to the exclusion of all others. This was in order to show future generations that not only were *all* the Rabbis’ disputes conducted for the sake of Heaven, but *even* those of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. All of the Rabbis’ disputes were motivated only by the desire to clarify *halacha*. All would back up their positions with sources and logical proofs, rather than the empty rhetoric that characterizes controversies done for the sake of ego or power.

The ways of Korach and his congregation stood in stark contrast to those of our Rabbis. Admittedly, they, like the Rabbis, argued within the context of halachic discourse. However, their true intent was quickly revealed once the discussion turned personal and self-interested, as they questioned the make-up of the priesthood and community leadership.

Beit Hillel and Shammai, unlike Korach and his followers, were never known to have challenged community leaders’ authority. This was despite their having considerable influence themselves, with Shammai having been the head of the Beit Din and Hillel having been the *nasi*. The disputes they engaged in were strictly halachic, not personal.

Yebamoth 13b famously tells us that despite Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai’s each not allowing certain marriages that the other permitted, this was no impediment to their joining each other’s families in matrimony. What better proof that their disputes were strictly halachic -- not personal! Had there been hatred between them, would they nevertheless have married one another? Would a father have given his daughter’s hand to someone whose family he was at war with?

Clearly, Beit Hillel's and Shammai's disputes were entirely for the sake of Heaven, for no reason other than to clarify Jewish Law.

There is another point I wish to make, but I must first explain a gemara that appears in Massechet Beitzah 11b. It tells us that the opinion of Beit Hillel carries no authority in cases where Beit Hillel disputes it. The phrase used is **אינה משנה**. One page later, a question arises as to whether a certain teaching is authentic. The gemara first dismisses it, saying that it could not have been said by any of the Rabbis from the mishnaic period. The phrase used is **משנה אינה**, the same phrase used above. Rashi interprets **אינה משנה** to mean that the teaching had never been taught in the Beit Midrash. The gemara then suggests another possibility, which is that it *was* taught by a teacher from the mishnaic period, but that teacher is Beit Shammai. The gemara's wording here is **ואם תמצא לומר משנה - בית שמאי היא** *And if you say that it is a tannaitic teaching (or was taught in the Beit Midrash), then it must be the opinion of Beit Shammai.*

One could say that the above gemara is one more proof that Beit Hillel's and Beit Shammai's dispute was for the sake of Heaven, for it shows Beit Shammai's persistence. They knew that their opinion had been rejected. Yet, they continued teaching it, believing that the rejection was not necessarily final. They believed that perhaps Beit Hillel might one day come around to agreeing with them. Of course, they would only have believed this if they also believed that the dispute was for the sake of Heaven. For, when a dispute is personal, the other side might never concede, as their ego would never allow it.

Although the halacha consistently follows Beit Hillel, not Beit Shammai, there are a number of exceptions. Although they are few, the fact that they exist at all shows that both sides' intent was neither for the sake of personal aggrandizement nor for the sake of simply being argumentative.

Beit Shammai's persistence, even when they knew that their opinions had largely been rejected, shows why their dispute has stood the test of time. Each was always open to the possibility that the halacha might possibly follow not their own position, but that of their disputants. Beit Hillel's view almost always prevailed, but the side of Beit Shammai occasionally won as well.



***What is an example of an argument that is not for the sake of Heaven?
That is the argument of Korach and his congregation.***

There is an interesting discrepancy here. When speaking of the “dispute between Hillel and Shamai,” the mishnah mentions both sides and of the dispute, whereas when it comes to the “dispute of Korach and all his company,” only one side is mentioned. Why doesn’t the mishnah mention Moshe and Aharon as Korach’s opponents in the dispute?

Clearly there is a big difference between the two disputes, and this is why they were chosen as prototypes of disputes that are “for” and “not for” the sake of Heaven. The disagreements between Hillel and Shamai were worthy of the term *machloket*. One side would declare an object *tamei*, bringing reasoned proofs for its position, while the other side would declare the object *tahor*, bringing reasoned proofs for its position as well. A fiery debate would follow, based entirely on Torah concepts. Korach’s dispute with Moshe and Aharon, on the other hand, was more in the nature of a rebellion than a *machloket*. Korach attempted to incite the whole nation against them, bringing two hundred fifty men with him to back up his spurious arguments. Moshe and Aharon did not respond in kind. They didn’t take a combative stance, and they presented no counterargument to Korach’s claims. In fact, they responded quite submissively — the *pesukim* tell us that “Moshe heard and fell on his face,” (במדבר טו, ד) and in an attempt to ward off disaster, he tried to persuade them with gentle words to drop their claims: “Please listen, sons of Levi....” (שם, טו, ח).

Korach’s uprising cannot be called a proper *machloket* because no debate took place between him and Moshe Rabbeinu; Korach was seeking to overthrow Moshe’s authority, and he confronted him for the purpose of provoking a fight. Even after Moshe said to Korach and company, “In the morning, Hashem will make known who is His, and who is holy, and He will draw [them] near to Him,” (שם, טו, ה) they didn’t all agree to this suggestion, but persisted in quarreling. “We will not go up,” they said, (שם, יב) and this clearly showed that their dispute was not *l’shem Shamayim*. If they were really seeking to arrive at the truth about who should be their leader and their High Priest, then they would have agreed to the test Moshe proposed. This is why the *parshah* begins with the words “ויקח קורח — Korach took.” (שם, טו, א) Rashi explains that Korach took himself to one side; in other words, the entire dispute was one-sided, since Moshe Rabbeinu declined to engage in any form of combat with him, physical or verbal.

We see now that Korach's dispute cannot properly be called a *machloket*. Yet the mishnah does in fact use the word *machloket* to describe Korach's dispute. How do we explain that?

I would suggest this answer: a person cannot fight with himself; there have to be two opposing sides, each trying to emerge victorious. Korach's attack on Moshe did not fit this pattern, since Moshe made no attempt to pit his strength against that of Korach and his henchmen. Thus the mishnah does not refer to his dispute as "the *machloket* between Korach and Moshe," but "the *machloket* of Korach and all his company." This indicates that Korach and his followers were fighting among themselves. Evidently they were quite an egalitarian group — as Korach claimed, "The entire congregation are all holy," (שם, ג) meaning that any Israelite was as worthy as Moshe to serve as leader of the nation. That being so, it must have been hard for Korach's men to agree on their internal hierarchy. The "dispute of Korach and all his company" was just that — they were all fighting against each other over the top positions, and they all met a disastrous end.

An *aggadah* relates that Eliyahu HaNavi once visited a certain town and was not given a warm reception. Upon leaving, he "blessed" the townspeople with the wish that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu should make all of them leaders. As he later explained to Rabi Joshua ben Levi, this "blessing" was in fact a curse since a town cannot have more than one mayor, and a place that has too many leaders will end up in ruins. (211 מעשה דרבי יהושע בן לוי נדפס באוצר מדרשים עמוד)

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

Rabbi Chaim Pinto the Younger zt"l was once visiting the city of Maknas, which was known for its many *chachamim* and scribes. "How do you react," asked one of the Rabbanim, "when the local talmidei chachamim don't treat you with respect or ignore your halachic rulings?"

Rabbi Chaim answered that, unfortunately, "Our current generation is not willing to accept the truth. Controversy, just for the sake of controversy has become all too common." He continued, "As the Rav of the city, though, it is your job to see to it that these controversies are contained as much as possible. Remember, before the earthly Beit Din chose you to be the Rav here, you were first designated by the Beit Din Above. All the community is therefore *obligated* to honor you."

Shortly thereafter, Rabbi Chaim ran into one of those *chachamim* who had been making the Rav's life so difficult. Rav Chaim chastised him, warning that this was most definitely *not* the Torah approach. "You're weakening his position here! The honor of Torah is at stake!"

Needless to say, the *chacham* was unconvinced.

In fact, he was not only unswayed, but he proceeded to hurl insults at the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim!

"Who do you think you are!"

"Isn't it enough that you came here to beg for donations? You think that you have the right to preach to me as well?"

"Pack up your coins and go back to where you came from! And don't start giving us your opinions as to how we should behave!"

The tirade having come to an end, Rabbi Chaim told the *chacham* that he would like to speak to him in private. The man refused. So, Rabbi Chaim asked all those present to please leave the room.

Once they had left, Rabbi Chaim addressed the man and told him that all he had said was completely unjustified. It was absolutely wrong to cause such trouble for the Rav. Not only was Rabbi Chaim saying this, but he offered to prove it.

"This past Ta'anit Esther, is it not true that you were not feeling well? And, is it not true that you grabbed a slice of cake, were intending to eat it -- but that you then heard a knock on the door? And that you then hid the cake in your pocket? And that you then sneaked into another room and stuffed the cake in your mouth, without having made a *beracha*? And that you then downed some water, straight from the pitcher? And that you then stuck your whole head into the water? And, after that, that your whole head started aching?"

The *chacham* could not believe his own ears. Rabbi Chaim's words were true down to every detail.

"But, how could he have known?" the *chacham* asked himself. "These were things that occurred within the privacy of an inner room!"

The *chacham* concluded that the man before whom he was now standing must truly be very, very holy. For, how else could he have known these things?

The *chacham* rose to kiss Rabbi Chaim's hand. As he lowered himself before him, he begged forgiveness.

He then went out amongst the people and proclaimed that a great tzaddik was amongst them. He related how he could personally testify as to his holiness. He said that one and all were obliged to honor him. He added that he had personally undertaken to follow whatever this tzaddik wanted of him.

The *chacham* announced a grand feast, to be held in Rabbi Chaim's honor. At that event, the *chacham* offered his sincerest apologies to the Community Rabbi, which the Rav accepted in the presence of all the attendees.

[The above story is testified to by Rabbi Aharon Chessin, author of "Mateh Aharon," who was the *Av Beit Din* in Mogador and personally witnessed this event.]



כָּל הַמְזַכֶּה אֶת הָרַבִּים אֵין חָטָא בָּא עַל יָדוֹ.
וְכָל הַמַּחְטִיא אֶת הָרַבִּים אֵין מְסַפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ
לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה. מִשֶּׁה זָכָה וְזָכָה אֶת הָרַבִּים
זְכוּת הָרַבִּים תְּלוּי בּוֹ שְׁנַאֲמַר (דְּבָרִים ל) צְדָקָת
ה' עָשָׂה וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל. יִרְבְּעַם חָטָא
וְהַחְטִיא אֶת הָרַבִּים חָטָא הָרַבִּים תְּלוּי בּוֹ
שְׁנַאֲמַר (מַלְכִים א טו) עַל חַטָּאוֹת יִרְבְּעַם (בְּן
נְבֻט) אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְאֲשֶׁר הֶחְטִיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל:
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יח

One who brings merit to the masses will not be the cause of sin, and one who causes the masses to sin will not be given the means to repent. Moshe merited and brought merit to the masses. The merit of the masses is considered to be his, as it says, “He performed the righteousness of God and His laws together with Israel.” Yeravam ben Nevat sinned and caused the masses to sin; therefore, the sin of the masses is considered his, as it says, “For the sins of Yeravam, which he committed and which he caused Israel to commit.”

The mishnah says that no sin will come to the hand of those who bring merit to the community. I would like to explain this in a relatively straightforward fashion.

The number of mitzvot one can do in one's lifetime is not unlimited, for lifetime itself is not unlimited. One is rewarded for the mitzvot he can do over the course of the seventy or eighty years on earth. No one is expected to do more than what is humanly possible, given the fact that one has neither unlimited time nor unlimited abilities.

Let us compare this to building a structure. When building a home, we hire several types of professionals. One knows how to lay the foundation. Another is skilled at constructing the walls. Another knows how to build a proper roof. Another will paint the walls. Each will labor at his own job, with the final result being a beautiful home.

It would be rare to find the individual who could do every one of these tasks, both in terms of the physical demands and in the multiple skills involved. Therefore, several people are hired and the “owner” rewards each according to his contribution.

Torah and mitzvot work the same way.

No one individual can possibly do every one of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot. Some are strictly for *kohanim*. Others only apply to females. Others, only to *levi'im*. Others only apply in the Land of Israel. Certain mitzvot can only be done as a community, etc.

What happens when one does something that brings merit to the many, specifically something that might lead to their doing an additional mitzvah? Let us presume that the group likely includes at least some *kohanim*, *levi'im*, females, males, and residents of Eretz Yisrael. Let us conclude as well that some member of this group might do a mitzvah of the type that applies only to their group, but not to others.

Given that presumption, it is not unreasonable to assume that the one who sparked their interest -- or ability -- to do this mitzvah is considered as having shared in its merit. It then turns out that the original catalyst has merited a mitzvah he could never have otherwise “performed!”

Following that logic, one could say as well that the *yetser hara* would be powerless in the face of so many mitzvot wrapped into a single soul! For, the *yetser* is set up to combat a “normal” person, not someone who might simultaneously be carrying the merit of both male and female, both Yisrael and Kohen, both individual and community! The *yetser* is only prepared to counter those who fit within the presumed boundaries of humankind, where, in fact one individual cannot simultaneously be Yisrael, Levi, and Kohen. Such a “creature” would certainly be beyond what the *yetser* could handle.

Accordingly, no sin could come from such a person. The *yetser* would find itself powerless.

The opposite is true as well. When someone *chas v'shalom*, sins or causes someone else to sin, complete *teshuva* will be -- as it says in our mishnah -- practically unattainable. The mishnah does not tell us the reason why *teshuva* will be unattainable. To my thinking, it is because the *teshuvah* process is geared towards erasing sins done directly by one's own self, by one's own hand. That which one leads some one else to do, however, is different.

When someone causes someone else to do something, whatever he does becomes traceable back to oneself. If that which was done by that third party happens to be a mitzvah happens to be a mitzvah, then all the better for the one who led him to it. If it happens to be a transgression, however, then it will be counted *against* he who led that third party into it. The resulting sin, then, is double: One strike against he who committed it and another strike against the one who drew him to it.

Teshuva can only address that which was within one's power, not that which has already escaped one's control.

This is one reason why one should be exceedingly careful to not draw others to transgression.

The mishnah continues by telling us that Moshe Rabbeinu brought merit both to himself and to others. I would say that his source of greatest merit was that it was he who ascended to receive the Torah and it was he who would defend his people from Hashem's anger, saving them from destruction. All of his very self was dedicated to these endeavors.

It was Moshe Rabbeinu who saw to it that the Torah would be taught to all the Jewish People. True, he was not the direct teacher of each and every Jew for each and every mitzvah in the Torah. However, his having made their learning possible meant that the merit of their study and observance is traceable back to him. It is as if he had, in fact, instructed each and every one of them. The merit of the many is his.

The Midrash Tanchuma says of Moshe Rabbeinu that his standing is equal to that of the entire Jewish People.

It is beyond comprehension just how great that merit must be.

One who causes the community to be meritorious, no sin will come by his hand. One who causes the community to sin, is not given the opportunity to repent.

I see a connection between this mishnah and the one preceding it. Since it is well-known that in every case of dissent between Hillel and Shamai, the actual *psak din* for the public was according to Hillel's ruling, it might be said that all the disciples of Shamai sinned, *chas v'shalom*, by acting in accordance with their own halachic rulings. How was it permissible for them to follow their own opinion, when the halachah was the opposite? The mishnah addresses this point indirectly. Since the dissent between Shamai and Hillel was *l'shem Shamayim*, the followers of Shamai did not sin. Their purpose in disagreeing with Hillel was always to bring out the pure truth of the Torah's words and thus to arrive at a halachic ruling that would bring merit to the community. That being so, no sin could come by their hand.

Regarding this, the Talmud relates that the disciples of Shamai argued with the disciples of Hillel for three years, each side claiming that the halachah was according to their reasoning. (עירובין יג, ב) Finally a *bat kol*, a voice issuing from Heaven, proclaimed, "Both these and these are the words of the Living G-d — and the halachah is according to the disciples of Hillel." But if both schools of thought were expressing the words of the Living G-d, then by what merit did Hillel's words, rather than Shamai's, emerge as the decisive halachah? It was due to their being genial and humble. Yet their words and the words of *beit* Shamai are both studied, and furthermore, the words of Shamai's followers precede those of *beit* Hillel. We learn from this Talmudic passage that since their disagreements were for the sake of Heaven, no mishap arose from them, and no hatred or jealousy ensued. What's more, those who chose to act according to *beit* Shamai's ruling did not act against the halachah, for although the halachah for the general public was decided in favor of *beit* Hillel, nevertheless the words of both were declared to be the words of the Living G-d, and this indicates that their dispute was for the sake of Heaven.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל המזכה את הרבים אין חטא בא על ידו

Rabbi Chaim Pinto's custom was to fast the whole week long, from the time Shabbat ended until the following Shabbat began. Erev Shabbat, the Rabbanit would always prepare for him a clear soup made from beef, accompanied by a second course with pieces of meat.

As was her custom, the Rabbanit entered the butcher shop one week to purchase the beef that would be prepared for the Rav's meal. Rather than give the Rabbanit her usual order of *basar chalak* (glatt), the butcher mistakenly sold her beef that was regular kosher.

Unwittingly, the Rabbanit brought the meat home and used it for the Rav's weekly soup, just as she did every other Erev Shabbat. Then, as usual she served it to him.

As the Rav sat down to enjoy the broth, he suddenly called out to the Rabbanit to take it away --- as quickly as possible. "It's full of worms!" He cried out.

Startled, the Rabbanit stared into the bowl.

"It's perfectly clear!" she told him, not understanding what he could have been referring to. "Perhaps he just didn't want the broth this week," she thought to herself. "Perhaps this was just his way of telling me to take it away from him."

She then moved on to the next course

No sooner had she placed the meat in front of him, that the Rav once again cried out: "What, you want me to eat forbidden food?"

"There are FIVE Torah prohibitions against eating insects!" said the Rav. "How could you place before me meat that's crawling with worms?"

With that, the Rav grabbed the pot, exited the door, and dumped out the soup and meat.

After having fasted the whole week, the Rav made do with nothing more than bread for the remainder of that meal.

It wasn't long before the Rabbanit marched off to the butcher shop, to find out whether something might have been out of the ordinary as regards to the meat. "Who was the *shochet*?" she asked. "Who soaked and salted it?"

The butcher answered every question, explaining that every step had been handled by G-d fearing people. "The only thing is that the meat was not *chalak*."

“One of the lungs had a possible lesion,” he explained. “The supervising Rav ruled that it was not the type of lesion that renders the animal not kosher. The meat was 100% kosher, he said.”

“Still, because the lungs were not entirely smooth, the meat was not *chalak* (glatt) -- only kosher.”

Now, the Rabbanit understood.

Her husband had seen through *ruach hakodesh* that there had been a question as to the meat. The Rabbis tell us that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* protects great *tzaddikim* from inadvertently eating that which is not kosher.

וכל המחטיא את הרבים אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה

The mishnah declares that whoever causes the many to sin will never achieve complete repentance. Yet, it seems that there are quite a few who have caused the many to sin, done *teshuvah*, and seemingly had that *teshuvah* accepted.

One example is Achav ben Amri.

It is known that Achav worshipped idols and caused the many to sin. Of him, it is said (Melachim I 16;31) . . . *and Achav did more to anger Hashem, G-d of Israel, than all the kings who preceded him.* He is one of three kings of Israel who has no share in the world to come, according to Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin (90a). Other sources in Rabbinic literature say, however, that he not only repented, but that his *teshuvah* was accepted.

Menashe, King of Israel, is another example. He placed an idol in the Temple courtyard, causing the many to sin, and thereby brought all sorts of punishment upon the Jewish people. *I shall make them a horror for all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Menashe ben Chizkiah, melech Yehudah, for what he did in Yerushalayim.* (Yermiyahu 15:4) Another verse says of him, (Melachim II 23:26) *Nevertheless, Hashem did not relent from His great flaring anger, for His anger had flared up against Yehudah because of all the provocations with which Menashe had angered Him.*

Like Achav, Menashe has no share in the world to come. This, according to Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 90a. Talmud Yerushalmi, however, says that not only did he repent, but that his repentance was accepted. That occurred despite the protestations of the *malachim*.

The Talmud Yerushalmi account is that Menashe prayed to Hashem, begging that he be allowed to repent. The *malachim* did what they could to prevent that

from happening. “How could You accept the *teshuvah* of one such as this?” said they. They referred, of course, to the magnitude of his sins.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* responded, “If I don’t accept his *teshuvah*, I will be locking the gates of repentance before all other penitents!”

What did the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* do? He tunneled a space under His holy throne.

From there, He listened to Menashe’s supplications.

We have now arrived at our question. Our mishnah says, seemingly as an absolute statement, that he who causes the many to sin will never achieve true repentance. Yet, it seems that Menashe and Achav -- at least according to the opinions brought above -- achieve repentance despite having enticed the many to sin. This seems to contradict the mishnah’s absolute, unqualified declaration.

Perhaps the answer may be found by saying that the mishnah was not speaking as broadly as we first thought. Perhaps it limits itself to situations like that of Yeroboam ben Navat, who is cited as the mishnah’s proof text. (This idea is my own.)

Achav and Menashe are different. For, Yeroboam -- unlike Achav and Menashe -- was motivated by wanting to anger Hashem. (This is how I view it.)

Yeroboam erected golden calves at the far edges of his northern kingdom, urging people to bring their offerings to that location rather than Yerushalayim’s Beit HaMikdash. He did this so that his subjects not witness Yehudah, his rival, sitting as king in the Temple courtyard while he himself would be left standing there. His fear was that the people might then view Yehudah as king and himself, Yeroboam, as no more than another commoner.

Because his intent was both to sin and cause others to do so, he is excluded from the World to Come. Nothing he could have done would have earned him the possibility of complete repentance.

Achav and Menashe, unlike Yeroboam, never intended to anger Hashem. They lived at a time when the temptation to worship idols was overpowering. This is illustrated by a certain gemara, in a story it tells about Rav Ashi.

One day, Rav Ashi taught something in the name of the three kings (Menashe, Yeroboam, and Achav). He referred to them as his colleagues. That night, Menashe appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream. “You consider yourself our colleague?” said Menashe in reproach. “If so, tell me what the halacha would be in the following situation”

Rav Ashi said, “I don’t know.”

Menashe told him the answer. He then challenged Rav Ashi again: “And yet you call yourself our ‘colleague’?”

Said Rav Ashi: “Let me ask you, you’re such a *chacham*! How could have worshipped idols?”

“Had you been alive when we were,” Menashe answered, “you would have been running right behind me, lifting the hem of your gown just to make sure you wouldn’t miss a step.” That’s how irresistible the impulse to idolatry was.

Achav, honored the Torah, according to Talmud Bavli. He ate only meat that had been properly slaughtered, says Rashi. His weakness was that he worshipped idols, the drive to do so having overpowered him. Achav was so much trusted as regards to kosher *shechitta*, that even Yehoshofat the tzaddik would meat from animals that Achav had personally slaughtered. This was because, as we said before, Achav was never suspected of violating anything other than idol worship.

It therefore seems that Achav was *kasher*. The drive to commit idolatry was so powerful that it seized hold of him, though, just as in the times of Menashe. Because of that, he forfeited his portion in the World to Come.

While it’s true that he lost his *olam haba*, he did manage to repent from the evil he had committed. As it was known that he never intended to sin merely for the sake of sinning, Hashem accepted his entreaties. The same could not be said for Yeroboam ben Navat, whose intent was to cause others to stray. His status therefore was therefore as a *choteh* and *machti et harabim*, one who both sins and drags others to sin. For those in that category, when it comes to reversing their judgment, no repentance they do will be sufficient.

I believe that the connection between our mishnah and that which precedes it has now become more apparent. Korach’s dispute with Moshe was not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of his own prestige. He led others to sin, encouraging them as well to argue with Moshe Rabbeinu. He would therefore never be able to attain Divine forgiveness.

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed him, before he would ever have the chance to attempt to compensate for the sins he had committed.



כָּל מִי שֵׁישׁ בְּיָדוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הִלְלוּ
 מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אַבִּינוּ. וְשְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים
 אַחֲרִים מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל בְּלַעַם הֶרְשַׁע. עַיִן טוֹבָה
 וְרוּחַ נְמוּכָה וְנַפֵּשׁ שְׂפֵלָה מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם
 אַבִּינוּ. עַיִן רָעָה וְרוּחַ גְּבוּהָה וְנַפֵּשׁ רַחֲבָה
 מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל בְּלַעַם הֶרְשַׁע. מֵה בֵּין תְּלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל
 אַבְרָהָם אַבִּינוּ לְתַלְמִידֵי שֶׁל בְּלַעַם הֶרְשַׁע.
 תְּלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אַבִּינוּ אוֹכְלִין בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה
 וְנוֹחֲלִין בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא שְׁנֵאמַר (מְשָׁלִי ח) לְהַנְחִיל
 אֶהְבִּי יֵשׁ וְאַצְרַתִּיהֶם אִמְלֵא. אֲבָל תְּלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל
 בְּלַעַם הֶרְשַׁע יוֹרְשִׁין גִּיהֶנֶם וַיּוֹרְדִין לְבָאָר שְׁחַת
 שְׁנֵאמַר (תְּהִלִּים נה) וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים תּוֹרִידִם
 לְבָאָר שְׁחַת אֲנָשֵׁי דָמִים וּמְרָמָה לֹא יַחֲצוּ
 יְמֵיהֶם וְאֲנִי אֶבְטַח בָּךְ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה', יט

One who has these three traits is among the students of Avraham Avinu, and one who has three other traits is among the students of Bilam the wicked. One with a good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul is among the students of Avraham Avinu. One with an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a covetous soul is among the students of Bilam the wicked. What is the difference between the students of Avraham Avinu and the students of Bilam the wicked? The students of Avraham eat in this world and inherit in the World to Come, as it says, "To cause those who love Me to inherit everlasting good, and I will fill their storehouses." But the students of Bilam

the wicked will inherit Gehinom and descend to the pit of destruction, as it says, “And You, God, lower them into the pit of destruction, men of bloodshed and deceit shall not live out half their days, and I will trust in You.”

The mishnah says that *ayin ra'ah* (evil eye), a haughty spirit, and a gross soul are the marks of being one of Bilaam's disciples. What is it about these traits, that they in particular are indicative of being a disciple of Bilaam the evil one?

I'd like to answer by first introducing you to the comments of Rabbi Maharam Galante to the verse, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, your places of dwelling, Yisrael*. Bilaam spoke these words as he gazed upon the places where Yisrael had encamped. Maharam Galante's interpretation is that Bilaam was remarking upon how the tents of Yisrael were set up to be on lower ground than that of the *Ohel Moed*. This was reminiscent of the talmud's ruling that the community synagogue should be built at the highest point in the vicinity. Massechet Shabbat goes as far as to say that any city whose residential flat roofs are higher than that of its Beit HaKenneset will ultimately be destroyed.

Bilaam, then, was remarking with amazement at the honor that Yisrael showed the *Ohel Moed*.

To the words of Maharam Galante, I would like to add a few thoughts of my own.

Let us consider what our Rabbis taught us, further on in Avoth, that Torah is acquired in forty-eight ways. The last is that, when repeating someone else's words of Torah, one should make certain to credit him by name. Doing so helps bring forth the geulah.

Why is giving credit to those who one has learned something from the very last of the forty-eight ways? Another question: Why is this way, in particular, tied to bringing geulah to the world? And, what is the connection between meriting to acquire Torah and being careful to properly cite the originator of a particular Torah thought?

I would propose that the Tanna of that mishnah wished to teach us that self-negation is an absolute pre-requisite to being able to acquire Torah. Those full of pride will never find success in their learning. Torah study demands that one subordinate oneself to both Torah and to the One who gave it to us. This is why

being careful to say things over in the name of the one who originally said them culminates the list of forty-eight ways.

Crediting someone else with a novel thought, rather than crediting oneself, demonstrates that one is not using Torah to feed one's own ego. Rather, it shows that he sees himself only as one who wishes to pass on the tradition of the great Rabbis who preceded him. A model for this is the Rabbi who said of himself, "I am neither a *chacham*, nor orator. All I am is one who repeats that which he heard in the yeshiva and presents it before his masters, his teachers."

The Beit HaMikdash was destroyed due to causeless hate, according to Massechet Yoma. This means, I believe, that everyone was full of self-importance and belief that they were better than all others. Contrast that with the ideal expressed in the mishnah regarding the ways of acquiring Torah, that it must be done through self-negation, not self-inflation.

Causeless love is the opposite of causeless hate. Just as causeless hate led to the temple's destruction, so would causeless love lead to its restoration. This is why the geulah is best advanced through negating oneself to the earlier generations of scholars. This is the underlying meaning of the idea that, when teaching Torah, one should be sure to credit those who preceded him.

I would tie the above concept to the famous midrash that says that Yisrael stood at Har Sinai in complete unity. In the words of the midrash, they were of one heart. They were therefore worthy of accepting the Torah at that point in time.

This fits in with what was said earlier about Bilaam, that he was so impressed by seeing the Ohel Moed placed in the highest spot. That not even one Jew set his own tent higher than that of the Ohel Moed showed their self-negation to Hashem and to His mikdash.

When someone builds their house in a way that is modest, simple, and unobtrusive ("in a low place"), this shows that the one who lives there is self-effacing. The opposite is true as well. Those who make sure that their home is prominent and showy (in a "high place") are demonstrating their view of themselves as self-important. I would go even further and say that this shows as well that they are even unwilling to subordinate themselves to Hashem.

When Bilaam gazed upon this sight, the self-negation of the Bnei Yisrael towards Hashem and His Ohel Moed was immediately apparent to him. His reaction was to cry out their praises, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob . . .* "

Bilaam admired what Bnei Yisrael had done, yet did not personally subordinate himself to the One above and to His Torah. Not only that, but he even wanted that the Bnei Yisrael be destroyed. He suggested to Balak how they could be enticed to sin, so as to thereby anger Hashem and cause His wrath to be brought upon them.

Why is it that Bilaam did not follow through and subordinate himself as well to Hashem and His mishkan? Hadn't he been terribly impressed by what Bnei Yisrael had done? The answer, I believe, lies with Bilaam's being obsessed with pursuit of honor and prestige. So filled with pride was he, that he lacked the capacity to lower himself.

The chumash quotes Balak as saying to Bilaam, *For I shall honor you greatly, and everything that you say to me, I shall do; so go now and curse this people for me.* To this, Bilaam replies, . . . *If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, my God, to do anything small or great.*

Although on the surface, these verses would seem to be saying that no amount of money could persuade Bilaam, the Rabbis understood that the Torah is actually telling us the opposite. Rashi comments that this verse demonstrates the extent of Bilaam's greed. Balak knew this, and was fully aware of his thirst for honor. That is why he initially offered, *For I shall honor you greatly.*

Bilaam simply could not subordinate himself to Hashem's will. No matter how great his admiration for Bnei Yisrael's self-negation, pride and avarice impeded his way; he could not emulate Bnei Yisrael.

There is another explanation, which is that the ultimate impediment was not his pridefulness and greed, but his "evil eye." The mishnah calls it, **עין רעה**. To me, this means that the natural course would have been that Bilaam's deep admiration would trump his haughtiness. In other words, he would have been so overwhelmed with what he saw, that he would have become a follower of Hashem.

Bilaam's problem, though, was that he did not really "see." Because of his **עין רעה**, that which his eye saw physically was never processed mentally.

Bamidbar 24:2 reads, *And Bilaam lifted his eyes and beheld Yisrael encamped according to its tribes.* I was wondering what the phrase, *And Bilaam lifted his eyes* adds to our understanding of what occurred. In its literal sense, it would mean that he physically lifted his eyes. But, why would that be necessary? He

was already standing on higher ground, as we know from the beginning of this incident. (*Balak took Bilaam to the summit of the height that overlooks the face of the wasteland.*) Wouldn't it seem that he should be *lowering* his eyes, rather than *raising* them, given his physical position relative to where they were?

Our Rabbis give various answers to this question. Rashi, for instance, says that his intent was to put the “evil eye” on them. Others, like Malbim, say that it was in order to get a fuller view of the entire encampment.

I have my own theory.

Perhaps the phrase is there to highlight precisely what was so terrible about Bilaam's character.

Think about what happened there. The sight of Bnei Yisrael subordinating themselves was so powerful that it made an indelible impression upon Bilaam's soul. Yet, he never acted upon it. In a sense, he had separated his heart from his mind. I would attribute this to his *ayin hara*.

What I mean is that his very “looking” was through a lens of arrogance and pride. He therefore remained a *rasha*, just as he was before.

His evil went even further. For, he “raised” with Balak the wicked plan as to how Bnei Yisrael could best be annihilated.

We now see that the worst aspect of Bilaam was his *ayin hara*.

It was this *ayin hara* that impeded his ability to translate that which was felt by his soul into something that would be sensed by his mind. Had it not been for this *ayin hara*, he would have acted upon that which his soul was so impressed by.

Bilaam himself was fully aware of this.

Among the things that the Kaddosh Baruch placed within his mouth was his saying about himself, *The words of Bilaam . . . the words of the man with the open eye*. This very phrase is repeated once again later on in the same chapter.

Why the man with the open eye?

Perhaps it is to tell us that prior to this moment, his eye had been closed. In other words, his “eye” was closed to “seeing” the truth. And, because his eye did not “wish” to “see,” this closed eye overcame the wonder felt by his soul. It hardened his heart; and he did not do teshuva.

This phenomenon was not limited to Bilaam. It existed during the period of Amoraim as well. For, during that time there were certain gentiles who witnessed

kavod hatorah, yet failed to proceed to the logical conclusion of converting to become full-fledged Jews. In the gemara's description, Rav Ashi said that the non-Jewish residents of Mata Mechasya are fierce-hearted people, for they see the beauty of Torah twice yearly, yet none ever converted to Judaism. Rashi explains that this refers to their witnessing Rav Ashi teaching Torah to multitudes of Jews. For this, they are called **אבירי לב**.

We can now better understand the Mishnah, when it says that whoever has the characteristics mentioned there is considered as a student of Bilaam the *rasha*. As you recall, there is a mishnah in the next chapter, which says that remembering to credit those whose Torah you bring is the last of the forty-eight ways of acquiring Torah. As I learned it, this would mean that *failing* to do so renders acquisition of Torah near-impossible.

This failure to give credit to others stems from haughtiness and pridefulness. Our mishnah calls this, *ayin ra'ah*. Such a person cannot possibly subordinate himself to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and to His Torah.

**כל מי שיש ביזו שלשה דברים הללו מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו
ושלשה דברים אחרים מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע**

The mishnah lists a series of traits and says that adherence to each and its opposite identifies one as either a disciple of Avraham Avinu or of Bilaam the evil one. I wonder why these two in particular are seen as opposite ends of the scale. Instead of comparing Bilaam to Avraham Avinu, why didn't the mishnah instead compare him to Moshe Rabbeinu?

The Moshe comparison seems more apt to me. For, wasn't it Moshe, not Avraham who was Bilaam's contemporary? And it's not as if Moshe was lacking any of the traits that the mishnah ascribes to Avraham.

For instance, one of the traits listed was that of generosity, **עין טובה**. Recall how Moshe Rabbeinu reacted upon having learned that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the encampment. Joshua told Moshe, "*Throw them in jail!*" Moshe's response, however, was: *Are you being zealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets!*

Moshe exhibited the trait of **רוח נמוכה**, a *meek spirit*, as well, for example when he declined Hashem's request that he be His agent in redeeming Yisrael from Mitzrai'im. *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrai'im?*

We know that Moshe exhibited **נפש שפלה**, a *humble soul*, as well. An example would be what occurred during the incident with Korach, where rather than argue with him, he merely tried to achieve co-existence.

Now that we've shown that Moshe, just like Avraham, possessed all the three traits listed in our Mishnah and was Bilaam's contemporary as well, we can now answer the question as to why Avraham rather than Moshe was chosen to be the Bilaam's opposite paradigm.

The answer, I believe, is that the teacher of our Mishnah wished to convey to us that even without having accepted the Torah, Clal Yisrael would have still been distinct from the nations. This would be true both in terms of how they present ourselves and their inherent character. One would have thought, of course, that this would not have been the case. One would have thought that their refined character comes from the Torah rather than its being a natural inheritance.

My view is that the Torah was given to Yisrael because it was they, and not the nations, who already possessed the traits spoken of in our mishnah. It was theirs as a natural inheritance from the holy *avoth*, who were the first *yehudim*. The *avoth* understood that in order for their descendents to merit the receiving of Torah, it was essential that the *avoth* pass down to them refinement of character. Yisrael would then, in turn, be able to sanctify Hashem's Name through refined behavior.

Bnei Yisrael, holy of nature, descendents of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov maintained this precious heritage. Consistently, they conducted themselves according to the standards set by their ancestors. Because of that, they ultimately merited to receive the Torah. This is line with the commonly invoked aphorism, *Derech Eretz preceded Torah*. Those who possess *Derech Eretz* are worthy of receiving the Torah -- and through them alone will it be sustained.

Bilaam is proof for the above, which is why the mishnah uses him as its example. He lived during the time when the Torah was given, but refused to go the wilderness to accept the Torah's yoke or subordinate his ego. At the moment of *matan Torah*, when the world was struck silent, the nations of the world asked Bilaam what the event signified. His answer was *Hashem will grant the world strength, Hashem will bless them with peace*.

To me, the above indicates that neither the nations nor Bilaam were ready or worthy of receiving the Torah. The reason, I believe, is that their ancestors -- unlike our own -- did not pass down to them excellence of character.

When the Nations heard that the Torah prohibited theft and sexual promiscuity, they were not interested in it. The reason, I would say, is that the Nations are inherently unrefined and poor of character. Bilaam personified this, to the extent that he even had relations with his donkey.

We now have a clearer understanding of the midrash that says that at the time that Yisrael accepted the Torah, the nations became jealous: “What did you see in them that you didn’t see in us?” they demanded. Hashem silenced them: “Bring me your Records of Ancestry, . . . just as My children have done.”

The midrash just quoted fits right in with what we have been saying all along. *Clal Yisrael’s* being descended from Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov is what make them alone well-suited for engagement in Torah. For, it is the Avoth who passed down to them the essential quality of character.

The gemara (Yebamoth 89a) tells us that three characteristics distinguish the Jew: their being merciful, unassuming, and full of kindness. These traits they received from our forefather Avraham.

We now understand why the Tanna of our mishnah did not stand Moshe in apposition to Bilaam the evil one. For, one might have thought to say that the reason Moshe possessed all these fine traits was simply due to his being a recipient of Torah. One would then be led to believe that the reason Bilaam lacked these traits was because he, unlike Moshe, was without Torah.

Therefore Avraham, not Moshe, was offered as Bilaam’s opposite paradigm. For Avraham was the embodiment of the refined characteristics of the Jew, without having received the Torah. Avraham had goodness in his essence; he had it inherently.

The verse in Micha says, . . . *kindness to Avraham*. The same can not be said for Bilaam. Although he was a prophet, one to whom Hashem spoke, he did not wish to accept the yoke of Torah. For his soul was lowly and despicable, unworthy of the gravity of Torah and its *mitzvot*.

כל מי שיש בידו שלשה דברים הללו מתלמידו של אברהם אבינו

Our mishnah tells us that whoever has one certain set of qualities may be considered a “student of Avraham Avinu,” while he who has a certain set of other qualities may be considered a “student of Bilam the *rasha*.” The previous mishnah contrasts those who bring merit to the public with those who lead them to sin.

The two mishnayoth are connected, I believe.

Bilaam was a *rasha* for many reasons. Among them was his pattern of trying to lead not only Yisrael to sin, but others as well. (See Sanhedrin 106a).

The Nations of the World came to him at the time of the Giving of the Torah, asking “What are those *kolot*?” Bilaam could have suggested that they join Israel in accepting the Torah. He said instead that G-d was giving the Torah to His nation and told the Nations not to bother attending, for the Torah’s content was not particularly relevant to them, given that they were exempt from its mitzvoth, For this, Bilaam has no portion in the Next World.

Avraham Avinu was different. Not only did he study Torah and live its lifestyle in private, but he sought to bring merit to the masses. He spread the Word of Hashem, helping those who wished to convert to do so.



יְהוּדָה בֶּן תֵּימָא אָמַר הוּי עַז כְּנִמְר וְקַל
 כְּנִשְׂר וְרַץ כְּצִבִי וְגִבּוֹר כְּאַרִי לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אָבִיךָ
 שְׁבִשְׂמִים. הוּא הִיא אָמַר עַז פָּנִים לְגִיהֶנֶם
 וּבִשְׂת פָּנִים לְגֵן עֵדֶן. יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 שְׁתַּבְּנָה עִירְךָ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְתֵן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרַתְךָ:
 מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ה, כ

Yehudah ben Teima says: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven. He used to say: The brazen go to Gehinom and the shamefaced go to Gan Eden. May it be Your will, Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, that You rebuild Your Holy Temple speedily in our days and grant us our share in Your Torah.

This mishnah seems to contain several elements. Yehudah ben Teima says to bold as a leopard, etc . . . to do the will of your father in heaven. He then says that the brazen are headed to *geheinom*, while the bashful are destined to Gan Eden. The final element is a prayer that the Holy Temple be rebuilt speedily and that we be granted a portion in Torah.

I would assume that these various elements have something in common other than their all being said by the same teacher.

My questions are: Why the prayer? What does it have to do with the preceding parts of the mishnah? Also, what is it about the brazen that they are destined for *geheinom*?

Let us try to put this into context.

Recall the gemara in Eiruvim that says that were it not for the Torah's having been given, we could have still learned modesty from the cat, [the evil of] theft from the ant, and [the importance of being careful regarding] prohibited relations from the dove. The gemara is telling us that certain aspects of morality and character could have been learned from *chayot, sheratzim*, and birds.

Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima is applying a similar principle. He is saying that positive lessons as regards to serving Hashem and as regards to personal conduct could be learned even from wild predators.

From the boldness of the leopard one could learn to not be embarrassed in the face of those who ridicule serving Hashem. Rather, one should do whatever is required, no matter what others think. This idea is noted right at the beginning of Shulkhan Arukh.

One might think, “Brazenness is a good thing, no matter what the context! Maybe I will embolden myself even in front of those greater than myself and in front our Rabbis!” Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima therefore adds that *the brazen ones are destined for geheinom*.

The traits are only desirable when directed towards serving Hashem. In other situations, particularly when dealing with one’s parents and Rabbis, one must go in the opposite direction, of humility and subordination.

We can now understand why this mishnah follows the one that describes the terrible qualities exhibited by Bilaam. For, Bilaam demonstrated brazenness in inappropriate situations. Specifically, he was boldly defiant to Hashem. He was unashamed to suggest that Balak’s emissaries turn over to him vast quantities of gold and silver.

Whoever pursues the path taken by Bilaam, being bold as a leopard in the wrong context, is akin to the leopard. He is like one who lacks the sense to make proper choices. He is modeling himself after a creature that has neither reward nor punishment. He is showing that he cannot distinguish between the situations when boldness is a mitzvah, versus those where it is a sin. He is a disciple of Bilaam. And, as a disciple of Bilaam, his fate will be to descend to the depths of *geheinom*.

Yehudah ben Teima lived during the period of the second temple’s destruction. It was a time when the idolatrous Roman kingdom had already spread its empire to Eretz Yisrael. This was a time of wantonness, a time when true faith and good character was non-existent amongst these conquerors. The midrash tells us that it was more than a matter of the Romans’ not submitting to Hashem, but of actively rejecting and mocking Him. This is known as being brazen towards Him Above.

It wasn’t enough that the Romans would conduct themselves in this way, but they even wanted that the Jews adopt their mockery of the Creator, the Torah, and the Mitzvoth. They advocated a life of total abandon.

Recall that the mishnah quotes Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima as praying that Yerushalayim be rebuilt. But, note that he doesn’t refer to it by name. Rather, he just says עירך, “your city.”

Allow me to suggest that he does this because עירך refers not only to Yerushalayim, but also to man, as it does in Koheleth 9:14. There, the verse says עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט. The plain meaning of this verse is *There was a little city, with few men in it*. The gemara, in Massechet Nedarim quotes a midrashic interpretation that understands the verse as allegory, with עיר קטנה symbolically meaning “man” and מעט ואנשים בה meaning man’s limbs.

Perhaps the intent is as follows: According to some interpretations, the third temple will be built not by man, but by Hashem. I believe that Tehillim supports this idea as well. Daily, we pray that Hashem rebuild the Temple quickly in our days.

Man cannot “build” a human body. Rather, it can only be done by Hashem. Kiddushin 30b tells us that were it not for the Kaddosh Baruch Hu’s help, man would be unable.

Just as we are obliged to pray daily for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, so should we pray for the building up of our bodies, meaning that we not be overpowered by the *yetser hara*. This battle could not be won through any method other than prayer. Sefer Tehillim stresses this theme quite often. I see it as well in Berachot 17a, where it says that Rav Sheshet, after having fasted, would remark that in earlier times, there was a Beit HaMikdash where the “blood and fat” offered as korbanot would help gain atonement. With the loss of the Temple and korbanot not presently being a possibility, he would pray that the “blood and fat” he had lost through strenuous prayer and fasting count as a substitute, for this was all we had left.

When calling for the building of “your city,” Rabbi Yehudah ben Teima’s intent in our mishnah is a prayer both for the rebuilding of the Temple and for the rebuilding of one’s own self. Both require entreaty. We pray that the arrogance of Rome be expelled from Yerushalayim. And we pray that our own arrogance be expelled from our own selves.

Only then, will we truly have a portion in His holy Torah.



הוא הִיה אומֵר בֶּן חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא בֶּן
 עֶשֶׂר לְמִשְׁנָה בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְמִצְוֹת בֶּן חֲמִשׁ
 עֶשְׂרֵה לְתַלְמוּד בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה לְחַפָּה בֶּן
 עֶשְׂרִים לְרְדוּף בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לְכַח בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים
 לְבִינָה בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים לְעֵצָה בֶּן שְׁשִׁים לְזִקְנָה בֶּן
 שְׁבַעִים לְשִׁיבָה בֶּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגְבוּרָה בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים
 לְשׁוֹחַ בֶּן מֵאָה כָּאֵלוּ מֵת וְעֵבֶר וּבִטֵּל מִן הָעוֹלָם:
 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה, כא

He used to say: A five-year-old begins Scripture, a ten-year-old begins Mishnah, a thirteen-year-old becomes obligated in mitzvos, a fifteen-year-old begins Talmud, an eighteen-year-old enters the wedding canopy, a twenty-year-old begins pursuit, a thirty-year-old achieves strength, a forty-year-old achieves understanding, a fifty-year-old achieves counsel, a sixty-year-old reaches old age, a seventy-year-old attains extreme old age, an eighty-year-old attains might, a ninety-year-old begins to stoop, a one-hundred-year-old is as if he is dead and gone from the world.

The mishnah says that five is the age to begin studying *tanach*, ten the age to start Mishnah, etc. Let's examine this in light of something that was said by our Rabbis in Massechet Shabbat and with what Rashi says in Massechet Berachot.

Shabbat 63a says that when it comes to Torah curriculum, a person should first focus on broad knowledge and only afterwards on the underlying reasoning. Rashi to Berachot comments that one should concentrate silently on what is being taught, to the point where he can recite it with ease. This despite the fact that he might not yet understand it very well. Once it's familiar, though, he can then begin the process of delving more deeply, asking questions, and

proposing solutions. He should continue this way until he is satisfied that he actually “knows” the material and feels that he truly understands it.

The common denominator between these two sources is that they both advocate that those who have not yet acquired broad knowledge in Torah should keep moving, rather than stubbornly refuse to proceed until they fully understand whatever they are currently working on. Once they have that broad knowledge, though, it is absolutely correct for them to delve more and more deeply.

I would now like to show how this relates to our mishnah. By introduction, let’s talk about what happens when children begin their formal schooling in Torah texts.

Their traditional starting point is Sefer Vayikra. This custom seems to have been well established from very early times, as it already appears in Midrash Tanhuma. This is what it says:

Why do we begin children’s instruction with Sefer Vayikra? It is because all the laws of ritual sacrifice appear there and because they (the children) are themselves pure, never having tasted sin. Hashem therefore said that they should begin with study of the sacrificial order. Let those who are pure involve themselves with the pure. From my perspective, it will almost be as if they were offering actual *korbanot*.

Now that we have seen the reason given by Midrash Tanhuma, I’d like to offer a reason of my own.

The word “Vayikra” has within its root “keriya,” which means (among other things) “reading.” I’d like to take this further and suggest that this includes reading without understanding. Talmud Berachot speaks of one who “reads” for the sake of correcting a text. That is, he is proofreading a scroll so as to make certain that the words were written correctly. They call it **קורא להגיה**. The issue at hand is whether this type of “reading” fulfills the minimal mitzvah requirement of “reading” Sh’mah.

Rashi says that, although it is technically called “keriya,” it does not qualify as “keriya.” In other words, because the intent was to check for technical accuracy, this does not constitute actual “keriya” -- at least as far as the mitzvah is concerned.

I would point out that, nevertheless, it is still called **קורא להגיה**.

Sefer Vayikra particularly lends itself to showing children that proper study includes reading without fully comprehension. One need not deeply understand each and every thing that one learns. Rather, one should acknowledge the initial need for superficial familiarity until he gets the opportunity, later in life, to study talmud and its commentaries. These will expose him to the deeper meaning of Vayikra's verses.

The talmud says, in Sukkah 42a, that once a child knows how to speak, his father should teach him Torah and Keriat Shema. "And what, specifically, is meant by 'Torah' in this case?" asks the talmud. **תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת** - *The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov* (Devarim 33:4) came the answer.

I am puzzled by the gemara's question, "What is meant by 'Torah' [here]." Is there more than one Torah, that such a question should even be necessary? Even assuming that there is no confusion about the first point and that the gemara's real question is which *part* of Torah should one begin with, I could still inquire as to why, amongst all other verses in the Torah, this one in particular was chosen.

One more question: Hadn't we learned earlier that the beginning point was to be Sefer Vayikra? Why, then, begin with . . . **תורה צוה לנו משה**, which is found in a different sefer?

Many answers could be given to the questions I asked, but I'd like to go with the approach explicated earlier on in this essay. Specifically, of course, I refer to my suggestion as to how important it is to impress upon children that all that they learn need not be immediately comprehended at its deepest level. As I said before, it is preferable that they first study as much material as possible. The advanced learning will come later on in life.

As I see it, the verse quoted here by our Rabbis, **תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת**, **יעקב**, points to this very idea. It is saying that we must view Torah as our inheritance from Sinai. Accordingly, even though we don't comprehend its meaning the first time we encounter it, we nevertheless are obligated to study and to toil over it. For it will remain ours, to delve into once again, after we have made our first pass.

Our mishnah continues *Ten, for the study of Mishnah. Thirteen, for the obligation to observe the mitzvot. Fifteen, for the study of Talmud. Eighteen, for marriage.* One could say that it is not merely telling us the suggested time

for each of these endeavors, but is saying that proper observance of one leads to the next. What I mean is that beginning one's studies in the correct fashion will lead to proper acceptance of the burden of mitzvot at the right time, which will lead to marriage at the right time, etc.

This can be connected to what we learned before.

What if one were delay all these things until such time as one "understands" what they're truly about? And what if that "understanding" were never reached? He would wind up never accepting the discipline of mitzvot upon himself and never getting married! He would die never having fulfilled the mitzvah of having children!

And this is why we teach children from the outset that understanding the reasoning behind things is not an essential pre-requisite. This is what is called viewing Torah as an inheritance and as *keriya*. Whether or not we grasp their underlying rationale, we are responsible for fulfilling mitzvot. The path to success is to be patient and realize that one will have the opportunity to grasp things more deeply in good time. In the meanwhile, one must do the mitzvot and develop broad familiarity with Torah sources.

To my eyes, this is evident in the interchange of "What is meant by Torah?" and "תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב." Obviously, the fact that this verse was singled out by our Rabbis means that it is foundational. As I said before, my opinion is that its significance is that it reminds us to fulfill Torah and study it whether or not we comprehend their rationale.

The midrash tells us that the Kaddosh Baruch Hu concealed the reasons for certain mitzvot. As I read it, this was because we are supposed to fulfill the mitzvot whether or not we understand them.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

בן שמונה עשרה לחופה

The mishnah tells us "eighteen years old to the chuppa." A story is told about a young man from the Algerian community who had passed his twentieth birthday and not yet found a bride. He went to Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto zt"l, seeking his help.

The Rav paused to think for awhile. He then told the young man that his "mazal" was had not yet "entered the world." The woman predestined for him

to marry would be born the very next day. Twenty years from now, she would become his bride.

The predication was greeted with a bit of laughter. But, the young man nevertheless took them seriously and kept them in mind.

Year after year passed. The young fellow entered the world of business. After twenty years, he had not yet found a wife and departed on a business trip to Mexico. There, he finally found the woman he was looking for and married her.

Upon glancing at her identity card, he discovered that, sure enough, she had been born twenty years previous, on the very day following his conversation with Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto.



בֶּן בַּג בַּג אוֹמֵר הִפְדָּ בָּהּ וְהִפְדָּ בָּהּ דְּכֻלָּא
 בָּהּ. וּבָהּ תִּחְזִי וְסִיב וּבִלְהָ בָּהּ וּמְנָה לָא תִזְוַע
 שְׂאִין לָךְ מְדָה טוֹבָה הַיְמָנָה;
 מִשְׁנָה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פִּרְקָא הַ מִּשְׁנָה כֹּב

*Ben Bag Bag says: Turn it over and turn it over,
 for everything is in it. Look deeply into it, and
 grow old with it, and spend time over it, and
 do not stir from it, because there is no greater
 portion.*

Ben Bag's Bag's wording is **בה והפוך בה**. Were one to drop the connecting *vav* and add the initial letters of each word, they add up to fourteen. Add one for the "shem hakollel," the unified phrase, and the result is fifteen. This gematria is identical to that of **גאווה**, which is the Hebrew word for pride.

I would like to say that perhaps Ben Bag Bag chose this formulation so as to reinforce in our minds that one is not permitted to learn Torah **בה** כדי להתגאות, for the sake of self aggrandizement. Although the wording there is different, the idea is consistent with Avoth 4:5, **רבי צדוק אומר אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהם**, *Rabbi Tzadok says, "Don't make them into a crown, to make yourself 'bigger' through it.* And, **ודישתמש בתגא חלף הא למדת כל הנהנה מדברי תורה נוטל**, *So would Hillel say: one who make personal use of the crown of Torah shall perish.*

Another statement by our Rabbis is relevant here: **שלא יאמר אדם שיקראוני : אקרא**, **חכם**, *One should not say, "I will study so that I will become known as a chacham, I will learn in order that I will be called "Rabbi."* (Nedarim 62a). This is generally understood to mean that one should learn Torah for its own sake and not to receive monetary reward or honor. I would add that it teaches as well that the Torah is Hashem's and that the **גאווה** is His as well. **יקוק מלך גאות לבש לבש**, *Hashem has reigned; grandeur has He donned* (Tehillim 93:1).

Ben Bag Bag's **בה והפוך בה** then, according to my reading, is telling us a path to guard against conceit. And that would be, to negate oneself before

Hashem and His Torah. With the *shem hakollel*, **בה הפוך** is numerically equal to **אלוף**, which means “supreme.” That is to say that one should subjugate oneself before the **אלוף** of the world, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*.

And how does one accomplish this? By reviewing one’s learning on a constant basis, which is **בה הפוך בה והפוך בה**. Doing so demonstrates true subordination to Torah. He has already “learned” this page not once, not twice, but multiple times. Yet, he goes back over it again and again -- and does not weary. This is what saves one from the grips of false pride.



בֶּן הֵי הֵי הָא אֹמֵר לְפֹם צְעָרָא אֲנָרָא:
משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה משנה כג

Ben Hei Hei says: The reward is in proportion to the effort.

Rather than explain this mishnah according to its plain meaning, I would like to do so by way of *remez*, allusion. The mishnah's words are: "Ben Hei Hei says, 'The reward is in proportion to the effort.'" That's the plain meaning. But, by way of *remez*, I would read it to be telling us something about *achdut*, the character trait of showing solidarity with others.

The gematria of **בֶּן הֵי הֵי** is twelve (if one counts just the proper name, excluding the "son of" part). Twelve, of course, alludes to the twelve sons of Yaakov, the twelve tribes of Yisrael.

What's the connection, though, to our mishnah?

People come in all kinds of varieties. And it's not all that easy getting along with each and every type. I would say that we could even characterize this as a **צְעָרָא**, a very great one at that.

The extent that one is **מַצְטַעֵר** over these divisions (*shevatim*, in a sense) and tries to look past them in order to promote peace is the extent to which he receives he receives reward. This is because the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* Himself is characterized by *Shalom*. **יֵשָׁא יְקוֹק פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וְיִשָּׂם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם**, *May the Lord raise His countenance towards you and grant you shalom*. (Bamidbar 6:26).

I see yet another *remez* in this mishnah, which is that its teacher is showing us a way of strengthening our ability to deter the *yetser hara*.

Once again, the gematria of **בֶּן הֵי הֵי** is twelve (counting just the proper name and excluding the "son of" part). The name **הֵי הֵי** is six times two. The "six" recalls the day man was created, which was on the sixth day. His sin was on the sixth day as well. And the sin is what caused him to have the *yetser hara* brought upon himself. And the *yetser hara* is what has entices man to sin from that point forward.

The Tanna is saying, "Behold, you are a Human Being, an *Adam*! No sooner had you been created, that you already came to sin! And thereby brought the *yetser hara* upon yourself."

“Now, the *yetser* is something you fear.”

“Don’t forget, therefore, that you are also a *ben*. The *ben*, that is, of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. This we see in the verse, **בנים אתם ליקוק אלהיכם**, *Banim you are, of the Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. (Devarim 14:1). The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* will be there for you, to help you overcome the *yetser*.

Kiddushin 30b tells us that daily, the *yetser* attacks, seeking to “kill” us. . . . Were it not for the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*’s help, we would be unable to withstand its assault.

בן הוא אומר לפום צערא אגרא.

Ben Hei Hei said that reward is in proportion to the the effort. I would like to apply that thought to some observations I had regarding the holiday of *Shemini Atzeteret*.

Shemini Atzeteret is also the day we celebrate *Simchat Torah*. The gemara characterizes it as a *regel b’fnei atzmo*, an independent holiday -- independent, that is, of Sukkot.

I wonder, though: if it is truly “independent” of Sukkot, why is it called “Shemini”? “. . . on the eighth day, it will be a day of assembly” says the Torah (Vayikra 23:36). It certainly does seem that it is the eighth, in relation to the previous seven (days). If so, why is also called “independent”?

The same verse that calls it “eighth” also calls it as well “an *atzereth*.”

What does “*atzereth*” mean? Our Rabbis explain it through a parable: I “stopped” you (*atzarti*) here, like a king who invited his children to a meal lasting a certain number of days. When it came time from them to part, he said “My children, I have a request. Stay, please, one more day. Your leaving me is so hard!”

Sukkot is not the only seven-day holiday; Pesach is as well. Why, then, does the “King” not say the same thing at the end of Pesach?

Perhaps the difference lies in that Elul and Tishrei are months filled with *teshuvah*, mitzvot, and good deeds. Our custom (that of the Sefaradim) is to arise early each day of those months for special prayers (*selihot*). We blow *shofar* from the first day of Elul. Forty days later, it is the tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur, and we spend the entire day in prayer. Then, we build our sukkah and dwell there for seven days. We take the four *minim*.

It turns out that we have spent close to two entire months busy with mitzvot and good deeds. Perhaps it might enter one's mind that "Enough is enough! all these mitzvot are such a bother already - a *tza'ar*!"

This is why Hashem tells them, immediately after Sukkot: "Stay with Me just one more day. Make a little meal for Me. Celebrate *Chag Ha'Atzeret* for Me."

I would suggest that *atzereth* here is reminiscent of the word *tza'ar*. The *atzereth* is their reward for the *tza'ar* they willingly "endured" from Rosh Chodesh Elul through the final day of Sukkot. This is why Hashem says that His now having to separate from the Yehudim is so trying for Him.

The intense and sustained Divine service through Israel's fulfilling His mitzvot not only draws the people closer to Hashem, but He to them. "I have become so close to you now," He says, "that the prospect of separation has become so, so distressing."

This reminds me of a Rambam that describes two different traditions regarding the public Torah reading. The Eretz Yisrael custom was to complete it once in three years. The Babylonian custom was that there would be a one-year cycle, with each year's cycle ending and beginning on Shemini Atzereth. All traditional communities I know of follow the yearly cycle today.

Regarding the Babylonian custom, why was Shemini Atzereth in particular chosen as the anniversary date for the new cycle? Regarding the Eretz Yisrael cycle, why is it that this ancient custom has all but disappeared?

I would suggest that the answer to my questions lies in what I suggested earlier. Because the B'nei Yisrael were *mitzta'er* themselves with mitzvot for a prolonged period, beginning with Rosh Chodesh Elul, Hashem said to them, "Behold, I will reward you in proportion to your *tza'ar*!"

This is just as our mishnah tells us, **לפום צערא אגרא**-- in proportion to the *tza'ar*, so goes the reward. On the day of *Atzereth*, you shall complete the Torah cycle and make of it a day of great joy!

The B'nei Yisrael rejoiced with the Torah throughout the generations on *Shemini Atzereth* to such a great extent, that an entirely new name was added: *Simchat Torah*. Although celebratory dancing is generally not permitted on *Yamim Tovim*, doing so in honor of the Torah on *Simchat Torah* is an exception.

The allowance for *Simchat Torah* dancing is not a mere granting of permission, but full-scale encouragement. The Mishnah Berurah urges us to dance with complete enthusiasm, in the model of how the Holy Ari z"l would

say that his own greatest spiritual heights were during *simcha shel mitzvah*. It is said that the Vilna Gaon would dance before the Torah with all his might on Simchat Torah.

This *simcha* was given us by Hashem, as reward for the *tza'ar* we “endured” from Rosh Chodesh Elul onwards, as I have said. And, as I have said as well, the Yom Tov’s name (*Atzereth*) commemorates that *tza'ar*.

Only through *yissurin* does man merit Torah. The more that one is *mitzta'er* for the sake of Torah and Mitzvoth, the more will be the reward. Ultimately, after all the *tza'ar* and deprivation, there will be a time of great *simcha*.

Perhaps we have discovered the reason why the three-year Torah-reading cycle is no longer practiced. Perhaps the reason is so that every year, the time of *Atzereth* and time of *Simcha* will overlap. More specifically, it is in order that the time of *Atzereth* will culminate with the time of *Simcha* and so that Yisrael will be immediately rewarded for the *tza'ar*. As we know, there is no *simcha* greater than that of Simchat Torah.

This is why the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* says “The separation is so trying” specifically in Tishrei. For, it is on the heels of close to two months of being *mitzta'er* over mitzvoth. Only at that point will they be worthy of reward. This is in accordance with what Ben Hei Hei says: “Reward is in proportion to the *tza'ar*.”

The month of Nissan, although filled with mitzvoth (just as Tishrei), does not involve the same degree of *tza'ar*. Quite the opposite: On Pesach, one is to look at oneself as a “*Ben Chorin*” -- a “free man.” Yes, much, much effort goes in to Pesach preparations. Every nook and cranny is meticulously checked to assure that not even small crumbs are present. The house is thoroughly scrubbed clean like at no other time of year. However, the holiday itself involves no *tza'ar*.

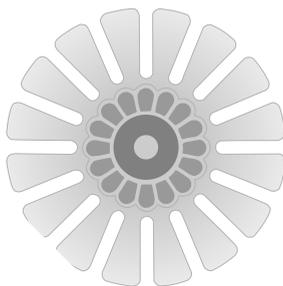
Once all the work is done, the householder sits at his table Pesach night a free man, a *ben chorin*. On Sukkot, however, this is not the case: We are forced from our comfortable permanent dwellings out to the modest, relatively-exposed *sukkah*. One is, in a certain sense, a wanderer rather than free man. The Pesach-like, *ben chorin* freedom is not felt until Shemini Atzereth.

We now know why *Atzereth* is called Shemini, despite its being an independent holiday, with no apparent connection to Sukkot. (One neither sits in the Sukkah nor shakes the *dalet minim*.) It is called *Shemini* because *shemini* means “eighth”

and eight is the number just beyond seven. In seven days, was the world created; these are the Seven Days of Creation, the time of forming the natural world. The eighth day, *shemini*, is beyond nature, for it is just beyond seven.

The “beyond *teva*” elevation comes to the Jews through the merit of the *tza’ar* they “endured” for the sake of so many mitzvot. It is only in this sense that this holiday is a *shemini*. As a holiday, though, it is entirely independent.

We understand as well now why Sukkot is limited to seven days. It does not have the characteristic just described regarding *Shemini Atzereth*. However, it does have a holy eighth day, in the sense that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* rewards Yisrael for the *tza’ar* they “endured” from Rosh Chodesh Elul onwards.



Chapter Six

המאיר אומר **בי**

כל העוסק **בתורה**

לשמה זוכה

לדברים הרבה ולא עוד

אלא שכל

העולם

כלו

כדאי הוא לו

נקרא רע **אהוב**

אוהב את המקום

אוהב את הבריות

משמרו את

המקום

משמרו את

הבריות

ומלבשתו ענוה ויראה

ומכשרתו להיות

צדיק חסיד

ישר ונאמן

ומרחקתו

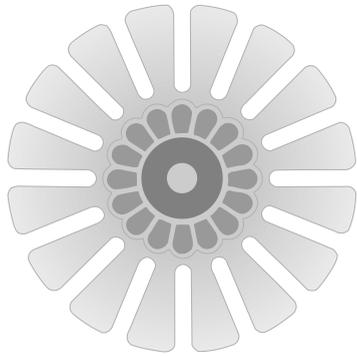
מן החטא

ומקרבתו

לידי זכות ונהנין ממנו

עצה ותושיה

בינה וגבורה



שְׁנו חֲכָמִים בְּלִשׁוֹן הַמִּשְׁנָה בְּרוּךְ שֶׁבָחָר בָּהֶם
וּבְמִשְׁנָתָם:

רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה לְשִׁמָּה
זוֹכֶה לְדַבְרִים הַרְבֵּה. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם
כְּלוּ כְּדָאֵי הוּא לוֹ. נִקְרָא רַע אֶהוּב אוֹהֵב אֶת
הַמָּקוֹם אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת מְשַׁמַּח אֶת הַמָּקוֹם
מְשַׁמַּח אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְלַבֵּשֵׁתוֹ עֲנִיָּה וְיִרְאָה
וּמְכַשְׂרֵתוֹ לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק חָסִיד יֵשֵׁר וְנֶאֱמָן
וּמְרַחֲקֵתוֹ מִן הַחֲטָא וּמְקַרְבֵּתוֹ לִיְדֵי זְכוּת וְנֶהְיֶין
מִמֶּנּוּ עֲצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה בִּינָה וְגִבּוֹרָה. שְׁנֵאָמַר (משלי
ח) לִי עֲצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה אֲנִי בִּינָה לִי גִבּוֹרָה וְנוֹתַנְתִּי
לוֹ מַלְכוּת וּמְמַשְׁלָה וְחַקוֹר דִּין וּמְגַלִּין לוֹ רֵזִי
תוֹרָה וְנִעְשָׂה כְּמַעֲנֵן הַמִּתְגַּבֵּר וּכְנֶהֱרַ שְׂאִינוּ
פוֹסֵק וְהוּי צָנוּעַ וְאֶרְךְ רוּחַ וּמוֹחֵל עַל עֲלֻבוֹנוֹ
וּמְגַדְלָתוֹ וּמְרוֹמְמָתוֹ עַל כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים:
מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ו,א

Rabbi Meir says: Anyone who is involved in Torah for its own sake merits many things. Furthermore, the entire world is worthwhile for him. He is called friend, beloved, lover of God, lover of people, rejoicer of God, rejoicer of people. The Torah dresses him with humility and fear and prepares him to be righteous, pious, upright, and faithful. It keeps him away from sin and brings him close to merit. People enjoy his advice and wisdom, understanding and might, as the verse states, "With me (Torah) there is counsel and wisdom; I am understanding; with

me is might.” The Torah gives him sovereignty, dominion, and the ability to analyze judgment. The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him, and he becomes like an ever-flowing spring and like a river that never ceases. He is modest, patient, and forgiving of insults. It makes him great and elevates him over all of creation.

Our chapter begins: *The sages expounded in the language of the Mishnah (blessed is He who chose them and their learning)*. An introduction like this is quite unique. There are thousands of tannaitic statements, known as beraithot, that were not selected for inclusion in the Mishnah. Wherever they are collected and presented, for instance, in Tosefta, it is without introduction. (By definition, a *beraitha* is a Tannaitic statement that was left “outside,” that is, not one of the Tannaitic statements included “inside” the body of mishnayoth.)

Of course, one could note that this chapter is different precisely because its collection of beraithot appear within a tractate of mishnayoth. Other collections of beraithot, of course, appear only within compilations that consist of beraithot alone. One might therefore say that the introduction here is used to distinguish between that which is of mishnaic origin and that which was appended at a later point in time. I, however, would question this as being the sole rationale, pointing to what appears to be a parallel example in tractate Bikkurim.

The mishnayoth Bikkurim have only three chapters. But, a fourth chapter is sometimes appended as well. That chapter, like ours in Avoth, consists solely of beraithot, not mishnayoth. There, however, no introduction appears.

Aside from the issue of why our chapter opens with an introduction, I wonder as to why the chapter was added at all. Aside from the example from Bikkurim, I know of no other instance where a chapter of beraithot was appended to a tractate of mishnah.

The Bikkurim additions, at least, are thematically related that which appears in the mishnayoth. The fourth chapter discusses the legal status of the androgynous, one born with physically ambiguous sexual characteristics. This would connect it with chapter two, which mentions the androgynous as well, albeit incidentally. Perhaps this explains why some editions of mishnayoth Bikkurim include a fourth chapter.

On the other hand, Perek Kinyan Hatorah, our chapter in Avoth, does not seem to relate to the first five chapters, even incidentally. Why add a chapter to Avoth that deals with the methods by which Torah is acquired?

The sixth perek is not the only one that has historically been attached to Avoth. Chapters titled “Yirat Cheit,” “Derech Eretz,” and others appear as well, albeit not in printed mishnayoth but in some siddurim. In other words, not as a part of the mishnah, but for being recited together with Avoth. Our perek, Kinyan Hatorah is the only one, though, whose association with Avoth has continued to this day throughout the Jewish world.

The wording of our introduction is quite revealing. It says that our Rabbis taught the words that follow “using the style of the mishnah.” They are saying, then, that the sayings are not true mishnayoth, but only “in the style of the Mishnah.” It continues, though, to say “*blessed is He who chose them* ובמשנתם.

Although, one could translate ובמשנתם to mean “and their teachings,” one could also interpret it literally, to mean “and their mishnah.” Were one to say, as I was suggesting, that the phrase literally means “and their mishnah,” one could then ask, “But, are the words that follow part of the mishnah? Of course not!” Why, then, would we be praising the Rabbis for their mishnah?

Wouldn’t it have been more fitting to praise them for their “talmud” or something similar? (Once again, this assumes the literal understanding of what is meant by ובמשנתם. He who reads it non-literally, in line with the traditional understanding of “mishnah,” would not have my question.)

So, once again I ask, “Why praise them for their mishnah, when the chapter does not contain mishnayoth and the first part of the introduction tells us this implicitly?”

Allow me to suggest that my question might be answered through a poetic reading of the talmud’s statement that “Everything that the Sages decreed, they decreed in the same manner as the Torah” (Pesachim 30b.) This principle is normally understood to refer to the methodology behind the Sages’ legal enactments. It means that Rabbinic decrees generally follow the same pattern as that applied to Torah. I would like to take the liberty of extending this concept beyond its conventional understanding and apply it more broadly.

Consider the mitzvah of lighting Chanukkah candles, for instance. As you know, the event commemorated by the holiday of Chanukkah occurred well after the Torah was given. Nowhere in our written Torah does it say that Hashem

commanded Moshe to tell the people to celebrate the Chanukkah story. The decree to light candles on those eight days is entirely of Rabbinic origin. Yet we still precede the lighting with saying, “Blessed are You, *Melech HaOlam*, who has commanded us in the lighting of Chanukkah lights.” (Other examples of this would be the blessings prior to the Purim reading of the Megillah, the present day counting of the Omer, and the recitation of Hallel on Festival Days and Rosh Chodesh.)

Another example would be second day of Yom Tov, which was rabbinically decreed for those who live outside of Eretz Yisrael. Those who live in Eretz Yisrael follow the Torah guideline, which is to celebrate only one day of Yom Tov. They have one Pesach seder. They say kiddush only on the first and last days of Pesach and the first day of Sukkoth, Shemini Atzeret, and Shavu’oth. The only Yom Tov whose holiness extends over two days in Eretz Yisrael is Rosh HaShanah. Rambam, in his Laws of Sanctifying the Month (Chapter 5:7,8) provides the rationale.

In contrast to the Eretz Yisrael practice, Diaspora Jews celebrate all Yamim Tovim as two days. The first two days of Pesach, they recite Kiddush and conduct a full *sedarim* each evening. They neither chametz nor put on tefillin on the eighth day, while their Eretz Yisrael brethren would be doing both. Their Kiddush on that eighth day, the same day that is a regular weekday in Eretz Yisrael, has them saying, “Blessed are You, Hashem, who sanctifies Yisrael and the Zemanim.” That blessing, “. . . *Hashem, who sanctifies Yisrael and the Zemanim*” is made despite the fact that nowhere in the Torah does it say that Hashem ever commanded that we celebrate that extra day.

The second-day decree was made due to the fact that during the time of the mishnah, the Jewish calendar was not yet fixed. Because it is based on the synodic lunar cycle, which is approximately 29.5 days, some months would necessarily have to be thirty days in length, while others would need to be twenty-nine. Determination was done through eyewitness testimony regarding the sighting of the “new moon.” This was done in Yerushalayim, by the Beit Din.

After having decided whether the new month had begun on the day following the twenty-ninth, as opposed to the day following the thirtieth, the news had to then be spread to all other Jewish communities.

Messengers were sent out by foot. The process could take a fair amount of time. Communities far enough away that would not receive the news early

enough in the month would observe two days, because of doubt as to when the new month had been declared.

One might ask why the two-days-in-Diaspora practice should continue in our own times, now that we have a fixed calendar. Even those in the farthest reaches of the Diaspora are no longer in doubt as to the dates. Talmud Bavli (Beitzah 4b) already asked this question.

Now that the calendar is fixed, for what the reason do we have two days of Yom Tov [in Chutz L’Aretz]? Because they sent from there [from Eretz Yisrael to Bavel]: be zealous in maintaining the custom of your forefathers lest a foreign government pass a law to forbid the calculations of the new moon and you may miscalculate [the time of the festival].

The gemara’s answer is that we continue to do so by Rabbinic decree, apparently because doubts about the calendar could reoccur at some later point in history. The fear, according to Rashi, is that Jews would then come to inadvertently eat chametz on Pesach. In any event, this is clearly a matter of Rabbinic, rather than Torah, enactment.

Now that I have given you the outline, I would like to offer a bit more detail.

Once the temple was destroyed and the Jews driven out of Eretz Yisrael, the possibility of sanctifying the month through a Beit Din ended as well. This is because membership in the Great Beit Din of Yerushalayim was limited to those with *semikha*, that is, Rabbis who had been ordained by Rabbis who had themselves been ordained according to certain qualifications. Those without *semikha* could not participate in the Sanctification of the New Moon process.

Hillel Hanassi, not the same Hillel as the one in the mishnah, but belonging to the last generations of Amoraim, calculated all future months and established a fixed calendar. Once this was done, there seemed to be no further reason to continue the two-day practice, given that Jewish communities were no longer in doubt as to when Rosh Chodesh would fall.

Despite the fact that its original rationale had disappeared, the two-day practice continued nevertheless. As I said before, this was solely due to Rabbinic decree. And, as I said before, the question then becomes how the people could utter the words, *Blessed are You, Hashem, who commanded us . . .* when reciting Kiddush on a day for which no Divine command had ever occurred. And, not only would they be saying a blessing that seems puzzling -- at least from a superficial

understanding -- but they would be forgoing the two Torah commandments to wear tefillin on days that the Rabbis had decreed to be a Yom Tov.

One of the answers to our questions might be found in the Rambam's Laws of Berachot 11:3. After telling us (in halacha 11:2) that we are to recite a blessing prior to performing most positive commandments, he explains that the same thing applies to those that are Rabbinic in origin:

And so, too, with mitzvoth from the words of the early generations of Rabbis, the *sofrim*. This applies whether it is a mitzvah that is obligatory, like the reading of the Megillah, lighting a flame on Shabbat, and the lighting of candles on Chanukkah or whether it is a non-obligatory mitzvah, like *eiruv*, *netilat yadai'im*. On all of them, one makes a blessing before doing them, *Blessed are You, who commanded us with . . .*

Where in the Torah was this commanded? It is from the verse that says, (Devarim 17:11) “. . .that which they tell you, so must you do.”

We see that the meaning of *who has commanded us in our commandments* is that He commanded us to listen to those commanded us to light Chanukkah candles, to read the Megillah, and all other mitzvoth from the words of the early generations of Rabbis, the *sofrim*.

The Rambam tells us that everything commanded us by the earliest generations of Rabbis (the *sofrim*) is included in the concept of *who has sanctified us in His commandments*. In a certain sense, they become like the mitzvoth commanded us by Hashem through Moshe, for that was the authority given to the earliest Rabbis.

As I understand it, those early Rabbis were granted that authority because Hashem knew that their Torah learning would be entirely *l'shema*, that is, for its own sake and not from personal interest. He therefore permitted them to add new commandments as they saw appropriate.

Violation of these Rabbinic decrees could be said to be equivalent to having violated a Torah prohibition, in a sense. For instance, someone dwelling outside of Eretz Yisrael who eats *chametz* on the eighth day of Pesach, when it is Rabbinically proscribed, could be understood to have violated Torah law. The Torah violation, though, would not be his having violated the Torah's laws regarding *chametz*, but the Torah law to listen to the early sages.

In other words, even though the Torah itself never prohibited anyone from eating *chametz* on the eighth day, nor from doing *melacha*, one who does so could be said to have violated Torah law. The Rabbis had Divinely-granted authority to legislate. Therefore, before performing their mitzvot we say *Blessed are You Hashem, who has sanctified us with His commandments*.

Rabbinic decrees, even those that are entirely an innovation, become an integral part of the Torah itself, to the extent that Berachot 4b says that whoever transgresses their words deserves to die. A midrashic statement goes so far as to say that practically everything that was said by the Rabbis had previously been taught to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. This shows, once again, how the decrees made by our early Rabbis are to be considered as a part of the Torah itself.

One could say that this chapter's introduction hints at this concept, if one approaches it *derech derash*. It starts out, *The sages expounded in the language of the Mishnah*. While the simple meaning of *in the language of the Mishnah* could be that it was taught in the Hebrew language rather than in Aramaic, one might suggest the following: The Rabbis who said that which appears in the following Beraitha learned Torah in the same fashion as those of the Mishnah. They strove and worked at it, just as those who preceded them. Through this, they merited that their sayings would be considered as if they had been taught by those earlier generations. So true is this, that we say regarding their words, *blessed is He who chose them and mishnatam*.

One might say that this choice of wording tells us that their teachings are equivalent to those of the mishnah itself.

In tribute to these rabbis, a chapter dedicated to the ways of Torah learning was added. Perhaps this shows the extent to which human beings have the potential to become a part of the Torah itself. In a sense, the decrees of the early Rabbis could be said to have the status of Torah commandments. Recall that we say before their performance, *Who has made us holy through His commandments*. This, despite the fact that the commandment might have been something instituted not directly by Hashem, but by the Rabbis, subsequent to the giving of the Torah. The Rabbinic decree to light Chanukah candles is one example.



רבי מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה

Have a look at the order in which this mishnah lists the praises of Torah study. First it says that he merits many things. Then it says parenthetically that *not only that, but the entire world is worthwhile for him alone*. After that, it says that *He is called friend, beloved, lover of G-d, lover of humanity, rejoicer of G-d, rejoicer of humanity, etc.*

Would it not have made more logical sense to begin with saying that *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone* and then say, “not only that, but that he merits many things”? It could then continue with saying, *He is called friend, beloved, etc.*

When the mishnah says that *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone*, it is not telling us about something that the Torah learner merits, but only a general principle. Whoever learns Torah without ulterior motive, *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone*.

Here’s my explanation: For the tzaddikim, who study Torah for its own sake, the physical world is meaningless. They have no interest in its comforts or pleasures. They learn in circumstances of physical deprivation. The physical world offers them no benefit.

It is said of Rabbeinu HaKodesh, Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, that just before his death, he lifted ten fingers up above and said, “Master of the World! You are absolutely aware that I strived with all ten fingers to understand Your Torah. But, I received not even a pinky finger’s worth of benefit.” It is interesting that he says this because, as we know, he was in fact a very wealthy man.

So, to reiterate, when the mishnah begins by saying that *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone*, it is describing something that the tzaddik considers of no benefit whatsoever. For, as I have just said, tzaddikim have no use for this world. It cannot therefore be considered their reward.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa is another example of how the great Rabbis related to the physical world. The talmud says that from on Shabbat to the next, he lived on a diet of nothing more than than carob. The Zohar adds that a heavenly voice declared that due to him, the entire world is sustained, yet he himself eats nothing more than carob the whole week long.

Our beraitha therefore does not begin with *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone*, for this is something of no benefit to the tzaddik himself. It’s not even something that interests them. It is, however, of great interest to the rest

of humanity. For, it is only through the merit of the tzaddikim's Torah that the world continues.

What I mean, then, is that the author of this beraitha felt that it would be best to begin with saying that they merit many things, having in mind the latter part of the beraitha, *He is called friend, beloved, lover of G-d, lover of humanity*, etc. To my mind, these are the key praises of those tzaddikim who learn Torah for its own sake. In between, though, the author immediately inserted that *the entire world is worthwhile for him alone* so as to make known that the entire world is sustained due to their Torah.

ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים *It makes him great and elevates him over all of creation.*

What exactly is meant here? Superficially, this would seem to be a repudiation of the phrase immediately preceding, *He becomes modest, patient and forgiving of insults.*

I believe that the beraitha, in saying that Torah study yields seemingly opposite qualities, is telling us that through learning Torah *l'shma*, one is potentially able to overcome negative personality traits, even those that one was born with.

What I said above applies not just to the way one studies Torah, but to how one conducts himself in the practical realm as well. One should always act for the sake of Heaven, not for self-aggrandizement and self-enrichment. Torah should be one's only goal. This is the way of those who learn Torah *l'shma*. All affairs of tzaddikim such as these are directed in this fashion.

Mishlei 3:6 is reminiscent of this, *Know Him in all your ways, and He will straighten your pathways.*

❖ Stories of Tzaddikim ❖

שכל העולם כלו כדי הוא לו

Twenty-two years prior to his passing, Rabbi Chaim Pinto was already quite sick. He was so ill, in fact, that his family and students feared that he was already dead. They had even begun to plan for his funeral.

As the news spread, cries were heard throughout the city. People flocked to the Pinto household to join in the mourning. The Rav's body had been placed upon the ground. Around his head, candles were in place.

The funeral was set for the following day.

Midnight approached, the time when Rabbi Chaim would customarily recite *tikkun chatzot*. With that, Rabbi Chaim got up from the ground, walked to his bed, and sat himself down.

The onlookers, of course, were stunned. In fright, they trembled at what had just occurred. They could not believe what they had just seen.

Rabbi Chaim tried to calm them. “Bring me my clothes,” he asked.

Once dressed, he washed his hands and began to recite *tikkun chatzot*, just as his practice every other midnight.

Upon finishing, he turned to his family and confided that his *neshama* had indeed departed from him that night. It had arisen and stood before the Beit Din in Heaven. The Heavenly Beit Din had even begun their deliberations.

Suddenly, the Beit Din announced that twelve years would be added to his life. His *neshama* would be granted another twelve years in this world.

“What caused them to change their minds?” asked those around the Rav.

“”They saw the extent to which I protect Am Yisrael and that no one else was here to take my place. So, they added more years for me.”

ונהנין ממנה עצה ותושיה

One of the praises listed in our mishnah is *From him, people enjoy counsel and wisdom*. I have a story to tell which I find relevant.

An agent of the Eretz Yisrael Rabbanim arrived in Marakesh one day, in order to raise funds for the Holy Land’s poor. He had been puzzling over a certain comment by Rabbi Avraham ben Ezra, the Ibn Ezra, one of the greatest commentators on Tanach. He inquired of the Rabbis in Marakesh, perhaps one of them could resolve the difficulty. Unfortunately, though, none of them could resolve it.

Eventually, the man came to Mogador. There, he posed the same question to Rabbi Chaim Pinto, whose praises he had already heard of. Rabbi Chaim looked at the text and proceeded to explain it in the most simple and clear fashion, in a manner that left the agent completely satisfied that he had finally gotten to the bottom of what Rabbi Ibn Ezra had intended.

Upon his return to Marakesh, the man related to the Rabbis there what had occurred, how Rabbi Chaim had been able to clarify the obscure language of

this highly difficult commentator in the most convincing manner. With that, the Rabbis of Marakesh began to grasp just how brilliant Rabbi Chaim was in Torah.

Once he had returned to Eretz Yisrael, the man related to the Rabbis who had sent him of the greatness of Rabbi Chaim of Mogador.

From that time onward, the Rabbonim of Eretz Yisrael would direct their Torah questions, regarding both the hidden and revealed, to Rabbi Chaim. And from Rabbi Chaim would come the clarification.



אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי בְּכֹל יוֹם וַיּוֹס בֵּית קוֹל
 יוֹצֵאת מֵהַר חוֹרֵב וּמִכְרֹזַת וְאוֹמֶרֶת אוֹי לָהֶם
 לְבָרִיּוֹת מְעַלְבוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה. שְׁפָל מִי שְׂאִינוּ
 עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה נִקְרָא נְזוּף שְׂנֵאָמַר (שם יא) נְזֹם
 זָהָב בְּאֵף חֲזִיר אֲשֶׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טַעַם. וְאוֹמֵר
 (שמות לב) וְהִלַּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הִמָּה
 וְהִמְכַתֵּב מְכַתֵּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלַּחַת
 אֵל תִּקְרָא חֲרוּת אֶלָּא חֲרוּת שְׂאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוֹרִין
 אֶלָּא מִי שְׁעוֹסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה. וְכֹל מִי שְׁעוֹסֵק
 בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה הִרִי זֶה מִתְעַלָּה שְׂנֵאָמַר (שם
 יא) נְזֹם זָהָב בְּאֵף חֲזִיר אֲשֶׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טַעַם.
 וְאוֹמֵר (שמות לב) וְהִלַּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הִמָּה
 וְהִמְכַתֵּב מְכַתֵּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלַּחַת
 אֵל תִּקְרָא חֲרוּת אֶלָּא חֲרוּת שְׂאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוֹרִין
 אֶלָּא מִי שְׁעוֹסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה. וְכֹל מִי שְׁעוֹסֵק
 בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה הִרִי זֶה מִתְעַלָּה שְׂנֵאָמַר
 (במדבר כא) וּמִפְתָּנָה נַחֲלִיאֵל וּמִנְחֲלִיאֵל בְּמוֹת:
 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו, ב

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says: Each and every day, a heavenly voice goes out from Mount Chorev (Sinai) and announces and says: "Woe to them, the people for their insulting of the Torah." For anyone who does not occupy himself with Torah is called reprimanded, as it says, "A golden ring in the snout of a pig, a beautiful woman who turns away from reason." And it says: "The Tablets are the work of God, and the writing is God's writing, engraved (charus) on the Tablets." Do not read it as "engraved" (charus) but as "freedom"

(cheirus) — for nobody is free except someone who is busy with the study of Torah. And whoever is busy with the study of Torah will be raised up, as is states, “And from Matana (gift) to Nachaliel (God’s inheritance), and from Nachaliel to Bamos (heights).

The mishnah says that every day, a heavenly voice cries out, saying, “Woe to those who insult the Torah.” Continuing, it says that one who does not occupy himself in Torah is considered an outcast. As a proof text, it cites (Proverbs 11:22), “A golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine, a beautiful woman bereft of reason.”

I wonder: What connection does the verse have to the phrase in our mishnah that precedes it?

Also, Har Chorev, the name used in our mishnah, is also known as Har Sinai. I wonder why the teacher of our mishnah chose to call it Chorev rather than Sinai. Isn’t Sinai the more common name for the place where Hashem gave the Torah?

Another question: Why is this heavenly voice specifically going out from Har Chorev? Once the Torah had already been given to Moshe, did that mountain retain any of its holiness? Don’t we have a verse that seems to say that it does not? Shemoth 19:13 tells us that once the Torah had been given, the mountain was no longer off limits. It says . . . *when the horn sounds, they may ascend the mountain.* In other words, the Torah was given, the sound of the Yovel was heard, and the people could then ascend, seemingly an indication that the holiness that had been there previously was no longer. Therefore, why is it that this heavenly voice would emanate from this particular place?

I would suggest that the question and the answer are one. In other words, the question itself tells us what the answer is. What I mean to say is that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* wished to teach us what becomes of a place that has no Torah.

Think about it. Har Sinai, as long as it was functioning as the designated place where Torah was being received, was inhabited by the *Shekhina*. As long as there was Torah there, *keddusha* was there as well. Whoever would go upon the mountain would be judged for death.

When, however, there was no more “learning” there, any one of Yisrael could ascend upon it at any time. For, the *Shekhina* had now departed. In fact, not just Yisrael could go up onto it, but their animals as well. The *keddusha* that had been there was no longer.

I would extrapolate this to the wider world. Those places where no Torah is learned are bereft of *keddusha*, in my view. They have no “life,” that is, nothing that is life sustaining. They are desolate. They are in hebrew, *charev*, destroyed. And this is why the voice went out specifically from the place where the Torah had been given and it is why that place was referred to here as Har Chorev. It shares its name with *churva*, a place that has been destroyed.

The lesson for us is to remind us that wherever we are, we should engage ourselves in Torah. This especially holds true in Eretz Yisrael, our holy land. For, it is said the gemara that the Canaanites left neither a valley nor a mountain upon which they had not practiced idolatry. To eradicate that *tumah*, it is incumbent upon us to study Torah in each and every place throughout the land.

I’d like to take this a step further. Let us consider the midrash that describes Rabbi Eliezer’s Beit Midrash. It is said that there was a certain stone there, which Rabbi Eliezer used as his seat. One time, Rabbi Joshua walked in and kissed it. He explained, “This rock is like Har Sinai. And the one who sat upon it is like the Ark of the Covenant.”

Now let us apply that midrash to our mishnah. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is saying here that a heavenly voice goes out from Har Chorev because every Beit HaMidrash that is actively used for Torah may be considered to be like Har Sinai. Should the learning cease there, a heavenly voice cries out, “My creatures! Come and learn Torah, so that the world will continue!” This is especially true when there are holy books there, sitting idle.

A parallel: When the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* comes to a Beit HaKenesset and finds that there is no minyan of ten, immediately He becomes angered. For it says, *Why have I come, yet there is no one to be found? I called, yet no one answered.* (Berachot 6b)

I would now like to explain the continuation of the mishnah, which quotes the verse, “*A golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine, a beautiful woman bereft of reason.*” Why is a failure to learn Torah compared to a golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine? Perhaps it’s not so much referring to those who neglect to learn Torah, but to those who are not connected to it at all. Perhaps they even

transgress its laws. Specifically, I refer to those who mock the Bnei Torah, even accusing them of lacking both proper manners and proper character.

Without a doubt, Bnei Torah are expected to conduct themselves respectfully and with proper manners, *derech erez*. To my mind, though, *derech erez* not accompanied by Torah is meaningless. And that is what Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is saying here, in my estimation.

He is saying that five chapters of Pirkei Avoth have been devoted to cultivating proper conduct and *derech erez*. However, let us not forget that *derech erez* must be accompanied by Torah study and with doing the mitzvot.

If, however, someone is not at all careful to be a Ben Torah himself, but is constantly demanding that others act with *derech erez*, his good manners are to be considered -- in the eyes of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi -- like a *golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine*. This is true even if this person does, in fact, conduct himself in a *derech erez* fashion.

For, Torah is the base, the foundation. Only once someone has that foundation, can he then make demands that others as well act with *derech erez*. In the words of our Rabbis, “Whoever does not have Torah flowing from his mouth does not have *derech erez*.” Similarly, “Whoever does not have the scent of Torah in his mouth does not have *derech erez*.” The intent here is that good character and proper behavior must be formed within the context and foundation of Torah. If not, they are like fine jewelry that sits upon something repulsive -- in the words of Mishlei, *A golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine*.

Derech erez is not independent of Torah, but is principally based upon it. To my mind, it is not possible to even become a *ba'al derech erez* without Torah. Support for my view, I believe, may be found in a statement that appears in one of the commentators to Shulchan Arukh. The context there is a ruling that Torah scholars forming a legal tribunal should be careful to make sure that all who join it are qualified experts. If they are not, then the Torah scholar should refuse to participate. To this, one of the commentators says **דידעת שפסקי הבעלי בתים ופסקי הלומדים הם שני הפכים**, *you should know that the legal rulings made by non-Torah-scholars (ba'alei battim) are opposite to what Torah scholars would say*. A common aphorism amongst some in the Torah world, -- which I subscribe to as well and which I connect to the comment quoted above -- is that as a general observation, *Da'at Torah* and *Da'at Ba'alei Batim* are direct opposites. In other words, their entire way of thinking is opposed. It could therefore happen that, when it comes a question of *derech erez*, the *ba'al habayit* and the *talmid*

chacham could arrive at opposite conclusions. Potentially, the *ba'al habayit* would say that proper *derech erez* dictates that a certain thing *must* be done, while the *talmid chacham* would say that, actually, *derech erez* demands its opposite.

An individual who is polite and has good character might very well be said to have “a golden ring.” But, if he has no interest in Torah, it as if that golden ring is *in the snout of a swine*. After all, what value do his refined manners have when he himself is a nothing?

Torah scholars are, of course, not exempted from having *derech erez* and to somehow imagine that they are allowed to act with wild abandon. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi therefore says that a voice rings out each and every day from Har Chorev, declaring, “Woe to the creation, for the insult to Torah!” The intent is those who are Torah scholars but lack all refinement and pleasantness of character. Ones like these, who claim to represent the Torah, actually disgrace the Torah. Those who see them will remark, “Woe to the one who taught Torah to people like this!” “Torah scholars” such as these are a desecration of Hashem’s Name.

So, as I understand this mishnah, it speaks on the one hand to those who demand that others act ethically, and may act ethically themselves, but have no interest in Torah study. They are, as I’ve said above, like a *golden nose-ring in the snout of a swine*, not merely out of place, but worthless. Even with the golden ring, the swine remains a swine.

In order to be a complete person, one must have not just refined character, but Torah as well. One is not possible without the other. Those who think that they can have one without the other are like a bejeweled swine.

This beraitha is tied to the first one. The first has Rabbi Meir saying, as regards to those who learn Torah for its own sake, that the world becomes worthwhile due to him. Here, rabbi Joshua ben Levi says that whoever does *not* study Torah is as if he had destroyed the world. For, the world has no basis for continued existence other than Torah.



ואומר והלוחות מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות
 על הלוחות אל תקרא חרות אלא חירות שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי
 שעוסק בתלמוד תורה

The mishnah says that there is no free individual other than he who occupies himself with Torah study. What is the connection between these two, Torah study and freedom?

I would suggest that the teacher of our mishnah is alluding to the situation one might face after 120 years, when he ascends to meet the Heavenly Court. In his defense, perhaps the individual might claim as follows: “The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* sent my soul to the world below, the world of the physical, a world that is filled with physical temptation. Everywhere I turned, no matter where I lived, I encountered yet another obstacle that blocked me from being able to engage myself in Torah and to perform the mitzvot of Hashem. It was as if I were an inmate in some kind of prison.”

“Hard as I tried, I simply could not overcome the *yetzer hara*. Not even once, did it cease from tempting to one sin or another. How could I have possibly engaged myself in Torah, in light of all this?”

Says our teacher, the above is a not a valid excuse. For, upon man’s creation, he was sworn to live as a tzaddik, not a rasha. In the womb, he is taught the Torah in its entirety. True, that upon exiting the womb, the child is caused to forget all the Torah he had learned. However, that learning is like a seed implanted in the ground that could ultimately produce a might tree.

That learning in the womb impresses in the individual the ability to overcome the *yetzer* and the vanities of this world, should he truly wish to do so. But, there is one catch: Only through Torah study can that which was engraved in one’s soul be activated. Without Torah, one does not sense it, nor can one draw upon its potential to help him master the *yetzer hara*. We were given an antidote to the *yetzer* -- and it is Torah.

Furthermore, it is said that we were created with 248 limbs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the number of positive and negative commandments. This was so that we would have the ability to counter the *yetzer*.

Getting back to our mishnah, we can now say that its *Tanna* brought proof from the *luchot* because its writing was etched in its stone. Now, stone is something inanimate; it has no life.

Well-known is the story of Rabbi Akiva. He was forty-years-old and had not yet learned Torah. Once, he stood by a well and said, “Who is it that carved out this rock?”

“It was the water, which flows against it every day,” came the answer.

Rabbi Akiva then made a logical deduction to himself: “Just as the soft cut into the hard, words of Torah, something hard as iron, should be able to cut into something as soft as my heart, which is only made of flesh and blood.” With that, he immediately went to learn Torah.

We now see why the *Tanna* brought a proof from the *luchot*. The *luchot* are made of stone and have words of Torah engraved into them. They are thereby transformed into something of holiness -- so holy, that they are placed into the Ark of the Covenant, which resides within the Holy of Holies.

Man is likened to the above. Into man’s body, was engraved by Hashem His Torah. That body is said to have 248 limbs and 365 sinews. These correspond to the number of positive and negative commandments.

When man encounters the *yetzer hara* head-on and overpowers it, not allowing it to draw him into temptation, then man becomes truly free. No longer is he a prisoner -- a prisoner that is, of the *yetzer hara*.



הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או
 פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפילו אות אחת
 צריך לנהג בו כבוד שכן מצינו בדוד מלך
 ישראל שלא למד מאחיתופל אלא שני דברים
 בלבד קראו רבו אלופו ומידעו שנאמר (תהלים
 נה) ואתה אנוש כערפי אלופי ומידעי. והלא
 דברים קל וחומר ומה דוד מלך ישראל שלא
 למד מאחיתופל אלא שני דברים בלבד קראו
 רבו אלופו ומידעו הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או
 הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או
 אפילו אות אחת על אחת כמה וכמה שצריך
 לנהג בו כבוד. ואין כבוד אלא תורה שנאמר
 (משלי ג) כבוד חכמים ינחלו (שם כח) ותמימים
 ינחלו טוב ואין טוב אלא תורה שנאמר כי לקח
 טוב נתתי לכם תורתִי אל תעזבו:
 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה ג

One who learns a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single word, or even a single letter from his friend must treat him with respect. So we find with David, king of Israel, who learned only two things from Achitofel, yet he called him his master, his guide, and his intimate friend as it states, "And you are a man of my worth, my guide and intimate friend." If David, king of Israel, who learned only two things from Achitofel, nevertheless called him his master, guide, and intimate friend, how much more so is one who learns from his friend a single chapter, a law, a verse, a saying, or even a single

letter obligated to give him honor. And there is no honor except for Torah, as it states: “The wise will inherit honor” and “The innocent shall inherit good.” And there is no good but Torah, as it states, “I have given you a good inheritance; My Torah, do not forsake it.”

The mishnah says that *one who learns from his fellow a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single word, or even a single letter, he must treat him with respect.* I wonder: Doesn't this introduction seem a bit verbose? Would it not have sufficed for it to have simply said that whoever learns even one letter from his fellow must show him respect? All the rest (one chapter, one law, etc) seems superfluous.

A further question: One might even ask why, in fact, someone who taught someone else nothing more than a single letter should be worthy of such special treatment.

An answer to my questions may be found in the midrash that says that *mikrah, mishnah, halachot, talmud, toseftot, aggadoth,* and even that which a seasoned scholar will be asking his Rebbi at some future time were already said to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. As I understand this, it is saying that each and every Jew has some portion of Torah designated for him, which he is destined to introduce to the world. Only he can introduce this to the world, not anyone else. Once he has done so, it becomes the inheritance of Clal Yisrael.

A gemara in Kiddushin tells us that up until the point where someone has learned it, Torah belongs to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. Once man learns it, though, it becomes his own. He has acquired it. Proof for this is brought from a verse in Tehillim, *But his desire is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.* At first, Torah is called Hashem's. After man has learned it, it is called “his.” (This how Rashi understands it.)

A story is told about our master, Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of Beit Yosef and Shulchan Arukh. There was a time when he struggled mightily trying to understand a certain matter. After a great deal of effort and many attempts, he was finally able to get to the bottom of what was meant. He then went into the Beit Midrash. And what happened? He heard the very same explanation, the one he had worked so hard to achieve, being said over by some of the other members

of that Beit Midrash. Not only that, but when they said it, they made it seem as if it were perfectly obvious.

Needless to say, this caused him great anguish. How could it be that something he had to work so hard to achieve had come so easily to these others?

Rav Yosef Karo had a *maggid*, a voice that came to him and taught him Torah. His *maggid* revealed the answer: Every Jew has a portion in Torah allocated to him alone. It is up to him to cause that portion of Torah to descend down to this world. In some instances, this will take a great deal of effort.

Once his personal insight has been revealed, it becomes easily available to one and all. “You, however, are the one who opened the spigot,” said the *maggid* to Rav Yosef Karo.

Mishlei 4:2 says **כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו**, *For I gave you good teaching; forsake not My instruction*. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* gave Clal Yisrael as a present. Each of us has a portion in it.

The word “Yisrael” could be understood to represent *yesh shishim ribo otiot latorah*. (There are sixty thousand letters in the Torah.) That is, each one of Yisrael is uniquely connected to one letter of Torah.

Getting back to the verse in Mishlei, it says **כי לקח טוב**. Rearrange the letters of **לקח** and you have **חלק**. *Lekach* becomes *cheilek*, that is, that we were given not just a **לקח** but a **חלק**, a portion.

Now that we see that each and every Jew has a unique “portion” of Torah, which is wholly dependent upon them to bring down into this world, think about what this means in terms of our obligation to respect each and every one of them! Once they have taught us that “one letter,” which was previously “theirs” and is now part of our world, how could we not recognize that Jew’s significance and to honor them?

Let’s say, for example, that someone had a very, very valuable diamond. The owner takes it in his hand, to show it to his fellow. Even if his friend knows very little about diamonds, still he would realize that it’s an extremely precious stone. Imagining that the diamond must certainly be of great value, he will look upon its owner with great respect. It’s man’s nature to see things that way, to admire that which is expensive, even when it’s someone else’s property.

It is said of one of our great Rabbis, Rabbeinu Tam, that when he was about to embark upon studying something particularly onerous, he would place before himself golden coins. For, looking at precious things gladdens the heart, even

when they are not one's own. For, in and of themselves, that which is expensive is naturally appreciated.

Now, how much more so should be with he whose "possession" is Torah! Even if someone does not personally know very much Torah or have much of a connection to learning, he can -- and should -- honor those who do. And, he should appreciate what these *talmidei chachamim* possess, not because he is told to do so, but because it should come to him naturally. This means that he should work on himself in order that the natural admiration he feels for material wealth, he will naturally have for Torah wealth as well.

One who learns just one letter of Torah from his friend could be compared to one who has been handed a friend's precious stone, to hold for only a moment. That brief exposure will suffice; he who owns the diamond will have thereby won himself honor. I see a parallel to that situation and that of someone whose friend has shared with him even a small amount of Torah. The less learned recipient does not have much of a relationship to Torah learning in general, as opposed to the friend, who very much does. The Torah he shares is still "his," and the one who only got to glance at it knows that. Yet, even so, now that he sees the Torah that his friend possesses, he should admire and respect him for it.

How much more so would all this be true for those who see that their friend has not just a small amount of Torah, but a great amount. And how much more so if the friend not only knows lots of Torah, but is dedicated full-time to its study.

We can now understand why our mishnah was written as it was, beginning with "one who learns from his fellow one chapter" and finishes with "one who learns from his fellow a single letter." This refers, I believe, to differing degrees of learning.

What I mean by the above is that "one chapter" symbolizes sharing with one's friend the entirety of all the halachot on a broad subject, while "one letter" symbolizes learning with him just one narrow area. An example of the first would be having taught his friend the entirety of *Hilchot Pesach*. An example of the second would be having taught him only the laws of *bedikat chametz*, *haga'ala*, *muktzeh*, or anything similar. It should be obvious that, despite having heard from his friend only one area of *Hilchot Pesach*, he would be grateful for having learned that one aspect. That friend will have thereby earned his respect and honor. My examples above assume that whatever the friend had taught him was in an area that the recipient had previously known next to nothing about.

Let us now consider the case of someone who taught his friend something new, but in an aspect of Torah that the friend was already quite familiar with. Let's say that someone taught his friend something new regarding a particular *pasuk*. The listener was already quite familiar with the *parasha*, but the new insight into the one *pasuk* deepened his understanding of the *parasha* as a whole.

A lower level would be one who taught his fellow a single *dibbur*, for instance, a solitary statement from gemara. By my reckoning, this is “less” than a verse of Chumash, as it is part of Oral, rather than Written, Torah.

We now arrive at the final item on the mishnah's list, “one letter.” It seems, of course, insignificant. Possibly. But, if we view it the way I am suggesting, which is that the “teacher” has brought down to the world the “part” of Torah specifically designated for him to reveal, we then have a different perspective. The “teacher” has earned our respect, not so much for his having learned with one particular “student,” but for the “portion” of Torah entrusted to him.



כַּד הִיא דַרְכָּה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה פֶּת בַּמֶּלֶח תֹּאכֵל
 וּמִים בַּמְשׁוּרָה תִשְׁתֶּה וְעַל הָאָרֶץ תִּישָׁן וְחַיֵּי צַעַר
 תַּחֲזִיק וּבַתּוֹרָה אַתָּה עֹמֵל אִם אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה כֵן
 (תהלים קכח) אֲשֶׁרִיד וְטוֹב לָךְ. אֲשֶׁרִיד בְּעוֹלָם
 הַזֶּה וְטוֹב לָךְ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ו' מִשְׁנֵה ז'

This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt and drink water in small measure. And sleep on the ground and live a life of deprivation and you can toil in Torah. If you do so, "Fortunate are you, and it will be good for you." Fortunate are you in this world, and it will be good for you in the World to Come.

The beraitha quoted here seems extraordinarily restrictive. As I read it, it's basically saying that there is only ONE way of Torah, which is that one must live a life of deprivation. And, presumably, that whoever studies Torah within a circumstance of comfort and wealth is not learning as he should be. I find this puzzling.

Let's look at this within the context of two gemarot, each appearing to contradict the other. Eiruvin 41b that says that there are three things that deprive one of their senses and their connection to their Creator: "idolaters, *ruach ra'ah*, and strictures of poverty." Chagiga 9b, however, tells us that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* reviewed all potentially good traits to give to Yisrael and found none better than poverty. How do we resolve these apparently contradictory sources?

The answer I would suggest is that one cannot truly compare learning while impoverished to doing so under circumstances of wealth. For instance, when it came to material possessions, Shlomo HaMelech lacked nothing. About him, it was said, *And all of the king's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the utensils of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none was of silver; [since] it was reckoned with as nothing in the days of Solomon.* As I read it, this means that his wealth in general -- as opposed to just his supply of gold -- was so vast that silver was not considered of particular value in his times. In his old age, he said (Koheleth 2:9) אִף חִכְמָתִי עִמָּדָה לִי . . . but my wisdom has

stayed with me. The Rabbis interpreted his words to say that the Torah that he learned *b'af* remained with him. Some understood this to mean that the Torah that stayed with him is that which he learned under difficult --- as opposed to comfortable -- conditions.

Gemara Sotah 49a tells us regarding Torah scholars who study under privation, that their prayers are heard. Eirubin 21b says “Come into the field and we will show Thee many scholars who study the Law although they are in poor circumstances.” Among them are masters of *mikrah*, *mishnah*, and *gemara*.

Clearly, the above examples show that certain outstanding *chachamim* achieved greatness under circumstances of deprivation and that scholars' prayers are most likely to be heard when said when they are in dire straits, as opposed to in comfort. I would take these sources even further. I would suggest that they go so far as to indicate that circumstances of poverty and difficulty are an essential pre-condition to success in learning, that lacking these, their Torah will not last. With that in mind, I would now like to return to our *mishnah*.

The *mishnah* says that the way of Torah is to eat bread with salt, to drink water only in small measure, to sleep upon the ground, and to live a life of deprivation. Talmud Berachot 53a says in the name of Reish Lakish that Torah does not last except amongst those who “kill themselves” over it.

Let us now turn to the *gemara* quoted earlier, that three things deprive one of their senses and their connection to their Creator: idolaters, *ruach ra'ah*, and strictures of poverty. The phrase used in this *gemara* for “strictures of poverty” is **דקדוקי עניות**.

I would like to suggest a poetic reading, namely that the Rabbis intended to say that a person should not be **מזדקק** (particular) as to whether he happens to be poor or wealthy. A person should neither worry about being poor, nor should he swagger due to his wealth. Rather, he should accept whatever it is that he has, whether it be very little or a great deal.

In the words of our Rabbis (Avoth 4:1), **איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו**. Whatever one's situation happens to be, one should not allow it to intrude upon his Torah learning, his prayer, nor his service of the Divine. In my estimation, this has been the path to success for all the great Torah leaders of our past, throughout the generations.

Rabbeinu HaKodesh, Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi, despite being of great wealth, testified about himself that he never received even the slightest pleasure

from this physical world. His table was filled with all sorts of delicacies and gastronomic delights. Yet, never did he partake of them himself. His riches were inherited, by the way. He was descended come from a family of prominent *nassi'im* (communal leaders). In addition, he was the frequent recipient of gifts from the family of Antoninus, with whom he was friendly.

Not only did he refrain from exotic delicacies, but he went even further and conducted himself with great *perishut*, asceticism, all his life. This was so that he could learn Torah in “poverty.” For the sake of Torah learning, he followed the maxim of our mishnah, that the way of Torah is to eat bread with salt, to drink water only in small measure.

Another example is Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom, a Tanna. He, too, was fabulously wealthy. His father had bequeathed to him a thousand towns on land, and a thousand ships on the sea, and he himself used to take a bag of flour on his shoulder, and wander from town to town and land to land to study Torah. His food on these journeys was this flour.

This is how all our great leaders were forged, from lives of self-denial and suffering. The gemara gives yet other examples. Berachot 17b tells us of Rabbi Chanina, that a heavenly echo would sound daily, announcing that all the world was sustained due to him, who himself made do with nothing more than a small amount of carob all week long.

I told you the story of Rabbi Eliezar ben Horkanus earlier, in the hebrew edition of this work, and will repeat it here because of its relevance to our topic.

Rabbi Eliezar’s father did not allow him to learn Torah during his youth. Midrash Tanchuma Lech Lecha relates that one day he fled to Yerushalayim. There, he encountered the yeshiva of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. He walked in, hoping to finally have the opportunity study our holy tradition. Despite his family’s great wealth, the only “food” he brought on his journey was a sack of ashes. Even once he arrived in Yerushalayim, this was all he ate. It was apparent to all those around him that a terrible smell was coming from his mouth. The other students were alarmed at this, fearing that it might be due to something רע. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai understood that the odor was not due to there being something רע in his mouth, but rather to רעב, hunger, in his mouth. This was conformed upon investigation. He learned that the new visitor had been eating nothing more than the ashes. Another midrash refers to it as “dirt” and has Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai telling him, “Just as you caused your mouth to have a foul odor for the sake of Torah, so shall the scent of your Torah reach from one end of

the world to the other.” Eliyahu Rabba tells us that if one does not merit to ask for mercy that words of Torah should enter his innards, he should at least ask for mercy that excessive food and drink not enter them.

Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, according to Shabbat 147b, s went to a certain place known for its fine wine and soothing waters. Drawn to these pleasures, he forgot his learning. Upon his return from that region, he got up to read something from a Torah scroll (which does not have vowels). The verse was **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם**, *This month shall be for you [the first of the months]* (Shemot 12:2). He read it though as **לָכֶם הִיא הַחֹרֶשׁ**, “**Was their heart silent?**” Seeing how he had unwittingly transposed the similar letters and the implicit message within that particular misreading, the sages beseeched Hashem to have mercy upon him and restore his learning.

We see from the above that Torah will not remain with those who indulge in worldly delights. Just as one blesses Hashem for the good, so should he bless Him for [what seems to be] the “bad.” It’s best to have little to do with life’s physical pleasures.

This, then is the explanation of our mishnah. Torah will not develop, nor will it last, except amongst those who engage it under circumstances of deprivation and distress. Even if one has a great deal of money, he could follow the example of our Rabbis who ignored their abundance and denied themselves any benefit from it. They avoided all excess and ate no more than what their body needed to maintain its health. To them, it made no difference if they happened to be rich or poor. This was how they lived their lives, and they became giants amongst our people. From their mouths do we live -- until this very day.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

וְחַיִּי צַעַר תַּחֲוִיָּה

Our Rabbi shlitah has told us what he heard from his mother regarding the dire straits under which she and Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto spent their first years. Following their wedding, their household barely had even bread to eat. Only after considerable effort was the Rabbanit finally able to arrange contributions of food from their neighbors.

Erev Shabbat, Rabbi Moshe Aharon would wash his own shirt, afterwards putting it on and drying it with his own body heat. He did this so as to avoid having to ask others for help, thereby having to reveal the extent of his self-mortification.

ואם אתה עושה כן אשריך וטוב לך אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך
לעולם הבא

This part of the mishnah says that if you follow the ideals of self-denial and poverty advocated in the introduction, you will find happiness and good. The happiness will be in this world, while the good will be in the next.

What is this happiness that is being promised? For those whose pursuit is Torah, worldly happiness means the continued ability to engage in Torah and mitzvoth free of the *yetzer hara'a* interference. And as I read it, this is exactly what the Tanna of our mishnah is telling us.

When one studies Torah under conditions of self-sacrifice, never pursuing luxuries -- and certainly never engaging in anything forbidden -- then it follows that the *yetzer hara* would lose interest in trying to tempt him to sin. Not only that, but it would even go before Hashem and tell Him, "Master of the Universe! I have not been able to entice this one to transgress. Happy is he in this world! Doubtless, it will be good for him in the next world as well! For, he is separated from sin and dedicates himself to Torah!"

A story is told about Rabbi Matia ben Cheresh who, believing the Satan was waging war against him, to tempt him to gaze at women, blinded himself intentionally. With that, the Satan went to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*, saying to Him, "Master of the Universe! . . . And this is what happened!" Hashem's reaction was to tell him in response, "Had I not told you that you wouldn't succeed?" He then sent the Angel Rafael to cure him and assure him that never again would he have to worry about the Satan's powers.

Regarding one such as Rabbi Matia ben Cheresh, Mishlei says *When the way of man is to seek Hashem, even his enemies will make peace with him*. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says this refers to the *yetzer hara*. In other words, the potential exists for the *yetzer* to end its enticement of certain righteous individuals. Doubtless, he who is free of his influence would now exclaim, "Happy is the man -- even in this world!"



אֶל תִּבְקֶשׁ גְּדֻלָּה לְעַצְמְךָ וְאֶל תַּחֲמוּד כְּבוֹד
 יוֹתֵר מִלְמוּדְךָ עֲשֵׂה וְאֶל תִּתְאַוֶּה לְשִׁלְחָנִים שֶׁל
 שָׂרִים שֶׁשִּׁלְחָנְךָ גְּדוֹל מִשִּׁלְחָנֵם וְכִתְרְךָ גְּדוֹל
 מִכִּתְרֵם וְנֹאמֵן הוּא בַּעַל מְלֶאכֶתְךָ שִׁישְׁלֵם לְךָ
 שְׂכָר פְּעֻלָּתְךָ:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ו' מִשְׁנֵה ה'

Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not lust for honor. More than you study, do. Desire not the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs, and faithful is your Employer to pay you the rewards of your work.

Says the mishnah, one should not crave the table of the royals, “for your table is greater than theirs.” Allow me to explain this *derech mussar*, that is, homiletically.

Jealousy is forbidden in all cases, except when it comes to that which one *talmid chacham* feels towards another. As regards to ordinary jealousy, we have already learned earlier in Avoth that it is one of the things that “expel one out of the world.” Envy between scholars, however, which is known as **קנאת סופרים**, increases wisdom (Bava Bathra 21a).

We see that two types of envy exist, one of which is *pasul* and the other, which is *kasher*.

The type that is *kasher* is that which one feels towards an *oveid Hashem*, a servant of Hashem, who one sees as being greater than himself in Torah knowledge. As I read it, this would be extended this to mean that it is not that one envies him just for his superior level of expertise, but envies him for his being a superior *oveid Hashem* in general. Not only that, I would say that it extends as well to those who are not necessarily greater in knowledge, but who are greater at other aspects of Divine service, prayer being one example. Envy such as this is healthy and positive, as one becomes a better *oveid Hashem* because of it.

There is another type of **קנאת סופרים**, though, which is not at all good. This is when one envies them for the wrong reasons. For instance, when one is jealous of prominent Rabbis not for their Torah, but for their prestige within the community or for the titles that precede their names. In my opinion, this type of jealousy will not lead to anyone's committing himself to study more intensively. Just the opposite, it injected within him a spirit of jealousy, that he is bowing not to Torah, but to the titles borne by Rabbis and *dayanim*.

The latter is the type of **קנאה** warned against in our mishnah. Although one is certainly encouraged to strive to reach the level of the greatest scholars, this does not mean that one should envy them for that which comes to them as a side benefit. Rather, one should only look as to how to best attain their level of Torah scholarship.

The mishnah says **ששולחנך גדול משולחנם**, “that your table is greater than theirs.” In other words, if the only envy you have of them is the type that is permitted, potentially you could almost achieve the level of even Moshe Rabbeinu himself! (Some see this in the words of the Rambam, who writes in Hilchot Teshuvah that everyone has free choice and could potentially become a *tzaddik* like Moshe Rabbeinu or a *rasha* like Yerobam ben Navat. However it is interesting to note that, when it comes to everyone's potential to become a *chacham*, Rambam says only that one could even become a *chacham*. He says just a *chacham*. He does **not** say “a *chacham* like Moshe Rabbeinu.”)

Do not, however, envy their “table,” that is, the *kavod* proffered them due to their Torah. The *kavod* they receive stems from communal obligation, for we are commanded honor *talmidei chachamim* and they, as rightful recipients, are allowed to accept it. The *talmidei chachamim* have earned it. They got there through ceaseless effort and hard work, unlike the average person, who hasn't made the investment and has not achieved their level.

Envy of the type just described is absolutely, absolutely unacceptable.

Jealousy of the most common kind is that which we feel when being led into someone's mansion. One stands there wide-eyed, gaping at what is displayed on every wall, in every cabinet, and upon every table. The envy is all over his face; everyone can plainly tell that it's there. And, given that it's so obvious, anyone can chastise him for it.

The other type of envy, **קנאת סופרים**, is not apparent at all. For, even if it is noticed that someone is staring, wide-eyed, at a prominent *talmid chacham*, how is the observer to know what his reason is for looking at him with so much envy? Is it because of the Torah? Or, is it because of the attention? If it's the latter, how would we expect that person to change his ways, given that no one will be giving him reproach? The **קנאה** will therefore continue and continue.

Regarding a person such as this, Shlomo HaMelech tells us in Mishlei 14:30: **ורקב עצמות קנאה**, . . . *envy brings rotting of the bones*.



גְּדוּלָה תוֹרָה יוֹתֵר מִן הַכְּהוֹנָה וּמִן הַמַּלְכוּת
 שֶׁהַמַּלְכוּת נִקְנִית בְּשָׁלְשִׁים מַעֲלוֹת וְהַכְּהוֹנָה
 בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבַּע וְהַתּוֹרָה נִקְנִית בְּאַרְבָּעִים
 וּשְׁמוֹנֵה דְבָרִים. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן בְּתַלְמוּד בְּשִׁמְיעַת
 הָאָזֶן בְּעֵרִיכַת שְׁפָתַיִם בְּבִינַת הַלֵּב בְּאִמָּה
 בִּירְאָה בְּעֲנוּהַ בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּטְהָרָה בְּשִׁמוּשׁ
 חֻכְמִים בְּדַקְדּוּק חֲבָרִים בְּפִלְפּוּל הַתַּלְמִידִים
 בְּיָשׁוּב בְּמִקְרָא בְּמִשְׁנָה בְּמַעוֹט סְחוּרָה בְּמַעוֹט
 דָּרָךְ אַרְץ בְּמַעוֹט תַּעֲנוּג בְּמַעוֹט שְׁנָה בְּמַעוֹט
 שִׁיחָה בְּמַעוֹט שְׁחוּק בְּאַרְךָ אַפִּים בְּלֵב טוֹב
 בְּאַמוּנַת חֻכְמִים בְּקִבְלַת הַיְסוּרִין הַמְּפִיר אֶת
 מְקוֹמוֹ וְהַשְּׂמִיחַ בְּחֻלְקוֹ וְהַעוֹשֶׂה סִיג לְדַבְּרָיו וְאֵינוֹ
 מִחֲזִיק טוֹבָה לְעַצְמוֹ אֱהוּב אֱהוּב אֶת הַמְּקוֹם
 אֱהוּב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת אֱהוּב אֶת הַצְּדָקוֹת אֱהוּב
 אֶת הַמַּיִשְׂרִים אֱהוּב אֶת הַתּוֹכְחוֹת וּמִתְרַחֵק מִן
 הַכְּבוֹד וְלֹא מֵגִיֵּס לְבוֹ בְּתַלְמוּדוֹ וְאֵינוֹ שׂוֹמֵחַ
 בְּהוֹרָאָה נוֹשֵׂא בְּעַל עִם חֲבֵרוֹ וּמְכַרְיעוֹ לְכַף
 זְכוּת וּמַעֲמִידוֹ עַל הָאֱמֶת וּמַעֲמִידוֹ עַל הַשְּׁלוֹם
 וּמִתְיָשֵׁב לְבוֹ בְּתַלְמוּדוֹ שׂוֹאֵל וּמְשִׁיב שׂוֹמֵעַ
 וּמוֹסִיף הַלּוּמֵד עַל מְנַת לְלַמֵּד וְהַלּוּמֵד עַל מְנַת
 לְעֲשׂוֹת הַמַּחְפִּים אֶת רַבּוֹ וְהַמְּכַוֵּן אֶת שְׁמוּעָתוֹ
 וְהַאֹמֵר דְּבַר בְּשֵׁם אֹמְרוֹ הָא לְמַדְתָּ כָּל הָאֹמֵר
 דְּבַר בְּשֵׁם אֹמְרוֹ מְבִיא גְּאֻלָּה לְעוֹלָם שְׁנֹאמֵר
 (אֶסְתֵּר ב) וְתֹאמֵר אֶסְתֵּר לְמַלְךְ בְּשֵׁם מְרַדְכֵי:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה ו

Torah is greater than the priesthood or sovereignty, for sovereignty is acquired with thirty virtues, the priesthood with twenty-four, and Torah is acquired with forty-eight qualities. These are: study, listening, verbalizing, comprehension of the heart, awe, fear, humility, joy, purity, serving the sages, companionship with one's contemporaries, debating with one's students, tranquility, study of the scriptures, study of the Mishnah, minimizing engagement in business, minimizing socialization, minimizing pleasure, minimizing sleep, minimizing talk, minimizing gaiety, slowness to anger, good heartedness, faith in the sages, acceptance of suffering, knowing one's place, satisfaction with one's lot, qualifying one's words, not taking credit for oneself, likableness, love of G-d, love of humanity, love of charity, love of justice, love of rebuke, fleeing from honor, lack of arrogance in learning, reluctance to hand down rulings, participating in the burden of one's fellow, judging him to the side of merit, correcting him, bringing him to a peaceful resolution [of his disputes], deliberation in study, asking and answering, listening and illuminating, learning in order to teach, learning in order to observe, wising one's teacher, exactness in conveying a teaching, and saying something in the name of its speaker. Thus we have learned: One who says something in the name of its speaker brings redemption to the world, as is stated (Esther 2:22), "And Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai."

The mishnah begins by saying that Torah is greater than **הכהונה**, the priesthood. A story is told in the gemara (Yoma 71b) about a *kohen gadol am ha'aretz* who walked out of the Beit HaMikdash after Yom Hakippurim one year, accompanied by masses of Clal Yisrael. Once they saw Shmaya and Avtalyon, however, the people rushed to walk instead with the great *chachamim*.

Well-known is the maxim in Massechet Horayot that a *mamzer talmid chacham* is given priority over a *kohen gadol am ha'aretz*. This law has practical implications, for instance, in the laws of *tzeddaka*. Bear in mind that the kohen is also to be treated with honor and is to be given certain priorities over non-kohanim, specifically in those areas that are referred to as things of “*keddusha*.” For instance, he is given the first aliya to the Torah and to lead the Birkat Hamazon. This right, however, is theoretically superceded where the non-kohen is a *talmid chacham* and the kohen is not.

I would like to add another point, which is that Torah can be a source of atonement even during the times in history when we have neither *korbanot* nor *kehuna*. Gemara Menachot says regarding studying the laws of the sin offering, that it is as if one has offered the *korban* in actuality. Whoever studies the laws of the guilt offering, it is as if he had offered the actual *korban*.

ומן המלכות

The next part of our mishnah deals with Torah's superiority to *malchut*. Massechet Moed Katan 16b says that when David HaMelech sat before his Rabbi, he never sat upon pillows and cushions, but rather on the ground. Once his Rabbi died and David became the students' Rabbi, when teaching he continued to sit only upon the ground. The students asked now that he was their Rabbi, that he sit instead upon cushions. For this is what their previous Rabbi had done. David, however, declined. He was a King in Israel, yet when it came to Torah, he humbled himself completely.

One of the 613 mitzvot is that the King write a sefer Torah, have it with him wherever he goes, and read it on a daily basis. This is one mitzvah where the Torah explicitly tell us its reason, which is “*so that he shall learn to fear Hashem, his God, to safeguard all the words of this Torah and these statutes, to do them. Lest his heart be raised above his brethren, and lest he stray from the commandments right or left.*” Our Rabbis explain further that when he goes out to war, he should take it with him. So, too, when “enters,” he should bring it inside. The same applies to when he is

sitting in judgement and when he reclines to eat. At all times, the sefer torah should be “opposite his eyes.”

The reason for imposing these rules on the kin is to remind him that all he does should be for the sake of Torah and to emphasize that being a king does not make him more important than Torah. Rather, royalty is subordinate to Torah and its laws, just as everything else is.

Let us now examine what the Kaddosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe Rabbeinu when sending him to Egypt: *“And the Lord’s wrath was kindled against Moses, and He said, “Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak, and behold, he is coming forth toward you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart.”*

The context of the above verse, as I read it, is that Moshe did not wish to return to Egypt to be Hashem’s emissary in redeeming Yisrael because he thought that Aharon should be appointed instead. In my opinion, the reason Moshe thought he should defer to his brother is that he believed that Aharon was greater than him, for he was destined to be a kohen. After all, one is obligated to honor the kohen.

Hashem’s answered Moshe, *“When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”* In other words, Moshe is being told that “You will be receiving the Torah, bringing it down to Am Yisrael. Then, you will be teaching it to them. Given that the importance of Torah supercedes that of *kehuna*, once Aharon learns that this will be your role, he will rejoice in the fact that you, rather than himself, will be their redeemer.

Aharon would rejoice because he, as well, has “a portion” in the holy Torah, in that it writes many times that Hashem spoke jointly to Moshe and to Aharon. There are even two instances where it is written that Hashem spoke to Aharon alone. Furthermore, Aharon was from the Tribe of Levi, who engaged in Torah even during the period of slavery and were not subjugated to the extent that the rest of Yisrael was. Aharon was therefore uniquely qualified to appreciate the value of Torah. Aharon honored his brother greatly, because of the major “portion” Moshe would have in the Torah.

Just as the value and beauty of a fine diamond will not necessarily be appreciated by just anyone, so too with Torah. A certain degree of familiarity, sensitivity, and expertise is required before one can distinguish between one diamond and another. Similarly, it often takes a Torah scholar to truly appreciate the value of another Torah scholar.

My own father used to tell me of the time when the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Benviniste came to Morocco and paid a visit to the grandfather, Rabbi Yehudah Pinto, father of Rabbi Chaim, treating him with extreme honor. Upon his return to Yerushalayim, he began to send money to Rabbi Yehudah on a regular basis.

Rabbi Benviniste's talmidim were curious as to why he was so deferential to Rabbi Yehudah. After all, didn't Rabbi Chaim Benviniste have *zechut Avoth*, just as Rabbi Yehudah? "True," he answered, "but only one who himself has *zechut Avoth* has the ability to properly appreciate it in others." Because he had it himself, he was particularly attuned to Rabbi Yehudah Pinto's *zechut Avoth*. "Which explains," he said, "why I subordinate myself to him to this degree."

**והתורה נקנית בארבעים ושמונה דברים בתלמוד . . . והאומר דבר
בשם אומרו . . . שנאמר ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי:**

The next part of the mishnah says that Torah is acquired in forty-eight ways and then lists what those ways are. The first is "Talmud" and the last is "to say things in the name of the one who first said it."

I wonder why the Tanna chose placed "Talmud" at the head of the list and "to say things in the name of the one who first said it" at its end. It's curious as well that, while neither a proof text nor a rationale is given for the other forty-seven, the last one is given both. Regarding that one, after listing that of is one of the forty-eight ways of acquiring Torah, the mishnah says: *Thus we have learned: One who says something in the name of its speaker brings redemption to the world, as is stated (Esther 2:22), "And Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai."* Note that the mishnah is not specifically showing why "saying things on the name of he who first said it" is one of the ways of acquiring Torah, but is stating instead that it brings redemption to the world. Then, it brings its proof text. On a superficial level, at least, it seems that something's "bringing redemption to the world" has little connection to its being a means of acquiring Torah.

To me, it seems obvious that the Tanna wishes to tell us something that on the one hand seems obvious and on the other, somewhat cryptic.

The first means of acquiring Torah is "talmud." To me, this is telling us the obvious, which is that one cannot become a "ben Torah" without putting in the time and effort to sit and study. There are those who seem to have not fully grasped this. One sometimes encounters individuals who are blessed with

extraordinary abilities to grasp their learning easily and quickly, without very much effort. They hold up their heads, trying to look like true scholars when, in fact, they barely know how to learn. All they've done is glanced here and there, memorizing a few midrashim, pasukim, and snippets of gemara. They know how to make it seem to the outside that they've mastered *kol hatorah kulah*, Torah's entire corpus. In fact, they've never gone deeply into any of the most complex of talmudic arguments, nor have they mastered even one area of Torah in its entirety.

The *tanna*, then, is teaching us that the above is not the way. Rather, one must sit and study. Even HaMelech David said (Tehillim 27:4), **שְׁבַתִּי בְּבַיִת יְיָ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי לַחַוֹת בְּנֵעַם יְיָ וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ**, *that I seek-that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the pleasantness of the Lord and to visit His Temple every morning*. David is declaring that his life desire is to “sit in the house of the lord.” Although the context seems to indicate that he refers to being in the Beit HaMikdash, “to sit in the house of the lord” can be taken to mean a desire to entirely dedicate oneself to Torah study. In fact, as we saw from a gemara we quoted earlier (Moed Katan 16b), David did in fact dedicate himself to sitting before his Rebbi, Rav Ira HaYairi.

One cannot even begin to embark upon serious Torah study before committing oneself to do so inside of a Beit Midrash, according to a regular schedule, at specifically designated times. Lacking this, all the ability in the world will not help.

In addition to investing great effort into one's learning, one must also take care that whenever he repeats that which he heard from someone else, proper attribution is given. To not do so is considered *gezel*, the theft of other people's Torah. And, as we know, as great as the other sins were of the generation of the flood, it was on account of *gezel* that their judgment was sealed. Doing exactly the opposite accomplishes exactly the opposite. That is, by giving credit to whoever said something first, one keeps the world going, redeeming it from destruction.

We now know why the *tanna* left for last, “To say it in the name of the one who originally said it.” For, even if one were to have acquired all fort-seven traits mentioned beforehand, were he to have not acquired the last trait, the forty-seven other traits won't help. For, he would in any event be contributing to the destruction of the world.

We now know as well why the *tanna* brought a proof from *tanach*. For, the trait itself comes from *tanach*: “*And Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai.*” The *tanna* has thereby fulfilled his own teaching, for he quotes it in the name of the one who first said it. The story of Esther is one where the world was saved. Perhaps one could say that it occurred due to the trait of “saying it in the name of the one who said it first.”

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

במיעוט שינה

One of the traits to be acquired, in the words of our mishnah, is “*limiting one’s sleep.*” Rabbi Chaim Pinto was known to have slept very little. He would awaken himself nightly, in the middle of the night, to learn Torah. “Sleeping is a waste of time,” he would say. “One should do as little of it as possible.”

Rabbi Chaim’s attendant, Rabbi Aharon ben Chaim, would awake as well in the middle of night, so as to prepare the coffee that the Rav would drink to help keep his eyes open. One night, he heard two voices coming out of the Rav’s room. One voice he recognized as that of the Rav. But whose was the other one? One thing he did realize, though, was that whoever the other voice belonged to, he and the Rav were learning together.

Rabbi Aharon figured that whoever it was, it would only be proper for him to prepare a cup of coffee for him as well. So, in he walked, two cups of coffee in hand.

The next morning, after *Shaharit*, Rabbi Chaim summoned his attendant. “Why did you bring two cups last night?” “I heard the voice of the person who was learning with you and wanted to serve him as well!” answered the puzzled Rabbi Aharon.

Head bowed, Rabbi Chaim looked into his attendant’s eyes: “Fortunate are you, my son, that you merited to hear the voice of Eliyahu Hanavi. It was he who was with me last night.”

“I must order you, however, that you are not to say a word of this to anyone else,” continued Rabbi Chaim.

Fulfilling his master’s command, as long as Rabbi Chaim was alive, Rabbi Aharon never told a soul. Only after Rabbi Chaim had passed to the world that is “entirely good,” did he reveal the secret.

גְּדוּלָהּ תּוֹרָה שֶׁהִיא נוֹתֶנֶת חַיִּים לְעֹשֶׂיהָ בְּעוֹלָם
הַזֶּה וּבְעוֹלָם הַבָּא שְׁנַאֲמַר (משלי ד) כִּי חַיִּים
הֵם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם וּלְכֹל בְּשָׂרוֹ מְרַפָּא וְאוֹמֵר (שם ג)
רְפָאוֹת תְּהִי לְשַׂרְךָ וְשִׁקּוּי לְעַצְמוֹתֶיךָ. וְאוֹמֵר
(שם) עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתוֹמְכֶיהָ
מְאֹשֵׁר. וְאוֹמֵר (שם א) כִּי לוֹיֵת חֵן הֵם לְרֹאשְׁךָ
וְעֵנְקִים לְגִרְגְּרוֹתֶיךָ. וְאוֹמֵר (שם ד) תִּתֵּן לְרֹאשְׁךָ
לוֹיֵת חֵן עֲטָרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת תִּמְגֶּנֶךָ. וְאוֹמֵר (שם ט)
כִּי בִי יִרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ וְיִוָּסִיפוּ לְךָ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים. וְאוֹמֵר
(שם ג) אֶרֶךְ יָמִים בְּיַמֶּינָהּ בְּשִׂמְאוֹלָהּ עֵשֶׂר
וְכַבּוֹד וְאוֹמֵר (שם) כִּי אֶרֶךְ יָמִים וְשָׁנוֹת חַיִּים
וְשָׁלוֹם יִוָּסִיפוּ לְךָ וְאוֹמֵר (שם) דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי נֹעַם
וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה ז

Great is Torah, for it gives life to its observers in this world, and in the World To Come. As is stated (Proverbs 4:22): “For they are life to he who finds them, and a healing to all his flesh.” And it says (ibid. 3:8): “It shall be health to your navel, and marrow to your bones.” And it says (3:18): “She is a tree of life for those who hold fast to her, and happy are those who support her.” And it says (1:9): “For they shall be a garland of grace for your head, and necklaces about your neck.” And it says (4:9): “She shall give to your head a garland of grace, a crown of glory she shall grant you.” And it says (9:11): “With me, your days shall be increased, and years of life shall be added to you.” And it says (3:16): “Long days in her right hand; in her left, wealth and honor.” And it says (3:2): “For long days, years of life and peace, they shall add to you.”

The mishnah says, “Great is Torah, that it gives life who those who ‘do’ it (לעושיה) in this world and the next.” I wonder why it uses the word “לעושיה” rather than למקיימה or ללמדיה. Given that לעושיה sometimes implies “making” something, I wonder why the mishnah believed this to be the right verb. Wasn’t it the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* who “made” the Torah, rather than Yisrael?

Let us explore another use of “לעושיה.” It is said of Avram that he departed Charan for Canaan and took with him Sarai, Lot, the possessions they had acquired, and הנפש אשר עשו. According to Rashi, הנפש אשר עשו in its plain meaning means the household they had acquired. הנפש would then refer to “household” and עשו means “acquired.” Its midrashic sense, according to Rashi, is that עשו continues to mean “acquired,” but הנפש now refers to the “souls that they had made (or acquired)” through conversion. Reish Lakish says in Sanhedrin 99b that whoever teaches Torah to someone else’s son is considered as if he had “made” him, the proof coming from the verse הנפש אשר עשו.

The difficulty in the verse is that once when assumes that עשו means “make” and הנפש means “people” or “souls,” then one is left puzzled as to what the verse is saying. For, wasn’t it the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* and not Avram who “made” these people? As I see it, this is one reason why the midrashim understand it to refer to Avram’s having taught them Torah, drawn them near the *Shechina*, and converting them. The women, in turn, were drawn to conversion by Sarai, who taught them the mitzvot relevant to women.

The Torah was given to Yisrael in order that they fulfill it. When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah, the ministering angels attempted to block his taking it below. “It should remain in the heavens!” they protested, for they wanted it to themselves. “But, you cannot possibly fulfill it!” Moshe protested. “Torah speaks of the worldly and physical, that which is permitted to eat and that which is forbidden. You, meanwhile, neither eat nor drink!” He continued, “The Torah tells of what one must stay away from and what one must do. You meanwhile do not have a *yetzer hara*.” In short, “The Torah was written so that it be carried out. Until this point, that has not yet occurred. If it remains here with you, it will be as if it had been written for nothing. As long as it remains in heaven, there will never be an opportunity for the Torah to have been fulfilled.” He continued, “Were it to descend with me below, to the place of flesh and blood man, it’s at least possible that it will be carried out.” With that, Moshe prevailed and returned to the physical world, together with the Torah.

This is the meaning of saying that the Torah gives life לעושיה. As long as it sits in the corner, with no one to fulfill what it contains, then it is as if the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu's* “thoughts” have not been actualized. When Yisrael does fulfill the Torah, however, then it is as if the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu's* “thoughts” have gone from potential to realization.

One could then say that Yisrael then becomes, in a sense, the Torah's עושיה. I have another thought on this as well. As long as the Torah had not yet been given, no additional innovations could supplement it. Once it was given to Yisrael, who then engaged in its study, new insights, new halachot, and new approaches could supplement it. New structures were built. Through Yisrael's study, the Torah would be expanded. This is another reason why the Tanna says עושיה.

Through fulfilling its mitzvot and studying its content, the Torah becomes “renewed.” The Torah would otherwise be bereft, “left in a corner,” one might say. Actively studied and “lived,” though, it becomes something else. It is a Torah from which every letter's crown spills forth fundamental new halachot. Tens of thousands of volumes would be written by its students. Could an עשיה greater than this be imagined?

We now have a better perspective on why it is said of the souls drawn to Judaism by Avram and Sarai, ומעלה עליהם הכתוב כאלו עשאו, that it is as if they were “made” (or “acquired”) by them.

Rambam writes that *teshuva* draws close those who are afar: “Only yesterday, this one was despised before Hashem, disgusting, distance, an abomination. Today, he is beloved, pleasant, a friend.” That is to say, he is a different person entirely. He's not the one he was just the day before. *Teshuva* has transformed him into a different human being.

With that, we can reexamine our Beraitha. “Great is Torah in that it gives life to עושיה.” Let us say that this refers to those who have done *teshuva* and have thereby become new creations. The Torah has given them new life, one that they did not have prior to their returning to Him in *teshuva*.

גדולה תורה שהיא נותנת חיים לעושיה

I would like to return to the part of the mishnah that declares, *Great is Torah, that it gives life who those who “do” it (לעושיה) in this world and the next.* The mishnah seems to be saying that Torah gives life to its practitioners. Yet,

that does not seem to be consistent with our experience. Do all Torah devotees, in fact, wind up living long lives? Isn't it quite common to hear of *tzaddikim* whose lives were tragically short? Given that this is the case, how then have we witnessed in them a fulfillment of *Great is Torah, that it gives life לעושיה in this world and the next?*

My approach to answering the question is to look at those whose lifestyle is opposed to Torah ideals and whose definition of חיים differs greatly from the Torah perspective. I refer to those who reject Torah entirely, neither practicing it nor studying it, and whose lives are lived without constraint. The more uninhibited they can become, the more they indulge in the physical, the more they feel they are experiencing life to its fullest. As long as they have the strength for such indulgences, they feel "alive."

When people such as this approach old age, as their strength wanes and they can no longer engage the physical world as in their youth, they become greatly distressed. What are they to do? Engage themselves in Torah? How? Given that they had not done so in their youth, from where would they have the skills to do so at this point? Engage in physical activity? They don't have the strength.

Their lives they consider essentially over. They find their existence purposeless. They sink into despair, looking for new ways to "kill" time. The pleasures of their youth are practically forgotten and, in any event, cannot do them any good at this point. Not only have they not brought him any benefit that remains with them to this day, but quite the opposite: They sapped him of his strength.

If individuals such as these give any thought to Torah in their old age at all, it is to regret that they did not study it in their youth. And, to regret that they had not lived a Torah life.

Had he lived even a hundred years, he still would not have found any benefit from a lifestyle such as this. He might have found it satisfying for twenty or thirty years, in the prime of his young adulthood, but not beyond. The rest of his life, he feels directionless, full of sorrow regret that he did not pursue the spiritual path that would have ultimately left him with so much more in his older years.

The rest of his years are spent in a condition not to be classified as "life," for a life a despair and regret cannot rightfully be called "life." From his perspective, death would be preferable.

Talmidei Chachamim, however, whose life is devoted to Torah and to service of Hashem, take advantage of every moment. They don't wish to waste even a second. Even if they are working at regular jobs and unable to spend the entire day in the Beit HaMidrash, they still enjoy a life of the spirit. They participate in Torah classes daily, every morning and evening.

When the working man who dedicated so much of his free time to regular study reaches his older years and feels he no longer has the strength he once did, what does he do when he retires? He seizes the opportunity and adds even more learning to his day. Now, he can reap the benefit of the time he had invested in learning Torah throughout his younger years. As he looks back on that time, he doesn't have regret, but quite the opposite, he has pleasure.

He is not looking back on years and years dedicated to the pursuit of emptiness, but rather to acquisition of Torah knowledge and skills. Now, when he has more time, he can draw upon that wisdom and gain more and more from his longer and more frequent Torah sessions.

When a person such as this finds himself ready to pass on from this world, he dies with a sense of peace. He knows that he has fulfilled his mission on this earth.

Those who themselves do not live a life of Torah will generally not educate their children to the ways of Torah, of course. When they reach their older years, they can then gaze upon the fruits of the little they had done towards their children's having a Torah education. Once they themselves have realized the truth, that a life spent in pursuit of food, drink, and physical pleasure is pretty much a waste, there is not very much for them to do to rectify what they had done to their children. How much more despair does one feel when one sees something like this, that they are personally responsible for the path that their own children are now on!

Some people try to salve their hurt by pretending to once again be young, dressing to the hilt, searching for new ways to kill even more of their time.

Those who live according to Torah, however, direct their households to Torah as well. They reach their elder years and, instead of being disappointed by what they see in their children, they take pleasure and pride. They see children and grandchildren following the path of Torah and mitzvot.

They experience their children and grandchildren treating them with honor. The grandfather can learn with his grandchildren. In short, a life of pleasure.

And all of it is due to the merit of Torah.

Could it honestly be said of someone who lived even one hundred years, but spent most of that time in the hospital, that he had lived what could truly be called “long life”? To my mind, certainly not! Life is measured not by its quantity, but by its quality. Even he whose life was short in quantity but long in quality has had “long life.” Conversely, he whose life was long in years, but filled with difficulty and pain, has had “short life” -- according to my estimation.

There are three (or four) things in life, the experience of which is “hell on earth,” according to our Rabbis. One is being trapped in a terrible marriage (*lit. “a bad wife.”*). Shlomo HaMelech says *One thing I find more bitter than death, and that is a woman . . . who is snares, whose heart is nets, whose arms are chains.* Yevamoth 63b says that the verse applies to a “bad wife.” Regarding he whose wife dominates him, Beitzah 32b says that “his life is no life.”

From the above, we see that, potentially, even one whose life is long in days could be someone “whose life is not a life.”

Shlomo HaMelech reigned as king of Israel for forty years and did not live a particularly long life, In terms of quality, though, his years were not “short.” His were times of peace and tranquility in Eretz Yisrael, as we see from I Melachim 5:1-5:

And Solomon reigned over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt, they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and sixty measures of meal. Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts, and deer, and fallow deer, and fatted fowl. For he had dominion over all (the inhabitants) on this side of the river, from Tiphseh even to Gaza, over all the kings on this side of the river, and he had peace on all sides around. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon.

One other example from Sefer Melachim:

And all of the king's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the utensils of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none was of silver, [since] it was reckoned with as nothing in the days of Solomon.

As I see it, these sources all point to what happens when one's life is conducted according to Torah. This is why the Tanna brings the verse **יוסיפו לך: כי ארך ימיו ושנות חיים ושלו** After all, this is what the Torah offers to those who live by it: *chaim* in its true sense, coupled with years of tranquility. Because it's not a life filled with anguish and pain, it is rightfully considered "long life" irrespective of its actual length.

We have seen and heard of many tzaddikim and *kedoshim* whose lives were short in years but so filled with accomplishment that for anyone else, seventy or eighty years would not have sufficed. Abbaye and Rabbah would be examples.

According to an account in Massechet Rosh Hashahana, Rabbah lived only forty years, while Abbaye lived for sixty. Yet, has anyone who ever picked up a gemara not heard of these two greats?

Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, the Holy Arizal, the most important latter-day teacher of Torah's hidden aspects is another example. He is said to have died at the age of thirty-eight.

Rabbi Moshe Isserlis of Cracow, a contemporary of the Arizal, lived only fifty-two years. Yet, during that short lifetime he wrote, among other things, the definitive statement of Ashkenazic law, the commentary to Shulchan Aruch known as "Ramah." It is indispensable even to the Moroccan community, which also follows some of his rulings.

Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto, also died young, at the age of thirty-nine. The profundity and quantity of his output was astounding, even without taking into account how short his life was. He was a master of all aspects of Torah.

Of all these great people, it could truly be said that in truth, they had enjoyed "long life." For, every moment of their lives was spent immersed in Torah, which they then transmitted to later generations.

כי חיים הם למוצאיהם ולכל בשרו מרפא

Our mishnah quotes Mishlei: *For they are life to he who finds them, and a healing to all his flesh.* Shlomo HaMelech is telling us something wondrous. In order to put it into proper perspective, let us examine two more verses from Mishlei: *If you seek it like silver, and hunt for it like treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and you will find the knowledge of God.*

The verses above emphasize that Torah knowledge can be attained only through effort. I see it as teaching as well that it is not possible to live a life of Torah without a significant measure of hard work and hardship. Torah is like an object waiting to be found, but which can be located only by those who seek it in earnest. Those who are unaware of it, though, could likely walk right past and never notice it had been there all along.

Another example of a Sefer Torah being “found” is *I have found a Scroll of the Torah in the Temple of Hashem* (II Melachim 22:8). Hilkiyah, the Cohen Gadol, gave it to Shapham, the scribe, who then read it to King Yoshiyahu, who was deeply affected by hearing the words of the Sefer Devarim Admonition read to him from that scroll.

Another example where the Torah is associated with something being “found” within it is Nechemiah 8:14. There, it says: *They found written in the Torah that Hashem had commanded through the hand of Moshe . . .*

In a sense then, we see that Torah is something that must be sought out; it’s not as if it’s sitting out in the street somewhere, in full view, just waiting to be stumbled upon. If one truly wishes to live by it, he has no choice but to strive and to seek it out.

Our Rabbis describe Avraham Avinu’s endeavoring to know Hashem, to the extent that he was finally able to grasp the truth. The Rambam describes it as a logical process, beginning when Avraham was three years old and culminating when he was forty:

Once this mighty man was weaned, he began to ponder and to contemplate. Although still a child, day and night he would wonder: “How could this sphere remain in constant motion without being directed? And who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it could not be rotating all on its own!”

Abraham had neither a teacher nor even someone to answer his questions. Rather, he was immersed amongst the foolish idolaters of Ur Kasdim. Everyone, his mother, father, and even himself were worshippers of idols.

Still, his mind continued to explore. He gained in understanding until the point where he would ultimately arrive at the truth.



ח רבי שמעון בן יהודה משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר הנוי והכח והעושר והכבוד והחכמה והזקנה והשיבה והבנים נאה לצדיקים ונאה לעולם שנאמר (שם טז) עטרת תפארת שיבה בדרך צדקה תמצא. ואומר (שם כ) תפארת בחורים כוחם והדר זקנים שיבה. ואומר (שם יד) עטרת חכמים עשרם. ואומר (שם יז) עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם. ואומר (ישעיה כד) וחפרה הלבנה ובושה החמה כי מלך יהוה צבאות בהר ציון ובירושלים ונגד זקניו כבוד. רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר אלו שבע מדות שמנו חכמים לצדיקים כלם נתקיימו ברבי ובבניו:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה ח

Rabbi Shimon the son of Judah would say in the name of Rabbi Shimon the son of Yochai: Beauty, strength, wealth, honor, wisdom, sageness, old age and children are becoming to the righteous and becoming to the world. As is stated (Proverbs 16:31): "Old age is a crown of beauty, to be found in the ways of righteousness." And it says (ibid. 20:29): "The beauty of youths is their strength, and the glory of sages is their age." And it says (ibid., 17:6): "The crown of sages are their grandchildren, and the beauty of children their fathers." And it says (Isaiah 24:23): "And the moon shall be abashed and the sun shamed, for the L-rd of hosts has reigned in Zion, and before his elders is glory."

Rabbi Shimon ben Menasia would say: these seven qualities enumerated by the sages for the righteous were all realized in Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] and his sons.

Our Mishnah begins by saying that *Beauty, strength, wealth, honor, wisdom, sagemess, old age and children are becoming to the righteous and becoming to the world.* Although I discussed the matter of wealth in my comments to a previous beraitha (#4), given that the editor of this chapter chose to address the matter again, I will do so as well. Hopefully, something new will come out of it.

As is my practice, I will begin with a few questions.

At first glance, the two beraithot certainly seem contradictory. The first asked: “What is the way of Torah?” and answered: “Bread and salt shall you eat, small measures of water shall you drink, upon the ground should you sleep, and a life of deprivation should you lead.” The second, our beraitha, has Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai saying that for the tzaddikim, wealth is to their benefit.

One could point out as well that, despite what is reported in our beraitha, the picture one gets from several midrashim is that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was not particularly comfortable with the idea of tzaddikim having riches. The two midrashim I have in mind are to be found in Shemot Rabba 52:3. Allow me to summarize them.

One tells of a student of Rabbi Shimon’s, who travelled to a distant land so as to devote himself to business. Returning some time later with great wealth, his former fellow students saw him and were seized with a desire to become wealthy, and so they also wanted to give up on their studies and go off in search of riches. When Rabbi Shimon learned of this, he brought his students to a vast plain. There he prayed to G-d that He cover the entire area with gold, and it was so. “The one whose heart clings to gold,” said their teacher, “should take what he wants. But know that the one who now takes of this gold loses his share in eternal life.” No hands reached out to take the gold, and his students abandoned the idea of exchanging the precious good of the Torah for gold (Midrash Rabba Pekudei).

The second story is not about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, but another tanna, Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta. One week, it was already Erev Shabbat and he was still lacking the means with which to purchase Shabbat’s basic needs. So,

he turned to Hashem -- and was answered with a precious jewel that fell from heaven. He took the stone, brought it to a pawnshop, and used it as security for a loan of cash.

Seeing her husband walking in the door with his newly-purchased Shabbat needs, his wife asked, “Where did that come from?”

Rabbi Shimon then related to her the whole story.

“Well, I have no interest in benefiting from that money even in the least!” exclaimed his wife.” “What, do you want to see in the next world that your table is lacking, while that of your colleagues’ is full?” she continued.

With that, Rabbi Shimon embarked to visit his Rebbi, Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, and told him all that had occurred. “You tell her that if in fact your table winds up lacking, I will fill it from mine” Rabbi Yehuda responded.

Rabbi Shimon now went to tell his wife what the great Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi had promised. “Let the two of us go and visit Rabbi Yehuda,” she answered.

“Rabbeinu,” asked Rabbi Shimon’s wife of Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, “Is it a fact that one will be able to see one’s friends in the next world? Isn’t it actually that each and every tzaddik has a world of his own?”

Hearing this, Rabbi Shimon went to redeem the precious jewel. Immediately, a *malaach* descended to retrieve it.

In light of the two stories I just told you of, it’s a wonder that Rabbi Shimon would have said that money is beneficial to *tzaddikim*.

One answer I could suggest is that wealth comes in different forms. It sometimes comes to a tzaddik through a natural process; at others it will be due to a specific request for Divine intervention. The type that comes through the way of the world does not bother the tzaddik, for this is what the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* chose to do. And, nothing bad can come of what He has chosen.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, in praising the benefit of the tzaddik’s and the world’s having riches, had in mind that which is gained through the natural order. David HaMelech, Shlomo HaMelech, and Rabbeinu HaKodesh (Rabbi Yehuda Ha Nassi) all acquired their riches in this fashion. Rabbi Yehudah, of course, was a member of an elite family that had close ties to royalty.

When, on the other hand, the wealth comes in response to a direct prayer, which is what happened in the two stories told above, it will not be in the

tzaddik's best interests. As I see it, this is why in the case of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, he warned his students that they would be diminishing their share in the next world.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* has His own considerations as to whom to give wealth to and to whom not. Only He knows what is in the heart of man. He knows as well that wealth is a *nisayon* not every tzaddik will be able to handle. He therefore chooses to withhold it from certain tzaddikim, while granting it to others, specifically those whom He knows to be capable of passing that test.

An example of the latter, in my view, is Chanokh, Of him, it is said, *And Chanokh walked with Elokim; then he was no more, for Elokim had taken him.* (Bereishit 4:25) The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 25:1) comments as to why the verse adds that Chanokh *was no more, for Elokim had taken him.* Its answer is that Chanokh shifted between periods of acting as a tzaddik and that of acting as a *rasha*. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* therefore chose to remove him from this earth at a point where his conduct was as a tzaddik.

I would now like to return to the story of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta told above, He and his wife went to speak to Rabbeinu Hakodesh , his wife said whatever she said, and this was followed by his returning the precious stone. I wonder though, why didn't Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta even ask Rabbeinu Hakodesh how it was that he was being told to shed himself of the riches, yet Rabbeinu himself -- the very person who was telling him to get rid of the jewel -- was himself a holder of great wealth?

Allow me to suggest that the reason he never asked that question was because he understood the distinction between riches granted by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* not preceded by pleading for it and that which comes in response to a direct request. He understood that the first is good for the *tzaddik*, while the second will diminish his share in the next world.

In support of Rabbi Shimon's principle, the *tanna* of our mishnah brings several verses from Mishlei. That he brings them from Mishlei carries special significance, in that Shlomo HaMelech -- traditionally understood to be Mishlei's author -- never requested wealth from the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. Rather, his riches came not through his specific petition, but as Hashem's own idea. As I read it, a midrash in Shir HaShirim Rabbah bears this out.

The midrash begins with a verse of Melachim saying that HaShem appeared to Shlomo HaMelech in a dream. The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* offered to grant him

one request. Shlomo thought to himself: “If I ask for silver, gold, precious jewels, and pearls, He will give them to me. Instead, I will ask for wisdom -- and all will be included.” This wish was expressed in the continuation of Melachim, *Grant Your servant a discerning heart . . .*

The Beraitha therefore concludes with the words of Rabbi Shimon ben Menassieh, that the seven qualities enumerated by the sages for tzaddikim were all realized in Rebbi and his sons. Another way of saying this is to say that Rebbi and his sons were worthy of all these great traits and that the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* knew that they would withstand the test.

Certain tzaddikim are described as having lacked certain qualities, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya being one of them. [Although the gemara seems to conclude that this was ultimately something generally beneficial to Torah scholars, as it leads to superior retention of one’s wisdom,] Rabbi Joshua is described as having been particularly unattractive physically. To me, this is to be understood as his having “lacked” a certain quality enjoyed by other scholars. To me, it demonstrates how the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* considers which traits are best denied to certain scholars and which are best given to others. All, of course, is based upon His precise calculation as to what is best.

Our mishnah says that the specific qualities it enumerates *are becoming to the righteous and becoming to the world*. Related is the Rabbinic adage that the *Shechina* rests only upon those who are wise, brave, wealthy, and tall. Of the Kohen Gadol, the Rabbis say that he is supposed to exceed his fellow kohanim in beauty, strength, wisdom, and wealth.

In the times of Shlomo HaMelech, the Jewish People lived in Eretz Yisrael in a situation of relative calm and ease. In the account of Sefer Melachim, *And Yehudah and Yisrael dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon*. This was due, as I see it, to their having the lofty qualities described earlier. The qualities will be shared as well by the Melech HaMashiach, may he come soon. At that time, the great things promised by the Torah will be enjoyed by all. Yisrael will dwell securely in their own land.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

והזקנה

The mishnah speaks of **והזקנה**, old age, as being becoming of the righteous. When Rabbi Chaim Pinto reached the age of 84, the sages of that generation wanted to test him, to see whether he was still in full command of his Torah faculties. They dispatched one of their more junior Rabbanim, armed with a particularly difficult *tosafot*. The exam would be whether Rabbi Chaim still had the facility to clearly explain it.

As the young man entered Rabbi Chaim's presence, he was seized with trembling. Rabbi Chaim's face shone as if it were entirely aflame. Rabbi Chaim turned to him, asking what was it he needed. The young fellow was so filled with awe, that all he could say was that he had come merely to greet him.

Laughing, Rabbi Chaim told him, "Were it really as you said, but I think that the actual reason you came here was that you and your yeshiva colleagues were stuck on a *tosafot* and figured you'd bring it to me, to test whether my age had gotten the best of me!"

Rabbi Chaim continued, "I wonder though, have the words of our sages regarding matters such as these eluded you? Is it not written in Mishnayoth Keilim regarding Torah scholars, that with advancing age, their wisdom increases? Allow me, then, to explain to you that *tosafot*!"

With that, Rabbi Chaim opened the gemara and dove into the Talmud's mighty waters. Rabbi Chaim then not only clarified the *tosafot* in question, but then proceeded to challenge the student with a host of additional questions on that gemara. Then, Rabbi Chaim resolved them, with the greatest of clarity, citing sources from the gemara's commentaries.

Once their session was over, the student thanked Rabbi Chaim for having enlightened him so greatly. He then begged Rabbi Chaim's forgiveness for the audacity of having come there in order to "test" him.



אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶן קִסְמָא פַּעַם אַחַת הָיִיתִי
 מֵהַלֵּךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּפָגַע בִּי אָדָם אֶחָד וְנָתַן לִי שְׁלוֹם
 וְהִחֲזַרְתִּי לוֹ שְׁלוֹם אָמַר לִי רַבִּי מֵאִיזָה מְקוֹם
 אָתָּה אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ מַעִיר גְּדוֹלָה שֶׁל חַכְמִים וְשֶׁל
 סוֹפְרִים אָנִי אָמַר לִי רַבִּי רְצוֹנָךְ שֶׁתְּדוּר עִמָּנוּ
 בְּמִקְוֵמֵנוּ וְאֲנִי אֶתֶן לְךָ אֶלֶף אֶלְפִים דָּנָרִי זָהָב
 וְאַבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ אִם אָתָּה
 נוֹתֵן לִי כָּל כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וְאַבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת
 שֶׁבַע עוֹלָם אֵינִי דָר אֶלָּא בְּמִקְוֵם תּוֹרָה וְכֵן כָּתוּב
 בְּסֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים עַל יְדֵי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל טוֹב לִי
 תּוֹרַת פִּיךָ מֵאֶלְפֵי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא
 שֶׁבַע שַׁעַת פְּטִירְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם אֵין מְלוּיִן לוֹ לְאָדָם
 לֹא כֶסֶף וְלֹא זָהָב וְלֹא אַבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת
 אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּלִבְךָ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מִשְׁלִי
 ו) בְּהִתְהַלֵּךְךָ תִּנְחָה אוֹתְךָ בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ תִּשְׁמֹר
 עֲלֶיךָ וְהִקִּיצוֹת הִיא תִּשְׁיַחֵךְ בְּהִתְהַלֵּךְךָ תִּנְחָה
 אֶתְךָ בַּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיךָ בְּקִבְרְךָ.
 וְהִקִּיצוֹת הִיא תִּשְׁיַחֵךְ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְכֵן כָּתוּב
 בְּסֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים עַל יְדֵי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל (תְּהִלִּים
 קִיט) טוֹב לִי תּוֹרַת פִּיךָ מֵאֶלְפֵי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף. וְאוֹמֵר
 (חֲגִי ב) לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נֶאֱמַר הִוָּה צְבָאוֹת:
 מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פֶּרֶק ו מִשְׁנֵה ט

Said Rabbi Yossi the son of Kisma: Once, I was traveling and I encountered a man. He greeted me and I returned his greetings. Said he to me: "Rabbi, where are you from?" Said I to him: "From a great city of sages and scholars, am I." Said he to me: "Rabbi, would you like to dwell with us in our place? I will give you a million dinars of gold, precious stones and pearls." Said

I to him: “If you were to give me all the silver, gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would not dwell anywhere but in a place of Torah. Indeed, so is written in the book of psalms by David the king of Israel: ‘I prefer the Torah of Your mouth over thousands in gold and silver’ (Psalms 118:72). Furthermore, when a person passes from this world neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls accompany him, only Torah and good deeds, as is stated (Proverbs 6:22): ‘When you go it will direct you, when you lie down it will watch over you, and when you awaken it shall be your speech.’ ‘When you go it will direct you’---in this world; ‘when you lie down it will watch over you’---in the grave; ‘and when you awaken it shall be our speech’---in the World To Come. Also it says (Chaggai 2:8): ‘Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold, so says the L-rd of Hosts.’ “

I have several questions on this mishnah. The first is why Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma felt it necessary to have us know that these thoughts came to him as he was travelling. Does it really add anything to the message for us to know the entire context, that he happened upon a certain individual, that individual happened to tell him a certain thing, and he then offered his response? The Rabbis of the mishnah are known to have weighed every word. We must therefore assume that these seemingly superfluous details are integral, although it is not immediately apparent how.

Another question of mine is why, despite the reason given as to why he would not want to live there long term, Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma declined to even visit. Isn't one of the obligations of a Torah scholar to travel even to far-flung locations in order to teach Torah to the unschooled? We have the example of Rabbi Chiyya, for instance. He arranged for the writing scrolls of each the five books of *chumash* and each of the six orders of mishnah, to take with him to places that lacked the texts and teachers of Torah. He assigned five students to

each master one of the five books of Torah and six to each master one of the six orders of mishnah. Once they'd learned the material individually, they were to then each teach it to the others.

My questions aside, there is much to be gained from learning our mishnah. One is that even while travelling, the value of learning Torah remains in force. A gemara in Sotah could perhaps be understood to point to this as well, at least as regards to those travelling unaccompanied. The parasha of K'riyat Shema includes the verse, *and you shall speak of them* (words of Torah) *[both] when dwelling in your home and when travelling along the way*. [Although the verse is generally understood to mean that the mitzvah of learning Torah applies at all times of day and in all situations, one could also understand it as reminding us that we must do so even when travelling.]

As Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma travelled “along the way,” he was so obviously engaged in Torah that the fellow who happened to encounter him could immediately recognize that this must be a very special Rabbi. His question “Where are you from?” shows that the fellow had not otherwise recognized Rabbi Yossi. It was his involvement with Torah while walking that showed him to be someone important.

Another lesson we learn, aside from the importance of learning Torah “along the way,” is the extent that the fellow met “along the way” valued Torah. For, he was willing to offer a vast fortune of gold and gems so as to have this great Rabbi live in his midst. The man at least had the trait of one who loved Torah. Despite this, Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma declined his request.

Why would Rabbi Yossi have refused?

My answer is that had the man simply said, “Please come to our city and raise the banner of Torah and *Yahadut*,” Rabbi Yossi would possibly have agreed and gone to that man's city to teach Torah. This was what Rabbi Chiya did in later years and what Rav and Shmuel did in their time as well.

In our case, though, Rabbi Yossi felt that the offer of vast sums was proof that the intent could not have been “for the sake of Heaven.” He thought to himself, “Why are they trying to buy me?”

Throughout the ages, from the time of Moshe to the time of the Tanna'im and Amora'im, the great Rabbis taught Torah to the masses without having allowed themselves to be “purchased for cash” by the townsfolk. The gemara in Massechet Nedarim describes Hashem specifically instructing Moshe Rabbeinu

that the Oral Tradition must be taught for no payment. “Just as I taught for free, so should you!” declared Hashem.

When Rabbi Yossi declined to go to that town, I believe that he had in mind what I said above. Given the offer of significant payment, he felt that nothing good would come out of teaching Torah in that place. He believed that he could not be successful; it simply would not be possible to have a positive impact. Added to that, he would find himself physically distant from centers of Torah. He therefore refused.

As I see it, Rabbi Yossi was also thinking that the offer of so much money and jewels was revealing in other ways as well. It showed that the man must have been one of those types who thinks that giving large sums to tzeddaka can form the entirety of one’s Judaism. People such as these consider themselves exempt from Talmud Torah and all other mitzvot. They think that tzeddaka alone will guarantee their entrance to Olam HaBa, especially if it’s donated to Torah institutions and the poor. In their minds, they believe that doing so exempts them from having to learn Torah themselves.

Note the wording of our mishnah. The interlocutor did not ask, “Would you come to our town to teach us Torah?” Rather, he asked only, “Would you come to our town?”

To Rabbi Yossi, this added up to a certainty that the townspeople had no real interest in Torah or in performing its commandments. Why, then, were they so willing to expend great sums of money in order to have this great Torah scholar dwell in their midst? Only so as to fool themselves and to gain a sense of satisfaction that they had purchased such a prominent Rabbi with their tzeddaka money. Furthermore, the huge sum would give them great leverage against this Rabbi, they thought. He would not dare rebuke them, nor exhort them to study Torah and perform its commandments. Surely, an amount such as this would silence him!

The decision for Rabbi Yossi was therefore obvious: Once a community has a Rav, they are obliged to listen to him. Once they are offering this kind of money and are not asking that he teach them Torah, clearly -- thought Rabbi Yossi -- their intent was only to bribe and to silence him.

The way I read Rabbi Yossi’s thinking, it is reminiscent of what the gemara says regarding a Torah scholar who is beloved by the townspeople. According to the gemara, he shouldn’t delude himself into thinking that their love is because

of his superiority. Rather, it must be that he never rebukes them for neglecting that which is spiritual.

Note how Rabbi Yossi related the story to his students. He said, “It happened that I was once travelling along the way and encountered (פגע בי) a certain individual.” The phrase פגע בי is used as well in relation to encountering the yetzer hara. The gemara in Sukkot 52a says, *If you encounter (פגע בדך) that disgusting one (the yetzer hara), drag him to the Beit HaMidrash.*

What’s the connection between Rabbi Yossi’s thinking and that gemara? Because, just as it is with the yetzer hara, this man did not have Rabbi Yossi’s best interests at heart. Rather, it was because of his own considerations that he wished to drag one of the greats of that generation to his city. To my mind, he wanted to use Rabbi Yossi not in order to establish a yeshiva or to strengthen Torah observance, but to establish a Judaism that consists of little more than the giving of tzeddaka.

The promised riches were only in order to bribe the Rabbi, to ensure that he would be silent in the face of whatever transgressions he sees. Meanwhile, the townsfolk would be able to pride themselves in the great sums contributed to tzeddaka.

I would like to explore this idea further and demonstrate how it can enhance our understanding of the episode of the golden calf that Bnei Yisrael crafted in the wilderness.

Everyone asks the question as to how it was possible that a nation that had witnessed the great miracles done by Hashem in Mitzra’im for their sake, had seen how He had struck down Pharaoh and split the sea, and had heard His voice from the midst of the fire could then swap Him for the statue of a mundane animal. About this figurine, they [the *eirev rav*] would say *These are your gods, Yisrael, who brought you out of the land of Mitzra’im.*

How could this be? I would like to suggest that the answer is the same as that which I theorized regarding our mishnah. Once [segments of] the people saw that Moshe had not yet descended the mountain to teach them Torah, they decided to establish a Judaism limited to the giving of tzeddaka. *And all the nation removed the golden earrings that were upon their ears and brought them to Aharon.*

Of course, this was a mistake. Praiseworthy as it is, *tzeddaka* cannot form the entirety of one’s Judaism. Rather, one must perform all the mitzvot, *tzeddaka* being only one of them.

When, however, one allows tzeddaka to take the place of all other mitzvoth, thinking he has thereby exempted himself from all other aspects of Torah, what results is nothing less than another golden calf.

וכן כתוב בספר תהילים על ידי דוד מלך ישראל: טוב לי תורת פיך
מאלפי זהב וכסף

The next part of the mishnah says, “. . . and so it is written in Sefer Tehillim, by David the melech of Israel: *More beloved to me is the Torah from Your Mouth than countless gold and silver.*”

Why did David Hamelech use the term, **תורת פיך** -- *The Torah from Your Mouth*? One could answer quite simply that one cannot compare he who studies Torah while saying it out loud to one who studies with vocalizing it.

The gemara in Eiruvim tells a story of Beruria, wife of Rabbi Meir. She happened upon a certain scholar who was learning in silence. She gave him a kick and told him, “Torah must be learned out loud. If one doesn’t, it’s ‘unprotected’ and will inevitably be forgotten.”

The gemara then relates what happened to a student of Rabbi Eliezer. His practice was to learn silently. Within three years, he had forgotten what he had studied.

Shulchan Arukh rules: Although there’s a general obligation to make a special blessing on the Torah before learning it, one who has not yet made the blessing is not restricted from merely thinking about it. The reason given by some commentators is that contemplating something is not the same as saying it aloud.

As I understand it, this shows that merely “thinking” in Torah is not considered “learning” in its full sense.

David Hamelech therefore said **טוב לי תורת פיך מאלפי זהב וכסף**. For, only Torah learned out loud is considered more valuable than silver and gold. Only Torah learned aloud is retained in one’s memory.



❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

איני דר אלא במקום תורה

The mishnah quotes Rabbi Yossi as saying, “I don’t wish to dwell anywhere other than a place of Torah.” This reminds me of a story told about Rabbi Chaim Pinto’s son, Rabbi Moshe Aharon. After his father death, he went to live in Essaouira, a place where many generations of his family had lived years before. He decided to do so because of late, many of the area’s Jews had departed and gone to live in Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Moshe Aharon was concerned that the dwelling place of his holy ancestors would become abandoned.

It was only some time later when Rabbi Moshe Aharon would leave Essaouira to live in Casablanca. His reason for moving, he said in his autobiographical diary written in Arabic, was that he wished to live in a place of Torah and so that his children would be raised in a place that had more Jews.

Still, he did not leave his ancestral home until his father appeared to him in a dream. *לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך*: -- *Go, from your land, from the place you were born, from the land of your forefathers to teach your children Torah in some other place.*

So much was Rabbi Moshe Aharon careful with how he did things, that he made sure as soon as he got to Casablanca to make known why he had left Essaouira. Otherwise, thought he, some might think that his reasons were other than for the sake of heaven.



חמשה קנינים קנה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו ואלו הן תורה קנין אחד שמים וארץ קנין אחד אברהם קנין אחד ישראל קנין אחד בית המקדש קנין אחד. תורה מנין דכתיב (משלי ח) יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז. שמים וארץ מנין דכתיב (ישעיה סו) כה אמר יהוה השמים כסאי והארץ הדם רגלי אי זה בית אשר תבנו לי ואי זה מקום מנוחתי. ואומר (תהלים קד) מה רבו מעשיך יהוה כלם בחכמה עשית מלאה הארץ קנינך. אברהם מנין דכתיב (בראשית יד) ויברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברהם לאל עליון קונה שמים וארץ. ישראל מנין דכתיב (שמות טו) עד יעבור עמך יהוה עד יעבור עם זו קנית ואומר (תהלים טז) לקדושים אשר בארץ המה ואדירי כל חפצי בם. בית המקדש מנין דכתיב (שמות טו) מכון לשבתך פעלת יהוה מקדש אדני כוננו ידיך. ואומר (תהלים עח) ויביאם אל גבול קדשו הר זה קנתה ימינו:
משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה י

G-d acquired five acquisitions in His world. These are: one acquisition is the Torah, one acquisition are the heavens and the earth, one acquisition is Abraham, one acquisition is the people of Israel, and one acquisition is the Holy Temple. The Torah, as it is written (Proverbs 8:22), “G-d acquired me as the beginning of His way, before His works of yore.” The heavens and the earth, as it is written (Isaiah 66:1), “So says

G-d: The heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool; what house, then, can you build for Me, and where is My place of rest?"; and it says (Psalms 104:25), "How many are your works, O G-d, You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is filled with Your acquisitions." Abraham, as it is written (Genesis 14:19), "And he blessed him, and said: Blessed be Abram to G-d Most High, acquirer of heavens and earth." Israel, as it is written (Exodus 15:16), "Till Your nation, O G-d, shall pass, till this nation You have acquired shall pass"; and it says (Psalms 16:3), "To the holy who are upon earth, the noble ones, in whom is all My delight." The Holy Temple, as it is written (Exodus 15:17), "The base for Your dwelling that you, G-d, have achieved; the Sanctuary, O L-rd, that Your hands have established"; and it says (Psalms 78:54), "And He brought them to His holy domain, this mount His right hand has acquired."

The mishnah says that Hashem acquired five acquisitions in His world.

I wonder: The entirety of creation is His. What is it, then, about the five things listed in our mishnah that caused them in particular to be singled out as "Hashem's acquisitions"? Isn't everything in creation "His acquisition"?

Another question: The mishnah seems to be saying -- as least as I read it -- that the world was created for the sake of each and every one of these five. (In other words, you wouldn't have needed the five combined; any one of them alone would have justified the creation.) A commentary printed in some editions of the mishnah, referred by them as "Rashi," seems to say this as well.

Yet another question: For each of the five, the mishnah repeats the word "acquisition," telling us that each is a **קנין אחד**. Why was that necessary? Couldn't it have sufficed with telling us at the outset that there were **חמשה קנינים** and then merely list them, without telling us again that each was **קנין אחד**?

Let us say that mishnah had mentioned only the *kinyan* of Torah. Without the mishnah's having explicitly listed even a single one of the other *kinyanim*, all of them would nevertheless follow implicitly.

Allow me to explain.

The heavens and earth (other *kinyanim* in our mishnah) were created for no reason other than Torah. Certain of our Rabbis see this reflected in Yirmiyahu, *So says Hashem, "Had my covenant with the day and night not be; had I not set up the laws of Heaven and earth . . ."* I understand this as meaning not just heaven and earth, but that it extends to all the *kinyanim* mentioned in our mishnah.

For example, Avraham Avinu was loved by the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* because of the Torah he taught. This could be seen in Bereishit (18:19): *For I have loved him. because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the ways of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . .*

Were it not for the merit of Torah, Yisrael would not exist. Famously, a midrash quoted in Massechet Shabbat 88a says that, in advance of offering them the Torah, Hashem suspended Har Sinai over Bnei Yisrael. "If you accept the Torah, well and good. If not, this will be your burial place," said the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*."

The Beit HaMikdash primarily existed for the sake of Torah. I see this by virtue of the fact that the Sanhedrin, who were charged with authoritative interpretation of Torah, assembled nearby the altar. A verse in Yeshiyahu bears this out: *Torah will come from Tzion and the word of Hashem from Yerushalayim*. Malbim, an important commentator to the tanach, understands this to be a reference to the Sanhedrin's rulings being issued from the place of the Beit Hamikdash.

This is how I see all four things listed in our mishnah, that they would have all been understood implicitly had the mishnah gone no further than mentioning "Torah."

Similarly, had the mishnah mentioned only "*Shamayim v'Aratz*." we would no longer have needed to be told about the rest. For, Torah is included in the concept of "*shamayim*." We see this in Tehillim: *You ascended on high, and captured a captivity . . .* This refers to Moshe's having ascended to heaven to capture the Torah. So says Shabbat 89a. Similarly, our Rabbis in that gemara take Tehillim 8:2 outside of its literal sense . . . *You should bestow Your majesty*

upon the heavens and extend it to refer to the Torah. According to that gemara, the angels wanted that Torah remain in the heavens.

Our mishnah groups *shamayim* and *aretz* as one acquisition: **שמים וארץ קנין אחד**. We just learned that “*shamayim*” could be said to subsume some of the other concepts mentioned in the list. I would say that *Aretz* could do so as well. The link is that Avraham, Yitzhak, and the Beit Hamikdash all resided in *Eretz Yisrael*.

I would extend this idea to Avraham as well.

He was the first to teach the principles of Torah and fear of G-d to the pagans of his time. To my mind, Hashem’s love for him was only due to his merit in Torah. Bereishit (18:19) brings this out, as I mentioned above: *For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the ways of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . .*

Shamayim v’aretz could also have been learned from Avraham. As you recall, it is said that Avraham would contemplate the workings of *shamayim v’aretz*. Through doing so, he came to recognize his creator. Rambam considers it fundamental that we know of Avraham’s process of spiritual discovery and describes in significant detail.

In Rambam’s view, Avraham would ponder from a young age how it could be that the heavenly spheres remain in motion without there being a force directing it. For, how could it spin on its own accord? Rambam points out further that Avraham had no one to show him the truth, as he was living amongst idolaters and fools. Even his own parents could provide no guidance. They, like all those around him, fully accepted the pagan notions of that time. Avraham himself would join them in worshipping idols.

Eventually though, Avraham arrived at the true understanding. Through his process of philosophical speculation, brought on by his questions as to the movements of the heavens, he came to the realization that there is one G-d, that He directs the heavens, that He created everything, and that there is no god save for Him.

Had only Avraham been specified, Yisrael’s being an acquisition would have been self evident. This is because he was Am Yisrael’s first forefather, which is how Yeshiyahu refers to him.

The Beit Hamikdash would have been known as well from the mention of Avraham. For, he was asked to sacrifice Yitzhak, his son, upon a mountain that we know as Har HaMoriah, which would later become the Har HaBayit.

I would now like to show you that “Yisrael” would also have pointed to the other “acquisitions.” Yisrael accepted the Torah and were commanded regarding it. Avraham, however, although he performed the commandments, was not commanded to do so. He therefore had the status of “one who does, but is not commanded.”

Perhaps one could say that the *shamayim v'aretz* were created for the sake of Yisrael. The gemara describes a stipulation that *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* made with *Ma'aseh Bereishit*: “If Yisrael accepts the Torah, you shall continue to exist. If not, I will return the world to desolation and nothingness.”

The inclusion of “Beit HaMikdash” alone would have sufficed for us to implicitly know the other acquisitions. For, as the seat of the Sanhedrin, it was the place from which Torah was issued. *If a matter eludes you in judgment, between blood and blood, between judgment and judgment, or between lesion and lesion, words of dispute in your cities, then you shall rise and go up to the place the Lord, your God, chooses. And you shall come to the Levitic kohanim and to the judge who will be in those days, and you shall inquire, and they will tell you the words of judgment.* (Devarim 17:8,9)

One could say that *Shamayim v'Aretz* are subsumed in Mikdash. Note the verse, *Mikdash Hashem, O Lord, [which] Your hands founded.* (Shemot 15:17)

Avraham as well would have been known, for he was prepared to sacrifice Yitzhak upon Har HaMoriah. This, even though the Beit HaMikdash was not there. If so, how much more so would he have done it had the Beit HaMikdash been standing and in operation, with sacrifices being offered there on a regular basis. By that time, *korbanot* would be the primary function on Har HaMoriah.

Yisrael would have been known as well, for Yisrael brought to the Beit HaMikdash the *korbanot* that the Levi'im and Kohanim would sacrifice there. Those sacrifices served to help Yisrael atone for their sins.

Having expanded my questions to their fullest extent, I'd like to now explore what in fact was the beraita's intent.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* could have “acquired” any one of the things listed and thereby “acquired” all the others, according to what I have written. Yet, He chose not to. What would be the reason? So as to grant each of them an added significance.

More significantly, it is to show mankind that each of the things listed exists for its own sake, independent of its relationship to anything else. And that is how we as well are to relate to them. So says the Beraitha.

Not only does it teach that none of these are dependent on any of the others, but also that the *keddusha* of each is equal to that of any of the others. That is, Keddushat Yisrael is equivalent to Keddushat haTorah, Keddushat HaBanim is equal to that of Keddushat HaAvoth, and Keddushat Hatorah equals that of Keddushat HaMikdash. There are, however, gradations to each Keddusha. No one *kinyan* is like another. Therefore, none could be derived from any other.



כָּל מֵה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ לֹא
 בָּרָאוּ אֱלֹהִים לְכַבוֹדוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה מג) כָּל
 הַנִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁמִי וְלְכַבוֹדִי בְּרֵאתִיו יִצְרַתִּיו אִף
 עָשִׂיתִיו. וְאֹמֵר (שמות טו) יְהוָה יִמְלֵךְ לְעַלְמִם
 וְעַד: רַבִּי חֲנִינְיָא בֶן עֲקֵשְׁיָא אֹמֵר רְצָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְזַכּוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִיכֶךָ הַרְבֵּה לָהֶם
 תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יְהוָה חֲפֵץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ
 יַגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וַיֵּאדָּר:
 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה יא

Everything that G-d created in His world, He did not create but for His glory. As is stated (Isaiah 43:7): “All that is called by My name and for My glory, I created it, formed it, also I made it.” And it says (Exodus 15:1): “G-d shall reign forever and ever.”

Our beraitha begins by saying that everything the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* created was done so for no reason other than for His own glory. I wonder why this was stated with a double negative. Wouldn't have it sounded more fluid in the positive: “All that Hashem created was for the sake of His glory”?

Perhaps it is stated this way so as to include those things normally not thought of as beneficial, even those often thought harmful. In other words, it is to tell us that everything -- even those things seemingly detrimental to the more “important” objects of creation -- was created by Hashem for the sake of His glory.

Shiga'on, insanity, is one example. Through feigning that he was affected by mental illness, David HaMelech was able to save himself from Achish, King of Gat. A famous midrash relates that prior to this event, David had wondered as to the purpose of His having created insanity in the first place. This incident taught him why. Afterwards, David composed a praise to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* for His having created even mental illness.

A similar story, appearing in aggadic works, is told about David HaMelech and spiders. As with “insanity,” David had wondered why, for instance, spiders had been created. Hashem therefore arranged a scenario whereby he would find out.

David, fleeing for his life from Shaul HaMelech’s pursuit, managed to enter a certain cave. Perhaps Shaul would have gone inside to search, but the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* sent a spider to spin a web at the entrance, sealing it closed and making it seem as if no one had recently entered. Shaul, seeing the web, assumed that David could not possibly be inside and ran off. The spider, whose purpose in the world David had originally wondered about, had just saved him from death.

This is why the author of our beraitha relates it through double negatives. It is to show that everything in Creation -- even those things which superficially appear to serve no useful purpose -- is there for the sake of His glory.

In my opinion, it could be said that, in a certain sense, these things really *do not* serve any ongoing purpose. Rather, their sole function is to serve His glory -- at one point in time. In other words, as I see it, there are “important” aspects of Creation and others that are not. I would go so far as to say that it would have been best had certain things never been created at all. They exist, however, for the sake of one significant moment.

I would connect this to a comment by the author of *Shnei Luchot HaBrit*, know as the Shelah. In the introduction to his *Toledot Ha’Adam*, he writes that both the “good” and “bad” come from Hashem. He both “makes peace” and “creates evil.” The purpose of the seemingly “bad” is no different that that of the “good.” Both exist for the sake of His honor. Were it not for the “bad,” there would be no fear of the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. One could like it to the idea, “*Mitoch sh’lo lishmah, bah lishmah.*” That is, even from doing something for reasons other than the proper one, one can eventually still come to do them for the right purpose.

So much for my interpretative summary of the *Shelah*.

So, we see that a purpose is served even by that which seems to be “bad.” The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* wants only the “Good,” not the “Bad.” And that is why our *beraitha* is phrased in the negative. Everything He created is for no reason other than for His glory.

Understand this.

רַבִּי חַנְנִיָּא בֶן אֶקָשִׁיא אָמַר רְצָה הַקְדוֹשׁ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְזַכּוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִיכֶךָ הַרְבֵּה לָהֶם
 תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יְהוָה חָפֵץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ
 יַגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וַיֵּאדִיר:

Rabbi Chananya ben Akashia says; "The Kaddosh Baruch Hu wanted to bring merit to Yisrael. He therefore gave them great amounts of Torah and Mitzvoth . .

Pirkei Avoth ends by saying, *Rabbi Chananya ben Akashia says; "The Kaddosh Baruch Hu wanted to bring merit to Yisrael. He therefore gave them great amounts of Torah and Mitzvoth . .*

What is behind the idea of giving Yisrael a great deal of Torah and mitzvoth and its being a means of increasing Clal Yisrael's merit?

The Torah is not a mere book of legalisms, to be consulted only when one needs to inquire as to one statue or another. Rather, it is the very path by which we are to lead our lives. It accompanies man at every moment of his existence. One cannot be without it -- ever.

Detailed within Shulchan Arukh are laws for every situation. All that we do has to be according to the ways of our Torah.

The *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* did it this way so that every single day, in every single place, each of us would be able to delve into one halacha or another directly related to whatever situation we happen to find ourselves in at that particular moment. And, not only would we be able to study it, but also perhaps come up with some new insight, based upon our own life experience.

We can thereby be connected to Torah at every moment. We awaken in the morning and, right away, the laws of rising from bed become directly relevant. Shabbat is about to begin -- and one must immediately contemplate the Laws of Shabbat.

One sits down to eat -- and one must have in mind the laws regarding a meal. There are halachot as to not mixing milk and meat that one must think about, as well as being careful as to all other aspects of the kashrut of the food that enters our bodies.

When one goes to the market or to business, he must have in mind the laws of not stealing, not overcharging, and not deceiving.

When he marries, one must have in mind the laws found in Shulchan Arukh Eben Ha'Ezer: *Hilchot Ketubah*, *Kiddushin*, and *Nissuin*. After the marriage, there are the laws of family purity.

In sum, the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* made us accountable to Torah in a way that there will be not a moment when some aspect of it won't be directly relevant to whatever situation we happen to find ourselves in. This makes our connection to Torah ongoing and constant.

And why is that? Why is it that He wants us continually connected to His Torah? I say that is so as to help us to resist the temptations of the *yetser hara*. Not just that, but so as to cling to the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu*. And, so as to merit a portion in the World to Come.

❖ *Stories of Tzaddikim* ❖

כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא ברא אלא לכבודו

It once happened that a charedi man and his son came to see Rabbeinu. The son had departed from the ways of Torah, to the extent that he was now preparing to marry a non-Jew, G-d forbid! The Rav did whatever he could to reach the young man, having known of the situation well before the boy had set foot in Rav's house that day. Unfortunately, all the Rav's words of inspiration fell upon deaf ears. Not only that, but they were even turned against him in mockery.

The Rav now tried a new tact: "Are you aware that the world has a creator?" he asked the young fellow.

"Can you prove it?" answered the boy.

"Is there something you're afraid of?" asked the Rav.

"Yes, lizards!" said the young man.

"Well, the lizard has a creator," said the Rav. "In fact, it doesn't just come near you for no reason at all. It's only there to scare you! And if it does succeed in frightening you, that's only because you must have some sort of sins"

"Prove it," said the boy.

No sooner had those words passed his lips, but a lizard leapt upon the table right where the young man was sitting! Raising up its body, it stared right into the boy's eyes!

Needless to say, the young fellow was terrified. "How could this have happened? It's the middle of winter!"

The boy retreated, stepping back from the table, hoping to slip away. For each step that the boy took backwards, the lizard advanced forward.

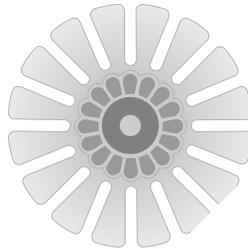
"Well, I hadn't known that you were so frightened of lizards" said the Rav.

"Yes," answered the boy. "No one knew."

The young man understood. He took the hint.

Then and there, he committed himself to return to Hashem.

He went to mikveh, broke off with his non-Jewish girlfriend, and returned to being a kosher, G-d fearing Jew in its fullest sense.





לעילוי נשמת הצדיקים הקדושים

הרב הקדוש רבי רפאל פינטו זיע"א
נלב"ע י"ב שבט תש"מ

הרב הקדוש רבי מאיר פינטו זיע"א
נלב"ע ט' אדר תש"מ

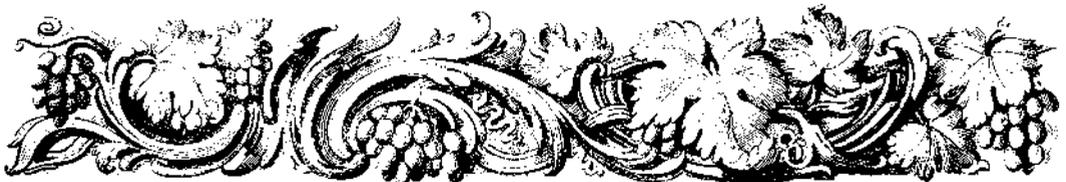
זכותם תגן בעדינו אכי"ר



מורי ורבי הגאון הצדיק
רבי שמאי צאהן זי"ע
ר"מ בישיבת נצח ישראל סונדערלאנד ומחבר ספר וגם לשמונה
נלב"ע ט' אדר תשס"א



מורי ורבי הגאון הצדיק
רבי חיים שמואל לופיאן זי"ע
ר"מ בישיבת נצח ישראל סונדערלאנד ומחבר ספר רווחא דשמעתתא
נלב"ע " כסלו תשנ"ט





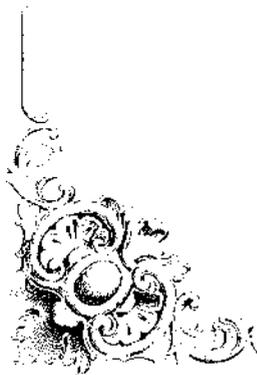
לעילוי נשמת

חמי רבי יחיא בן אסתר חרפי ז"ל
חמותי מרת ממה בת זהירא חרפי ז"ל
תנצב"ה



לעילוי נשמת

סבי רבי אהרן אלקסלסי ז"ל
סבתי מרת שמחה אלקסלסי ז"ל
תנצב"ה



הספר מוקדש

לזכות בני הרב המופלג

רבי

רפאל מאיר עמרם פינטו

שליטי"א

אשר מנהל את המוסדות שלנו בליון, צרפת. מתוך מסירות נפלאה

ולזכות בני המופלג

כמר

משה אהרן פינטו

הי"ד

אשר הנו אחראי על ישיבת הערב לצעירים בפריוז

ולזכות בני המופלג

כמר

יואל יחיא שלמה פינטו

הי"ד

אשר עוזר לאחיו בישיבת הערב לצעירים בפריוז

יצליח ה' אותם בכל דרכיהם
ויוזבו להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה
אמן כן יהי רצון