

CHAPTER 1: MISHNA 10: PART 4

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Shmaya and Avtalyon received (the tradition) from them (Yehuda ben Tabai and Shimon ben Shatach). Shmaya says: Love work; despise public office; and don't become known to (become intimate with) politicians.

(The person who loves work, the person who enjoys what he produces through his own efforts, is living a life of service rather than looking for a life of leisure. Contrast this with the modern western perspective on the relationship between work and leisure time.)

(While a person who enjoys what he achieves with his own hands has a stable existence both in this world as well as in the world to come...) Power exerted over other people undermines a person's own existence, as we are taught (see Pesachim 87b) "Woe to (him who is in) a position of power, for it buries he who wields it. There was no prophet didn't outlive four kings..." (The prophets, who were the epitome of service, outlived the kings, who wielded power over others.) Going even further than this we are taught (Berachoth 55a; Sotah 13b) "Why did Yosef die before his brothers? Because he exerted power over them." Power over others shortens one's life, because one who exerts power over others detaches himself from the community (the "klal") making himself into a separate and individual element. An individual element has a less stable existence than a group, just as a few drops of water has less of an existence than a river of water. The power of the "klal" where the individual elements are united together is much greater than that of the individual, and a "klal" doesn't disintegrate. Therefore we are taught to "love work, and hate the exercise of power over others," which detaches the individual from the "klal."

(At the conclusion of this Mishna, I am including a Dvar Torah about the relationship between the 17th of Tammuz and its primary sin (the Golden Calf), and the 9th of Av and its primary sin (the spies and the nation's rejection of entering the land of Israel). It is both appropriate as "inyana d'yoma," relevant to the coming fast, as well as helping in understanding what the Maharal writes in explaining our Mishna.)

We are taught "DON'T (definitively) become intimate with those in power." Loving work (and the commitment to serve that it implies) is the ideal. Exerting power over the community can potentially be done properly (if the motivation is purely one of service, as opposed to ego gratification or personal gain), although the benefit is usually overshadowed by its disadvantage. But becoming

intimate with people who themselves wield power is never motivated by the desire to serve. (Emphasis here is on the word "intimate" as opposed to interacting with them to truly accomplish valuable, altruistic goals.) In fact, no true benefit comes from this intimacy, since these people themselves are only interested in their own personal agendas, and any intimacy that they have with others is only to further those goals.

The main message of this Mishna is teaching one how to ensure personal perfection, coupled with being the cause of the name of G-d to become beloved by others. When Torah scholars are motivated by the desire to serve others, when they are giving to the community, this is accomplished.

It is striking that "Cheit Hameraglim", the sin of the spies convincing the Jews not to enter Eretz Yisrael is viewed on many levels as being more serious than "Cheit Haegel" the sin of the idol worship embodied in the Golden Calf.

Cheit Haegel was on the 17th of Tammuz, Cheit Hameraglim on Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av. We know that Tisha B'Av is viewed as a greater day of mourning. The Mishna in Taanit (Chapter 4, Mishna 1) mentions five things that happened on the 17th of Tammuz and five things on Tisha B'Av. The relationship between each of the tragedies of the 17th of Tammuz are that they are less serious beginnings of processes that reached their conclusion on the 9th of Av. This is obvious in the breaking of the city walls on the 17th of Tammuz followed by the destruction of the Temples on Tisha B'Av. (See chapter 8 of the Maharal's Netzach Yisrael for a further elaboration of this idea.)

Another indication of the greater seriousness of Cheit Hameraglim is the fact that G-d basically forgave those who sinned with the Egel. The punishment for the Cheit Haegel is delivered "byom pokdi, uphakadti aleihem chatatam..." (Shemoth 32:34), punishment for this sin gradually extracted over the generations in combination with other punishments. After Cheit Hameraglim, the entire generation was condemned to death in the desert, and only a new generation could go into Eretz Yisrael.

WHY?

There is a striking Sifri (Bamidbar, Parshat Naso, #144) for which the Maharal offers a fundamental principle in explaining it. Rebbe Elazar the son of Reb Elazar Hakafar says: Great is Shalom (unity), for even if the Jewish people are serving Avoda Zarah (false idols) but they are united, they are immune from retribution.

The beginning of destruction is when every person is worrying about himself and his own personal agenda. Everyone is pulling in his own personal direction, and whatever exists is in danger of collapse. The walls begin to crack. When everyone is united in a common purpose transcending the individual (even if, chas v'chalilah, the purpose is not the best one) there is an integrity of the unit that

makes it impregnable. This was the situation of Klal Yisrael at cheit haegel, where they were UNITED in the search for an alternative to Moshe as their leader to lead them in their continued service of G-d. This had overtones of Avoda Zara (see Ramban, Ki Tisah), and for that they were threatened with destruction. But when G-d forgave them, their unity enabled them to continue united in their mission which had gotten sidetracked, with their punishment being measured out over time, while they received the second set of tablets and proceeded towards Eretz Yisrael. They were united in the desire to SERVE G-d, being misguided in how to implement what was a fundamentally altruistic motivation.

The sin of the spies and the rejection by Klal Yisrael of entry into the Land of Israel was a case of individuals pursuing THEIR OWN agenda. They desired to stay in the womb of the desert, where all their needs were taken care of in a miraculous way, rather than enter Eretz Yisrael and be involved in serving G-d in a more "earthly" way. G-d's agenda for them was entry into Israel, and to serve Him under new conditions. But the people were more interested in their own perceived spiritual welfare, rather than fulfilling G-d's mission for them in the way He wanted it. Pursuit of the individual agenda is a fragmentation of the Jewish people; the beginnings of the "crack in the wall," as each person is worrying "what's good for me."

Galut, exile, which is the result of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash on Tisha B'Av, is the state of the Jewish people being dispersed (pizur). It came about because of Sinat Chinam, unjustified hatred of others (Yoma gb), where each person views other people as intrusions, being in his way to pursue his own agenda. Any perceived unity is purely functional. A group of individuals may come together because each individual feels that his or her personal agenda will be better accomplished with the help of the others. But the unity itself is egocentric. The forerunner of this was the sin of the spies, where the Jewish people together decided to pursue individual agendas rather than a united one.

When one is motivated by the desire to serve, other people are viewed not as competition and an intrusion, but rather as additional resources in helping to assure the accomplishment of the mission. What I can't accomplish, someone else can. Strengths are emphasized and not weaknesses.

The Maharal in Netiv HaShalom, Chapter 1 teaches us that the characteristic of humility is: "...when man doesn't single himself out as being special in an independent way, separating him from others; rather he views himself as equal to others, which is Shalom (peace; harmony). Machloket (divisiveness) occurs only when each one views himself as being independently superior" (arrogance as opposed to humility.)

The true Jewish leader is one who is focused completely on serving the community, giving all he can in a selfless way to fill the needs of the community. This is the underlying meaning of the lesson "Love work" -- the inherent desire to utilize our resources, our energy, our creative ability to produce what we can for the benefit of others.

This behavior is the foundation of service. When the Jewish People knows how to behave in this

way, it becomes deserving of Beit Hamikdash, a Temple to serve G-d and to bring His glory in to the world.

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