

CHAPTER 1: MISHNA 2: PART 2

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Shimon HaTzadik was of the remnants (last members) of the Great Assembly. He used to say: On three things the world stands. On Torah, on Service of G-d, and on deeds of kindness.

(We concluded last class with the Maharal teaching us that for man to be the creation that G-d wanted him to be, he must choose to be "good," fulfilling his potential, in relation to his own unique humanity, in relation to his Creator, and in relation to his fellow man. The multi- dimension of man's "good" is demonstrated from a famous Gemara in Kiddushin, 40a.)

"Imru latzadik, ki tov... Say about a righteous man that he has done good, and that he will enjoy the fruits of his good deeds" (Isaiah 3:10). Is there a good righteous man and a righteous man who is NOT good? Rather, the verse is referring to one who is good to G-d and good to his fellow man (tzadik tov). One who is good to G-d but not good to his fellow man is termed a righteous man who is not good (tzadik sh'eino tov).

This Gemara indicates that for a man to be considered "good" he must be "good" in all areas: In relation to his own self (which is self evident - without that we can't even begin referring to him as "good;" in relation to G-d; and in relation to his fellow man.

(Please remember what we wrote in the part three of the Maharal's introduction about the real meaning of "tzadik," coming from the word "tzedek," righteous, in contrast to "chasid," pious. This will explain what may be bothering some of you: How can a person who is "good" to G-d and not good to his fellow man be termed a "tzadik." Since he is doing everything demanded of him in his relationship with G- d, he can be termed a "tzadik" in his relationship with G-d. But he is appropriately termed a "tzadik sheino tov" a person who may be fulfilling the letter of the law in some areas, without being considered "tov," a person who is fulfilling his purpose.)

"Torah," divine, spiritual wisdom, is what enables a person to perfect his humanity. It is what makes him a unique creation. Lacking this dimension, he is no more than a sophisticated animal, with a quantitative edge in intelligence (hopefully :-). (Is this different than what Darwinian evolution maintains about the human being?) His human wisdom is a function of his material being (neurological brain waves?) and this can't be the justification for the existence of the entire creation.

It is man's acquisition of Torah which bestows upon him a unique spiritual dimension which justifies his existence and therefore the existence of the entire creation. It is exactly this idea that Chazal are communicating to us in the famous Gemara (Shabbath 88a) that teaches that the entire world was hanging in abeyance until that fateful sixth day of Sivan. The continuity of the six days of creation were conditional on the Jewish people accepting the Torah. Had they not done so, G-d would return the world to its pre-creation condition (tohu vavohu).

If man's existence in the world is an animalistic existence, even a sophisticated one, this is a denigration of creation. The unique virtue of creation is when man transcends his animal existence, something which is enabled exclusively through the divine, spiritual Torah. It is through this Torah that man elevates himself above the material (chomer), giving him true reality and existence.

(The word "chomer" which occurs frequently in the Maharal has been translated here as "material." Because it will come up so often, and it is so fundamental to understanding many of the ideas, I will elaborate a little. "Chomer" can be thought of as raw material, which needs to be fashioned in to some functional object. Doing so requires imposing a certain structure, purpose and direction (what is termed "tzurah") on this material, something which, conceptually, raw material resists. It would rather remain "undisciplined," leaving all possibilities open. The animal "chamor" donkey, is most representative of this concept of "chomer," a point the Maharal finds frequently in Chazal. Another dimension of "chomer" is that it can be viewed as physical "matter," the substance which composes the entire physical world. As physics has discovered, all matter exists in time and space, and is in a state of constant deterioration. This will have relevance in future Mishnayot.)

The Torah enables man to transcend his limiting animalistic dimension to become the complete being G-d had intended. Torah, therefore, is one of the foundations upon which the world stands: Man in relation to himself. Without Torah, man could not achieve his potential in relation to himself as a human being, a reflection of the Divine.

The next pillar, "Avodah," refers to service of G-d and devotion to Him. This includes sacrifices, prayer, and ultimately all the Mitzvah acts we perform in serving Him. "Service" implies that we do it for the sake of serving, because we have the ability and inherent motivation to do so. This is our perfection in relation to our Creator, and without properly maintaining this relationship, we undermine the essence of our having been created. The second foundation upon which the world stands: Man in relation to his Creator.

The third pillar is "G'milut Chasadim," acts of generosity and kindness (that go beyond what is expected, as we have pointed out). When man does for others with no OBLIGATION to do so, and with no expectation of "quid pro quo" this makes man truly "good" in relation to those with who he shares the world. This connection of man to his fellow man is the final pillar: Man in relation to others.

With these three pillars -- Torah, Avodah, G'milut Chasadim -- man becomes complete, enabling to fulfill his the totality of his purpose in this world, giving a stable foundation to the world's existence.

On three the world stands.

(Next class we will see how this gives us insight in to the three cardinal sins that require us to forfeit our lives rather than violate one of them.)

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