

CHAPTER 1: MISHNA 2: PART 4

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.

The world that G-d has created cannot stand apart from and independent of Him. The connection to Him, a necessary element for its continued existence, is accomplished in three ways, which provides another perspective on our Mishnah.

1. To maintain its connection with G-d and ensure its existence, the world must remain a creation which has meaning and substance, rather than degenerate in to one of emptiness and void. This substance comes from Torah, without which the world would return to its chaotic pre-creation state (tohu vavohu, see Rashi on Breishith 1:31).
2. The world's existence with service of G-d as its central purpose, is what connects the world to Him, maintaining the connection that needs to exist following the actual act of creation. Without this ongoing service of G-d, there would be a division between G-d and the world He created, not allowing for its continued existence. The world was created for the recognition and glory of G-d (See Mishlei 16:4), and the implication that it exists for its own self completely undermines that purpose. Devotion and service to G-d, "avodah," maintains the world's ongoing connection to its creator and His goals.
3. Finally, the world needs to be nourished, receiving resources bestowed upon it by the Almighty. This must be done on an ongoing basis for the world to remain in existence, and is the "chesed," G-d's kind giving to the world, maintaining an ongoing connection to Him. Man's imitation of G-d, providing nourishment and support to others through the resources that G-d bestows upon him, "gemiluth chasadim," is the vehicle through which G-d supports the world and maintains His connection with it. Without providing this nourishment and support, the world could not sustain itself.

(After we have seen the three foundations of the world, and the three cardinal sins that are their polar opposites, this will be connected to the three Avoth, and their three unique characteristics related to the world's three foundations.)

The three foundations of the world are related to the three Avoth, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, each of whom, as a "father" is also a foundation of the world.

Gemiluth chasadim is the unique trait of Avraham, who is well known for his hospitality towards guests (Breishith 21:33 and Rashi) and other deeds of kindness. The prophet Micha (7:20) tells us "Give truth to Ya'akov and kindness to Avraham."

Avodah is the unique trait of Yitzchak, who was prepared to have himself sacrificed on the altar, making him the pillar of service to G-d. (See Midrash Rabbah Vayikra 2:10.)

Yaakov was the pillar of Torah, as we know from the verse (Breishith 25:27) "V'Yaakov ish tam, yosheiv ohalim" sitting in the tents of Torah study. The "truth" mentioned in the verse from Micha also refers to Torah study. His unique trait was "emeth," truth.

In relation to the giving of the Torah, there is a puzzling Gemara in Shabbath, 88a. "Blessed is G-d who has given us a "three part Torah" (Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim) by the hand of the third one (Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the third child to his parents) to a nation of three groups (Kohanim, Levi'im, Yisraelim) on the third day (of preparation - see Shemoth 19:11) in the third month (of the year, Sivan; also the third month after they left Egypt)." Yaakov was also the third of the forefathers, and he is connected with the giving of the Torah.

(Please refer back to what we wrote in the THIRD shiur [only coincidence!! I promise] on the first Mishah [DC1_013]. This will help us understand the above Gemara, and its emphasis on the number three as a critical component in the giving of the Torah. The Torah is a perfect balance of all the conflicting forces and elements that exist in the world, and the number three, as the midpoint between extremes, embodies that. Kedhusha, sanctity, and eternity always lie in the center. It is at the extremes ("katze" in Hebrew, from the root "keitz" which means "end") the termination point, that death and destruction lie. In "Gevuroth HaShem," Chapter 46, the Maharal points out that Pesach and Sukkoth, the times of redemption and holiness, are in the seasons of balance, spring and fall where the climate is balanced and comfortable; the length of the days and nights are balanced (equinox); and (I would point out) they come out in the exact middle of the month, on the 15th, when the moon is full. See the full chapter for an important elaboration on the importance of balance and the center.

(There is a potential corruption in the extremes, what is termed in the literature "p'soleth," refuse or the waste product. Behaving with too much "chesed," too much giving and closeness, can lead to "gilui arayoth," incestual sexual relations. [See Vayikra 20:17. where sexual relations with one's sister is called "chesed."] Gilui arayoth was the major corruption of Yishmael, who was the p'soleth of Avraham. Behaving to a person with too much "din," too strict of a demand that things be exactly the way they are supposed to be, with NO deviation tolerated -- which is what real "din" is, and which was Yitzchak's trait -- could ultimately lead to killing the person, as the strictness chokes him to death. Murder is the p'soleth of din, and was the major corruption of Eisav [See Breishith 25:27, and many places in Chazal that Eisav and his descendants were people of blood, war, and destruction.]

But Yakov, who was the balance between chesed and din - EMETH - had only righteous children, with no psoleth.

(A couple of points of clarification on this theme need to be added, to avoid some misunderstandings and misapplications.

1. This may appear to contradict what the Maharal taught us earlier about the relationship between the three pillars of the world and the three cardinal sins. "I thought that the opposite of chesed was murder!?" Here is a good example of the precision and depth of Torah understanding. The OPPOSITE, the undermining of chesed is murder. The CORRUPTION of chesed, excessive chesed leads to gilui arayoth. The opposite of avodah (and din) is to serve false values and gods. But the corruption and overabundance of din leads to murder. The opposite of Torah (and emeth and tifereth, which is perfect human balance) is behaving like an animal, gilui arayoth. [Can there be excessive emeth, corruption of emeth? At first glance not. But there is a subtlety here which we will save for another time, ideally explained in a "human" shiur rather than an electronic one...]
2. - The order of Avraham (chesed), Yitzchak (din) and Yakov is not coincidental, but the natural way ("darka shel olam") something is built. (The something here is very special -- Klal Yisrael!) To begin a project requires the "chesed" mode, uncalculating giving, pouring in time, money resources, without too many restrictions. If this continues indefinitely, however, the project will go bankrupt, the people will burn up all their resources and burn themselves out. It must be followed up with "din," structure, accountability, precision. If one tries to START with this, nothing would ever get going. But without it, whatever existed can't be maintained. So after Avraham/chesed must follow Yitzchak/din. But if that continues indefinitely, then whatever was there will eventually be choked off and die. To maintain something, to enable it to grow and thrive, requires "emeth," the perfect balance between chesed (giving when necessary) and din (being strict and "tight" when necessary). This is the balance of Yakov, which produced 12 "shivtei kah" the tribes of G-d.
3. - "Balance" and "center" do not need to imply compromise and concessions in our Judaism. They should also not be interchanged with modern political terms like "Centrist" or "Moderate." Rather than being a diluted form of pure chesed and pure din, and rather than being NEITHER of them, the middle point -- the emeth ("truth") and tifereth ("glory") of Yaakov -- fully embodies BOTH of them, knowing when chesed is appropriate and when din is appropriate. And knowing how to pursue each one fully, appropriately and accurately.)

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