

CHAPTER 1: MISHNA 6

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Yehoshua ben Prachiah and Nitai HaArbeili received from them (Yossi ben Yoezer and Yossi ben Yochanan). Yehoshua said: Make for yourself a Rav (a teacher); acquire for yourself a friend; and judge every person on the positive side.

1. What is the significance of the language "asei lecha," make for yourself, rather than "kach lecha," take for yourself? (You are not making him -- he is already there! You are simply accepting him as your authority.)
2. Why is there a change in verb between the Rav ("asei") and the friend ("knei," acquire, implying some kind of transactional acquisition)?
3.) How do these three lessons connect together?
4. Why didn't the Tanna add "Acquire for yourself a student" since we are taught (Ta'anith 7a) "I have learned from my students more than from my teachers and peers."

After we were taught how a person is supposed to perfect his home, something to which he is closest, we are now taught how a person is supposed to perfect his relationship with other people with whom he is close. A Rav and a friend are very close to a person, although they are out of his house, and not as closely attached to him as those who dwell in his house. The Mishnah is in order of closeness: One's Rav, followed by one's friend, followed by other people.

The Rav referred to in this Mishna is not one's primary Rav and final authority. Rather it is referring to one who YOU make into one of your teachers, even if on his own he may not be up to that standard. If it is someone from whom you can learn, you are being instructed to make in to one of your teachers.

The friend you are being encouraged to "acquire" is also referring to one who may not up to the standard of being considered your peer. Yet "two is better than one" (Koheleth 4:9) and you should expend the resources necessary to attach yourself to friends. The word "knei," acquire, is appropriate for the process of relating to friends, since each one is frequently doing a favor or providing needed resources for the other, and as such there is an element of mutual "acquisition" in their friendship. But the word "acquire" is totally inappropriate to describe how one relates to a Rav, since the student

does not "own" the Rav (members of the Board of Directors of Shuls -- take note!), and the Tanna uses the word "asei."

Finally, the Mishna closes with the lesson not to distance yourself from a person because of an ambiguous act that you see him do.

It does not add "acquire students" since it is inappropriate for a person to "acquire" students by setting himself as more important than he really is and "buying" students to come and learn from him.

Man does not stand alone in this world, but is supposed to be connected with others. This Mishna is teaching us how to behave with three strata of people with whom we interact: People that are greater than us (Rav), those who are our peers (chaver), and those who are on a lesser level than we are (kol adam).

Implementation of the lessons of this Mishnah grow out of love and desire to be closer to others. Rather than saying that this person is not worthy of being your Rav, a teacher for you, you make him in to your Rav. Your desire to learn from and become closer to him motivates you to do it. Rather than saying that this person is not worthy of being in your peer group, you make an effort to bring him closer to you as a friend. Finally, you don't look for reasons to distance yourself from others, but rather you look to judge them favorably, in order to remain closer to them. This is a branch of "Love of G-d." In the previous Mishna, we were taught about love of wise people, which is man's primary manifestation in this world of love of G-d. This is followed by our Mishna which teaches about loving others on lower spiritual levels, but which also emanates from a love of G-d, recognizing others as G-d's creations, and the desire to give to them and to be close to them.

Another connection between the three elements of the Mishna is as follows. We want your attachment to your Rav and to your friend to be a long-lasting one. The closer you are to someone and the longer you spend with him, the more likely you are to uncover faults, or at least be in situations that lend themselves to various interpretations. You are likely to think that your Rav or friend did something wrong to you, and this reaction will lead to distance between you. So the Tanna has taught us to judge these people favorably, preventing dissension and division between you.

(A word of clarification about the concept "havei dan kol adam l'kaf zechuth," judge every person favorably. There is a misconception that we are required to look at clearly wrong actions and make up any kind of unlikely scenario to justify the action of the person we observe. For example, when we see cars driving down the road on Shabbos in Israel, we are supposed to say to ourselves that the person driving is probably a doctor, on his way to life-saving surgery, or the woman in the car is about to give birth. I don't believe there is any source in the Gemara and Rishonim for such an interpretation of judging people favorably. The law is said in relation to situations that are ambiguous, where you are required to give the person the benefit of the doubt, assuming the favorable side of the ambiguity rather than the negative side. But one does not have to invent

unreasonable explanations to justify behavior that is clearly wrong. You can and should say that the person didn't realize how seriously wrong his behavior was. But behavior which is clearly wrong has to be viewed that way. Our Mishna is teaching us about behavior that has multiple interpretations, with the positive interpretation being equal to the negative one.)

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