

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 10: PART 1

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (RYB"Z) had five students, and they were: Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkonus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania, Rabbi Yossi HaCohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach.

(We are about to embark on a very complex, difficult and deep discussion of a series of Mishnayoth. The Maharal's explanation does not follow the order of the Mishnayoth, but begins with a later Mishna then returns to explain the above Mishna and the one following it. This indicates that a complete understanding of what he says about our Mishna requires the introduction of his explanation of the later Mishnayoth. Due to the nature of our internet medium, I will present his explanation on this Mishna first, while noting that it appears later in the Derech Chaim. To further add to the confusion, there are a number of ways of numbering these Mishnayoth. We are following the numbering as the Mishnayoth appear in the siddurim. This is different than the way it appears in the Talmud editions of Mishnayoth, which combines 10 and 11 with the previous Mishna. The Derech Chaim follows the numbering system in the Mishnayoth of the Talmud, so what we are listing as 10, 11 and 12 appear within Mishna 8. Yet the explanation doesn't appear until the middle of Mishna 9 (which will be listed by us as number 13). I know this is a bit confusing if you are trying to follow in the original text of the Derech Chaim. And we haven't even gotten to the content yet!)

(If you are following our explanation in the original text, we are beginning with the paragraph that opens with the words "Aval ki hama'amar hazeh..." in the middle of the Derech Chaim's Mishna 9.)

This lesson contains in it elements of great wisdom, and we will explain it to anyone who has an understanding of wisdom, and you will see that this is clearly its true meaning. We will begin by clarifying a number of questions.

Didn't Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai have more than the five students whose praises are enumerated here?!

(There are a number of other questions included at this point, asked on the lessons taught in the coming Mishnayoth, which the Maharal has begun to explain. Because we have not yet introduced these Mishnayoth nor the Maharal's explanation, we won't bring in these questions yet. But it is on the basis of these questions that the Maharal introduces the coming explanation with a sentence that reiterates a recurring theme in his works: "You should know that this lesson, along with the

lessons that follow, contain wondrous things. They are not as they appear to many people, simply as coincidental or approximate statements made by smart people. Rather the words of the Rabbis contain great [fundamental] elements of wisdom.")

The human can be classified through a number of different groupings. There are times when he is divided into two dimensions, the "guf" (physical) and the "nefesh" (metaphysical). Other times he is classified through three elements, such as his intellectual component, through which he can acquire wisdom, his human intelligence, giving him the power of speech, and the physical component of his material possessions. (This was developed in the last Mishna of Chapter 1; see our explanation of Mishna 18, part 1.) There are also examples of man's dimensions being classified in various other ways. In the Torah, we find that man is assessed in multiples of five, with five shekalim being the smallest amount and fifty shekalim the largest amount. (See Vayikra 27:3,6) Having man evaluated with a factor of five reveals a very deep concept.

Man was created by G-d with a "guf" (the actual physical body), which has "kochoth haguf." (We will define this as the energy or the forces related to man's physical functioning. It refers to the activities of his physical organs such as sight, hearing, thinking.) In addition, man has a "nefesh" (a metaphysical dimension) which has "kochoth hanefesh." (This would refer to the energy or forces that relate to his metaphysical functioning, a deeper level of the seeing, hearing and thinking that only human beings have.)

(For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will be using the words "guf" and "nefesh" frequently, rather than translating them, when I feel that the translation doesn't do justice to the subtlety of the concepts being communicated. And they ARE very subtle and deep.)

The "guf" is the physical medium which carries the "nefesh," and this physical medium is required for man's metaphysical forces to function in this world. On a higher plane, the "kochoth haguf" are the medium through which the "kochoth hanefesh" are able to manifest themselves in man.

The "kochoth hanefesh" can be divided into two levels, one transcendent and divine ("koach sichli") and the other on a lower level ("koach nafshi.") Each of these "kochoth hanefesh" have parallel "kochoth haguf" to serve as their carriers. The "koach haguf" that carries the more elevated "koach sichli" is a more delicate and refined force than the "koach haguf" that carries the "koach nafshi."

(This is a very difficult section, and I will try to make it somewhat more accessible. The eyes or the brain would be elements of the "guf." Sight, hearing, or thinking etc. (on the ophthalmological, auditorial or neurological level) would be "kochoth haguf." These are functions that are not uniquely human, as even animals have them. The uniquely human dimension of sight, what we would call "seeing beyond the surface," perceiving deeply through the power of vision, would be called "koach nafshi," connected to its "koach haguf" (seeing). The process of abstract and transcendent thinking would be called "koach sichli," connected to its more elevated "koach haguf" (thinking). The "koach haguf" carrying the thinking is a more refined and delicate force than the "koach haguf" that carries

the seeing, hearing, etc.

(We have introduced four elements, two forces of the physical side of man, each of which operates as a carrier for one of the two forces of the spiritual/transcendent side of man.)

Don't think that man has only the four elements, two connected to his physical dimension and two connected to his transcendent dimension. Because the reality is that these dimensions of man are not independent and fragmentized, but have a common root, a fifth, uniting, element. This fifth force resides in the heart, and serves as the uniting link between the material dimensions and the transcendent dimensions, and in fact shares characteristics of both. This uniting force is not a completely physical force nor is it a completely metaphysical force.

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