

## CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 10: PART 2

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 have classified man as having five elements. There are two forces which belong to the physical side of man, and each of these operates as a carrier for one of the two forces of the spiritual/transcendent side of man. In addition, there is a fifth force which is the root of the other forces, sharing part of the physical side of man as well as sharing part of the spiritual side.)

Utilizing the above insights, we can now understand a very cryptic Gemara in Eruvin (13b): For two and a half years Beith Shammai and Beith Hillel argued. These [Beith Shammai] said "It is better for man not to have been created than to have been created." And those [Beith Hillel] said "It is better for man to have been created." Together, they [reviewed the opinions and] reached a consensus: It is better for man to have not been created than to have been created."

Why is it relevant to tell us the amount of time that the argument lasted, something that is not done anywhere else?! Furthermore, the language "two and a **half** years" is strange, since (legally) even a part of a year is counted as a year, and a half a year is a quantity we don't (usually) find used (in Talmudic discussions). What is the significance of its use here?

We will explain the reasoning of their dispute: What leads one to say it is better for man not to have been created and one to say it is better for him to have been created.

As we have said, man has both physical and metaphysical forces, two connected with the body and two connected with the spirit. In addition, there is the fifth force, serving as the uniting element, belonging to both the metaphysical and the physical. Therefore, two and half forces can be said to lean towards the good, as they are more connected to the spirit, and two and a half lean more towards the bad, as they are more connected to the material.

(Remember how we have defined "tov," good, and "rah," evil: Tov is something moving towards fulfillment of its purpose; rah is something detached from the path to fulfillment of its purpose. When man is under the control of the physical drives of his body, he is cut off from fulfilling his purpose as a uniquely human being. When man allows his spiritual/intellectual dimension to be in

control, he is moving towards the fulfillment of his purpose as a human being.)

There is a balance between the forces of man that lean towards "tov" and the forces leaning towards "rah." It is for this reason that there is a dispute whether it would have been better for man not to have been created (due to the forces leaning to "rah") or better to have been created (due to the forces leaning to "tov"). When it says that they were arguing for "two and a half years" the meaning is that there were two and a half [forces] for one side of the argument and two and a half for the other side of the argument. We find the word "shana" (which normally means "year") used to indicate "repetitions," as in "And Hevron was built seven 'shanim' before Tzoan Mitzraim" (Bamidbar 13:22 and Rashi).

(The literal translation would have been that it took seven years to be built; but the Maharal and Rashi both understand that the Torah is not referring to years. The root of the word "shana" is "repetitions" or "times," and it is in this context that the Maharal understands its use in the Gemara we are discussing.)

The two and a half forces of man which are closer to "rah" make the case that it is better for man not to have been created. The two and a half forces which are closer to "tov" make the case for man to have been created. Yet the conclusion is that it was better for man not to have been created. While the individual forces of man are equally balanced, man's existence in a material form tends towards the probability of evil exerting itself over the good, since there is nothing inherently tilting the balance of forces towards good. The existence of forces in man that can corrupt the forces of good, tilt the argument in favor of man being better off not having been created. (The question of why G-d chose to create man if this is the case, is a very good one. Answering it is beyond the scope of our discussion.)

Along similar lines, Beith Shammai and Beith Hillel argue in the first chapter of Rosh HaShana (16b) about those whose deeds are divided equally between good and evil. Beith Shammai says that they descend to Gehinom for a short time of suffering, then they come back up. Beith Hillel says that, out of His kindness, G-d tilts the balance towards merit, and they don't have to descend to Gehinom.

In the argument about the fate of a person whose deeds are exactly balanced, Beith Hillel maintains his opinion that G-d's kindness can tip the balance towards good. However, when the opposing forces that exist within man are exactly balanced, he concurs with Beith Shammai that, since there is no mechanism for the good to tip the balance, it is better for man not to have been created.

This tension that exists in the essence of man's creation is indicated in the letters of the word for man, "adam." The first letter is aleph (numerical value of one) which indicates the one uniting force. This is followed by dalet (numerical value of four) which indicates the four evenly balanced forces, two closer to the good and two closer to the bad. This balance of forces is also alluded to in the spelling of the word to describe man's creation itself. "Vayeetzer" (Breishith 2:7), written with two yods (instead of the normal spelling which would have called for only one yod), indicates that man

was created with two opposing forces, one good and one evil. (See Berachoth 61a) The word concludes with the letter mem, which lies at the exact midpoint of the aleph-beth, to indicate that the five forces are evenly split, two and a half on one side and two and a half on the other side.

The concept that man is composed of distinct forces is something about which there is a broad consensus in our sources. The Rambam, in his introduction to Avoth (Shemonah Perakim, which contains many principles that serve as a framework for understanding the Maharal's explanations of Avoth) divides man's forces into three groups: the material force; the emotional, human life force; and the intellectual force, which is the highest. (See Chapter One of Shemona Perakim.) In addition, there must be (without the Rambam mentioning it explicitly) a force that serves as the medium to carry the transcendent intellectual force. And finally, a unifying force that is the root of all the forces (which itself is alluded to in the Rambam). So we reach a total of five forces.

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