

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 2: PART 4

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

The Mishna then continues that "all those who are involved with the community (doing communal work) should be involved for the sake of Heaven." The Tanna put the lesson a lesson on Torah study together with this lesson on doing communal work because there is a relationship and a similarity between them.

Torah is not like other Mitzvot. Every Mitzvah is an individual act, and the doer is involved in only one element of a greater "whole." When one learns Torah, however, one is involved in something which is comprehensive and all-encompassing ("klali"). Something which is purely intellectual/spiritual (sechel) is all-encompassing (klali). This is what we are being taught when the Rabbis teach us (see Yerushalmi Peah 1:1) "(Even) one element of the Torah is equated with the entire world, as it is written (Mishlei 8:11) '...all desirable objects cannot be compared to [the Torah].'" We see that every element of the Torah is considered all-encompassing.

This is also the understanding of the verse (Mishlei 6:23) "For a Mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light." A Mitzvah that a person does is like a lamp, which is a solitary illuminator. But the Torah is like light itself, which is indivisible, and cannot be viewed as an individual thing. This is the underlying meaning of the way we explained this verse in the introduction. (See the shiurim on the Maharal's introduction to Derech Chaim.) This (all-encompassing) dimension of the Torah also explains the Mishna (Chapter 5, Mishna 22) "Turn it (Torah) over and over (search it thoroughly) for ALL is contained in it."

A person who is involved with the community (the "tzibbur," which is considered an all-encompassing entity) is not comparable to a person who is involved in something which is particular and individual. Therefore a person who is involved with the community must do it for the sake of Heaven, for only then can it be considered a matter of the "klal," being done for the many. If his motivation is for ego gratification or self aggrandizement, it is not being done for the community but for himself. ("For the sake of Heaven" should be understood as being altruistically motivated, in contrast to activities which are egocentrically motivated.) Even if he is doing something for a group of people, if his intention is not "for the sake of Heaven" then he is doing it only for that limited group of individuals and not for the "klal," for the community. One whose service is directed towards a specific group is really serving only a number of individuals and not serving the community (the true klal). G-d attaches Himself specifically to the community, and one should be motivated to serve the

community due to this comprehensive dimension that the community embodies.

Therefore we are taught (Shabbath 150a) "We attend to communal matters on Shabbath," since communal matters are considered Divine matters. (The Rabbis extract from the verse in Yeshaya (58:13) "...and honor [Shabbath] by not accomplishing your own ways nor pursuing your own business..." that one's own matters are forbidden, but matters and business of Heaven are permitted.)

This is the reason why our Tanna teaches us that our involvement with the community must be for the sake of Heaven, motivated by the welfare of the community, which is considered a Divine matter.

(This approach is built on the understanding that we exist in the world for a purpose that transcends our individual existence. True altruism means to serve something that transcends us, which leads us to serving G-d. A person can do something for the community that has the appearance of altruism, yet is built on any one of many different motivations. There is the obviously selfish drive for personal gain or power. There is the drive for ego-gratification which motivates many insecure/arrogant people towards communal service. And there is involvement with the community motivated by the pursuit of mutual benefit, which underlies much communal service in a secular society. >From this perspective, people are fundamentally motivated by what is good for them. But they understand that in the long run their OWN agenda is better served by uniting with other people whose individual agendas happen to coincide with theirs, and they are willing to "contribute" because they realize that they are better off this way. So what is happening is not really giving and serving, but "investing." Unfortunately, we find many of the above motivations even in Jewish communal service.

(What is being highlighted in our Mishna is that true communal service has to be motivated exclusively by the desire to fulfill the Torah, implementing G-d's agenda. Recognizing the fact that the totality of the community (not a specific shul, group of people, ideology or locale) is what makes up the Jewish people, one's service is directed towards enhancing the welfare of the entire Jewish people. There is recognition of the need for the diversity, and a person works on a specific project, looking to fulfill his unique mission, and contribute his unique talents and perspective to the totality of the Jewish people. But it is always done "for the sake of Heaven," altruistically, looking to give and to serve, with an eye to the bigger picture. If it is done egocentrically, it stands in contradiction to our Mishna.)

Our Mishna continues "...for the merit of their forefathers assists them, and their righteousness stands eternally." This is because our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov, are considered fathers of the entire community, and not fathers of individuals. Every individual has his or her own father. The forefathers are considered fathers to the "klal," the unifying element of the entire Jewish people, and they assist all who view them as their fathers (which is true of those who view themselves as members of the "klal"). This leads to their assurance of eternity.

Individuals are ephemeral and transitory. They are subject to change and variation. A true

community (the tzibbur, which embodies the uniting and all-encompassing element of all the individuals) is everlasting. Even if the members of the community pass on, the accomplishments of that community remain. The "klal" stands forever, due to its transcendent nature. (When people bind together to fulfill a role in the service of G-d and purpose of creation, that service transcends the presence of the specific individuals and outlasts them.) Therefore, the Tanna teaches us that the righteousness of those who serve the community -- the results of their service -- stands eternally, since the unifying and encompassing element of the community stands eternally.

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