

## CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 2: PART 5

*by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky*

Something which is "klali" (comprehensive, all-inclusive) stands eternally. (This is contrast to an individual person or element, which is ephemeral.) Therefore, one who works for the welfare of the "klal" (altruistic service for the entire community) links himself to an eternal chain, which began with our forefathers and continues throughout the generations. It is for this reason that "the merit of their forefathers assists them, and their righteousness stands eternally," informing us of how great the merit of community service is when done with true altruism. If our own communal leaders would be deeply conscious of this, they would work for the sake of heaven instead of being motivated by their own welfare.

Even though the merit of the forefathers assists those working for the welfare of the community, the Tanna teaches us that they receive reward as if they had done it themselves, with no outside assistance. This is the meaning of "and you -- I apportion reward to you as if you had done it (alone)." The additional "you" is inserted to avoid the possible ambiguity that the merit is accruing to the forefathers. (Had it written "aleihem" (them) the antecedent of the pronoun would be ambiguous -- does it mean the people serving the community or the forefather. This is an obvious ambiguity in the original Hebrew.)

Another reason for the extra "and you..." is to emphasize and strengthen the credibility of the promise being made for the large reward due those who work altruistically for the welfare of the community.

We are taught that "the merit of THEIR forefathers assists [those involved in community matters for the sake of Heaven]" as if the forefathers of the nation were the individual fathers of these people. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov are known as the fathers of the entire Jewish nation. But since these people are working for the welfare of the community, they are viewed as the community itself (and the forefathers can be considered as the individual fathers of these altruistic people). We find a tangible example that one who serves the community can have the status of the community in G-d's statement to Moshe at the Burning Bush. G-d says (Shemoth 3:6) "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov" as if the forefathers were Moshe's own personal fathers. Moshe interpreted "the G-d of your father" as meaning the G-d of Amram (Moshe's biological father), so G-d had to elaborate with "the G-d of Avraham...". But why did he introduce Himself as "the G-d of your father?" Since G-d knew that Moshe would not feel worthy of the mission for which he was being sent, G-d was telling Moshe that the mission was one for the welfare of the community, and the forefathers are fathers to one who works for the needs of the community. By introducing Himself as

the G-d of the forefathers, He was telling Moshe that he would be assisted by the merit of the forefathers, as we are taught in our Mishna.

(This next section is rooted in Kabbalistic insights. I have translated the words with minimal elaboration, without going beyond the very cryptic surface. There will be some development of these ideas in chapter 5.) This assistance has Avraham "holding his right hand" (symbolic of Avraham's characteristic of "chesed") guiding the speech and actions of the person working for the needs of the community; Yitzchak defends against destruction and negative elements (which symbolically comes from the left side; Yitzchak's characteristic of "gevurah") that could come from his actions; and Yakov shows him the path to take and provides guidance in choosing which actions to do. That this is the role of Yakov is alluded to in the verse (Breishith 28:20) "If G-d will be with me, and protect me on this path that I am going on..."

There is another reason for the connection of the lesson of involvement with communal matters and the lesson of derech eretz in our Mishna. Even though involvement in communal matters is simple "derech eretz," the expected way one should behave in society, one who does this receives great reward. After teaching that one's Torah should be accompanied with "derech eretz," giving praise to involvement in the material/physical side of the world, the Tanna teaches us that if that involvement is directed to benefit the community and provide their needs, the person is greatly rewarded.

(A person motivated by what Rav Deseler calls "koach hanetina," the drive to give, will always be looking to give people what they need, and do it with the best service possible. A store keeper who is motivated by maximizing profits will look for what products have high profit margins, and give good service in order to attract the largest number of customers in order to make the most money he can. This person is governed by the drive to take, which economists would call "the profit motive." Another store keeper may charge the same prices and give the same good service, but he can be motivated by the drive to give and serve. He looks to sell the products that meet needs that aren't being met. And he charges a price that allows him a profit, because if he loses money, he will soon be out of business and there will be no one to provide the good service and need products that he does. The first person gives service to make money. The second makes money in order to give service. The Maharal has understood the juxtaposition of the elements of this Mishna to teach us that a person should try to accomplish his needs for derech eretz in a way that maximizes his ability to provide the community with service.)

(This concludes Mishna 2. The next shiur will be after Pesach. Wishing everyone a "Chag Kaher V'samyeach".)

The class is taught by [Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky](#), Dean of [Darche Noam Institutions](#), Yeshivat Darche Noam/Shapell's and Midreshet Rachel for Women.