

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 6: PART 1

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

He (Hillel) used to say: A boor is not one who fears sin; nor can an ignorant person be pious. A shy person does not learn, and an [overly] strict person is not one who can teach. And not everyone who increases commerce ("sechorah") becomes wise. And in a place where there are no "people," attempt to be a "person."

(Proper understanding of the Maharal's commentary on this Mishna requires more knowledge of Hebrew than most of the Mishnayoth we have studied until now. I will try to provide a few lines of introductory background now, and insert necessary comments along the way. I will surround Hebrew words that I am transliterating with quotation marks.)

(The Hebrew word "boor" that is used in the Mishna has been translated by us with the English word boor, since they seem to mean similar things. The Hebrew phrase "am ha'aretz" literally means people of the earth, people connected to the soil. It is usually used to refer to people who are ignorant, and that is how the Maharal, as well as most other commentaries, understand it here.)

(We may have some difficulty with the final phrase of the Mishna, due to the "politically incorrect" nature of Chazal's language. The Hebrew word "ish" is translated as man, and in the pre-politically correct era the phrase could have been translated "In a place where there are no men, be a man." We will see what Chazal meant by the phrase "be a man" in the Maharal's explanation. But I would like to reminisce about how things "used to be." Golda Meir, the late (female) Prime Minister of Israel was fond of telling how Ben Gurion used to refer to her in the years when he was the Prime Minister and she was the lone female cabinet Minister. "Golda Meir is the only man in my cabinet." If we are to correctly understand the use of the word "ish" we must transcend the contemporary politics of gender wars.)

(We will now examine the Maharal's very precise analysis of this Mishna, typical of his approach.)

What is the difference between a "boor" and an "am ha'aretz," an ignorant person. These two nouns seem to be referring to the same kind of person, one who hasn't learned Torah. The proper wording should have been "An ignorant person cannot be one who fears sin, nor can he be a person of piety." (Whenever the Rabbis use different words for similar things, a distinction is being communicated.) And if there **is** a difference between a boor and an ignorant person, why is the boor specifically the one designated as not fearing sin, while the ignorant person is the one who can't be pious. Why

couldn't it have been the reverse? (Many of the commentaries ask this question.)

A further problem is the continuation of the Mishna. One could explain these lessons of the Rabbis as being simple "common sense." A shy person can't learn because he is embarrassed to ask questions to obtain the information and the understanding that he is lacking. An overly strict person can't teach because the students are afraid to ask questions. And a person who is overly involved in business won't become wise, due to the many dealings and distractions he has. But if this was the intention of the Mishna, these obvious ideas could have been taught by anyone! They don't require the insight and wisdom of our Rabbis!!

Furthermore, explaining in this way the lesson "increasing commerce ('sechorah') doesn't necessarily make one wise" is problematic. ("Sechorah" is understood as commercial trade, what we would call "turnover" in a retail business. This is in contrast to other ways of making money such as real estate, agriculture, manufacturing, a professional trade, etc.) For if the intention was to teach us that business dealings distract a person from learning Torah, then the problem isn't specifically one of increasing commerce. It would be true about a person who had to tend to any financial assets! We will learn (in Mishna 8) that "All who increase possessions/assets, increase worry." So we see that distraction is not dependent specifically on commerce, but is caused by an overinvolvement in any aspect of business. The lesson should have been worded as "One who increases his business will not increase his wisdom."

Finally, how does the last lesson - In a place where there are no "people," attempt to be a 'person' - connect with the earlier lessons of the Mishna?

We have said many times that the words of the Rabbis are true wisdom, and not simply what people say from their own human insights or logic.

The two nouns, "boor" and "am ha'aretz" refer to two distinct classifications. Even though they both refer to those who lack Torah knowledge and wisdom, there are two dimensions to this deficiency.

Something which is desolate and empty (meaning that it lacks what should be there) is called "boor." This is seen through the verse (Breishith 47:19) "and the land will not become desolate" where the word "teisham" (become desolate) is rendered by the Targum Unkelos as "taboor." A field which has no crop is called a "sadeh boor," a desolate field. So, too, a person who lacks wisdom is called "boor." He lacks the thing which is meant to be in the person, wisdom, the same way a desolate field lacks what it is supposed to have, namely crops.

A man who lacks wisdom is also called an "am ha'aretz," for the physical body which has wisdom attached to it is a different and superior physical entity in comparison to the human body which is detached from wisdom.

A human being who lacks Torah has two characteristics. First, he is empty and void of wisdom. He lacks the element of "sechel" (the intellectual/spiritual component) that should be found in the

human being. Secondly, his human physicality is less perfect due to this lack of wisdom. (While he could have a more purely physical strength, which would appear to indicate a superior physical dimension, this aspect of his physicality is really **Animal** physicality, since it built purely on physical strength. If we focus on what is unique the human being, even his **Matrrial** dimension is more perfect when it is imbued with "sechel.") The first characteristic is referred to in the title "boor," lacking what should be there. The second characteristic is referred to by "am ha'aretz."

So a boor cannot be a sin-fearing person, because it is through knowledge of G-d that one acquires fear of Him. One who lacks Torah knowledge, which is the true wisdom, cannot have awe of the Almighty. This is what we will learn (Ch. 3, Mishna 17) "If there is no wisdom, there can be no awe."

A person who stands close to a king is in awe of him, while a person who is distant from him is not affected by the feeling of majesty and power, and will feel no awe. The distance mitigates and diminishes any perceptions that could be created. A person lacking in Torah wisdom and intelligence is distant from G-d. A purely physical being cannot attach himself to G-d, Who is a completely transcendent and spiritual reality. It is only through the Torah, which is the essence of spiritual and intellectual reality, that man can come closer to G-d. A boor, who lacks true wisdom, is distant from the Almighty, and as such cannot fear sin. (Fearing sin is an outgrowth of being in awe of the Almighty. One who is not in awe of a king isn't very worried about violating the decrees of that king. The awe created by standing in front of the king will imbue the person with fear of violating his will. One who stands close to the Creator will be in awe of Him, and will therefore fear sin.)

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