

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 6: PART 2

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."

"An ignorant person will not be pious." When man's physical dimension is connected to the "sechel" (imbuing the material human being with a spiritual/intellectual reality), then that physical body is refined and purified. It is clear that the body of an animal is of a more material nature than the body of a human being, for the animal has no "sechel" (spiritual/intellectual dimension). The more connected man's body becomes with this "sechel," the more refined that physicality becomes. And the more refined and elevated the physicality becomes, the more piety it will manifest, with this person doing acts of kindness to all.

(To elaborate briefly on the above, I would suggest that concept of the material being "thick" "coarse" and "heavy," should be contrasted to the intellectual/spiritual, which is viewed as being delicate, thin, and light. Think of spiritually inspiring piece of music or art and you will probably think of the latter adjectives. On the other hand, lusts, addictive or animal behaviour are associated with adjectives like heavy, murky and coarse.)

A person who is an "am ha'aretz," one whose existence is based on his material dimension, is not able to behave in a way that goes beyond the letter of the law. (The definition of a "chasid", a pious person, is one who does more than is required of him.) "Tov" is found in one who transcends the limitations of the material, and this is the source of piety, being motivated to serving, going beyond the letter of the law.

Therefore, we are taught two outcomes from the lack of "sechel." One who lacks "sechel" (the intellectual/spiritual dimension) which is, in essence, Torah knowledge, will lack fear of Heaven, for without wisdom one cannot have awe and fear.

An additional consequence of this lack of "sechel" is that man remains on the level of a coarse material being (in contrast to a refined and lucid being who embodies that "sechel," a purified material dimension). Only by transcending and refining the material dimension can man embody "tov." The more physical the material dimension, the more distant the person is from "tov."

(The connection between a refined physicality and doing acts of kindness needs clarification. While we imagine that refined physicality is a good thing, and acts of kindness are good things, it is necessary to understand why it is the former that specifically leads to the latter. Furthermore, we must clarify our understanding of "tov," which is usually loosely and simplistically translated as "good." We will then understand the basis for the Maharal teaching us that "tov" is found only in those who transcend the material dimension. What is the connection? We touched on it in the Introduction and in the early Mishnayoth, and the ideas can be further developed in this Mishna.

(Physical matter is finite and in a state of constant deterioration, always on the path towards its ultimate destruction. It is driven towards self-preservation, and due to its finite nature it is naturally driven to maintain its existence, properly perceived as being tenuous. Something built exclusively on a material dimension views the giving of itself as diminishing its own limited and finite resources, threatening its very existence. The material dimension can be viewed as very egoistic and selfish. Taking in more resources is viewed as increasing the foundation of its existence, and giving away resources diminishes that existence.

(The word "chasid" comes from the root "chesed," which means to give more than is required. We have written before that the modern usage of the word should not influence our correct understanding of the fundamental meaning of "chasid" as it is used, with precision, by our Rabbis. A person rooted in the material is incapable of giving more than is required, for that would undermine the resources necessary for his existence. Therefore, on the deepest level, it is not possible for an "am ha'aretz," one rooted in the finite material world, to be a "chasid," one who gives generously in a completely altruistic way. While he may give and share, it is done on the basis of his perception that the world and the society of which he is a member will run better if he, and others, share and give. It is more properly viewed as "investing" rather than "giving." To give altruistically is motivated by the recognition that one's existence transcends the material dimension, and that resources are given to man by G-d for the purpose of sharing them, with man serving as G-d's vehicle to pass resources on to others. This is the quintessential "chasid." A person rooted solely in the material dimension, an "am ha'aretz," views the purpose of his resources as being to ensure his material existence. He can give what is required, but certainly wouldn't give more. One who views his resources as a vehicle for giving to others, imitating G-d's altruistic kindness, is in a constant state of giving, ongoing chesed.

(Let us take a businessperson who gives good service or makes a good product **in order to make more profit**, which is motivated by his need to ensure his continued material existence. Now contrast him with one who makes profit **in order to provide a better product or service**, knowing that without profit, he won't be able to continue to give and serve. The latter person is transcending the purely material dimension of his existence, motivated by the desire to give and serve).

The more rooted something is in the material the more distanced it is from "tov" while things that transcend the material are called "tov."

(The word "tov" comes from the root "hatavah," which means to prepare something for its purpose. For example, "hatavath haneiroth" means to prepare the lamps of the menorah to be lit. Since the purpose of creation is to imitate the Divine on the path to attaining a transcendent and eternal existence, the previous sentence of the Maharal takes on very precise and very deep meaning.)

Things which transcend the material are called "tov." Examples are: The Torah (Mishlei 4:2; see what we wrote in Ch. 1, Mishna 2), which is transcendent wisdom; and Moshe Rabbeinu (see Menachot 53b and Sotah 12a) who had the minimal physical dimension necessary to exist in this world. The Jewish nation itself was worthy of receiving the Torah because of their ability to transcend dependence on the material dimension.

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