

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 8: PART 3

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

He (Hillel) used to say: A surplus of meat causes an increase in worms. A surplus of possessions causes an increase in worry. A surplus of wives causes an increase in "keshafim" (witchcraft). A surplus of maidservants causes an increase in promiscuity. A surplus of slaves causes an increase in thievery. A surplus of Torah causes an increase in life. A surplus of "yeshiva" (sitting together with peers studying Torah) increases wisdom. A surplus of "eitzah" (seeking advice and insights from more experienced people) increases understanding. A surplus of charity increases peace. One who acquires a good name acquires it for himself; one who acquires words of Torah for himself has acquired the World to Come for himself.

After dealing with five things that relate to the physical dimensions of existence, our Tanna begins to discuss the things that relate to the transcendent dimensions of existence, which connected to the soul. In matters relating to the soul, a surplus ("marbeh") leads to a virtue.

The first lesson is that "a surplus of Torah causes an increase in life." Torah is the foundation for the soul's existence, giving the soul its life and nourishment. It is through Torah that attachment to G-d (the source of all life) is possible, and a surplus of Torah, through a strengthening of that attachment, is what increases life and vitality .

Then we are taught "A surplus of [sitting together with peers studying Torah] increases wisdom. "Torah" (in the previous lesson) refers to the accurate knowledge of all the laws and commandments, while "wisdom" is the next stage, encompassing the reasons for the laws and an understanding of the commandments. This virtue of wisdom is also connected to the soul.

Then we are taught that a surplus of "eitzah" increases understanding. This refers to delving ever more deeply into the Torah, toiling and striving to discover and understand new things from what is already known.

The first three virtues relate to "da'ath" (knowledge), "chochma" (wisdom) and "binah" (understanding), which we find mentioned in the Haggadah (of Pesach): "...we all have wisdom, we all have understanding, we all know the Torah..." ("kulanu chachamim, kulanu nevonim, kulanu yod'im et haTorah"). The Torah is called "da'ath," as we have explained in other places. (See Gevuroth HaShem, at the end of Ch. 52. This also came up in the explanation of Ch. 1, Mishna 1, in discussing the three

lessons that were taught in response to the deterioration of "sechel," of the intellectual level of the Jewish people. Each one of the three lessons in that Mishna was directed at protecting the three dimensions of the "sechel:" chochmah, binah and da'ath. We will be dealing with this again in future discussions, especially in Ch. 3 in the Mishna which teaches us that "binah" and "da'ath" are interdependent. It is one of the last Mishnayoth of the chapter, and if you want to reference it, there are a few ways of numbering the Mishnayoth in that chapter leading to it being listed as variously as 17, 19 or 21.)

In each of these listed practices, an increase leads to the acquisition of more virtue, in contrast to the earlier practices, where every increase (beyond what is necessary) leads to greater lack.

The next step is one who increases "tzedaka" (which we will loosely translate as "charity") which leads to an increase in peace. (The Maharal understands "tzedaka" in this context as giving to someone else something which is not owed to him, in contrast to giving because the law determines that it belongs to him.) Peace implies that there is no opposition preventing a person from smoothly following his path and pursuing his goals. Peace is necessary to enable one to achieve his goals, both materially and spiritually, while conflict would be a barrier preventing those achievements. When a person insists on all aspects of his interactions with others being built on strict adherence to the letter of the law, never adopting a position of leniency, this is a recipe for conflict and argument. (See Bava Metzia 30b, which teaches that Jerusalem was destroyed -- destruction being the ultimate conclusion of conflict and argument -- because everyone insisted on adherence to the letter of the law.) This contrasts with one who behaves charitably, with behavior that extends beyond the letter of the law, leading to peace and harmonious interactions.

Charity leads to peace, as it is written (Isaiah 32:17) "And the acts of charity are peace." This verse is used as a source for the lesson in Bava Bathra (9a): Greater is one who makes others [give charity] than one who does it (gives charity) himself. (The extra word "ma'aseh" in the verse, which we translated as "acts," is being interpreted to mean "make another do something") Rava instructed the people of Mechoza (his home town) "Make each other [give charity] in order that there should be peace even in relation to the authorities" (who usually demand strict adherence to the law). What is the meaning of this benefit of getting others to give charity?

A person can give charity out of a personal feeling of generosity, his desire to do something for another person. But he doesn't feel that it is required of him. This kind of generosity does not necessarily lead to peace and harmony with others. Arguments and strife are caused by one person expecting another person to behave in a certain way, while the second person resists. This resistance is caused by the desire of each person to do what he wants to do, and not "give in" to the other. Charity motivated by the personal desire to do for another does not indicate a willingness towards "leniency." The person's generosity is motivated by his feeling that it is right, but not because there is something outside of his perspective that can require it of him. **that** is exactly what can lead to argument and conflict, and why even people who are capable of giving generously can become

deeply embroiled in "machloket," in interpersonal strife and argument. Their generosity is a function of it being in line with their personal perspective of how things should be.

However, when, in addition to his own giving, a person works to get **another** to give in a situation where he was not intending to give, this comes from the recognition that charity and generosity are objective imperatives. Rather than being done due to his own feeling of generosity -- which would have been consummated by his own giving -- charity, giving something that is not required by law, is viewed as a behavioral norm. Convincing another to give, as well as giving at the behest of another, are both indicative of the ability to go beyond the letter of the law, to compromise and to be lenient in adopting behavior which is in line with another person's perspective, rather than only behaving according to one's own perspective. **this** is the foundation of peace and harmonious coexistence.

So the real intention of our Tanna when he teaches that an increase in charity increases peace refers to one who is involved in every aspect of charitable giving, getting others to give charity (in addition, of course, to his own giving).

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