

## CHAPTER 3: MISHNA 1: PART 4

*by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky*

(The next section of the Maharal is heavily dependent on Hebrew grammar and the nuances of language. It is therefore difficult to do it justice in the purely English format that we are using. I will summarize the Maharal's thoughts, and provide the Biblical references for the distinctions he makes. Those interested in pursuing it will need to see the section in the original Hebrew.)

In the language of the Mishna, the word "mei'ayin" is used to ask FROM where a person came. "L'an" is used to ask TO where that person is going. Why two different forms of the same root, both meaning "where?" The Maharal explains that the going "TO where" is a dynamic process, indicating motion towards a future, but not yet attained, end point. "FROM where" is looking for the origin of the journey, something which already exists. (See Tehillim 139:7, Yehoshua 2:4, Shoftim 19:17 for examples of the different usages that parallel the usage in our Mishna.)

The Tanna used the language that you won't "come to the hands of sin," rather than the more straightforward "you won't come to a sin," because he is referring to the cause of the sin. The phrase "to the hands of..." always indicates the cause of something, for it is the hands that gives one the first contact with an object and makes it accessible to us. So the cause of the sin is called "the hands of sin." Contemplating the three things taught to us in our Mishna will help man avoid the cause of the sin, which is his arrogance. Had we been taught that by contemplating these three things we would avoid sin, the implication would be that if he fails to contemplate these things he will definitely sin, which is not correct. What will happen is that he will be vulnerable to the causes of sin. (Also not a very good thing, of course. But the Maharal is once again building our understanding from the expectation of accuracy and precision in the words of the Rabbis.) This is also the meaning of the request "And don't bring me to the hands of sin nor to the hands of iniquity," (Berachoth 60b, said every morning in the introductory prayers) asking G-d not to bring us into circumstances that can be the cause of sin.

But even after a person has alleviated the control that the yetzer harah can have over his behavior, he may sin if he thinks that there is no accountability for his actions. It is in response to this that the Tanna teaches "And before Whom will you ultimately give a judgment and an accounting." With the awareness of all these elements together, a person will certainly not sin. (The yetzer harah uses various enticements to bring a person to sin. Sometimes, the only way to resist those enticements is through a simple cost/benefit analysis. The fact that one is held accountable for one's actions can be used to mitigate against the short-term "benefits" of the sin. The concept of "no accountability" all

too common in our society today allows a person to permit himself to behave in very improper and even destructive ways.)

Another reason to instruct a person to contemplate before Whom he will ultimately give a judgment is to further neutralize his arrogance, by highlighting the encompassing nature of his insignificance. Not only is his origin insignificant (coming from a putrefied drop); not only is his conclusion insignificant (ending in a place of dirt, maggots and worms); but even his existence lacks independent significance, as evidenced by the fact that he will be called to give an accounting before the King of Kings, The Holy One, Blessed be He. A person is held accountable for all his activities during the time of his existence, and since he surely falls short of what is expected of him, "better that he should not have been created" (as we are taught in Eiruvim 13b). (For a fuller explanation of this famous and most difficult dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, see our earlier explanation of the Maharal on Chapter 2, Mishna 10.)

There are those who question the language "judgment and accounting," (din v'cheshbon) since the accounting (cheshbon) has to be given before the judgment (din). But this is not difficult, since this judgment (din) refers to the fact that G-d will judge the person for his actions. He should not think that his actions will not be judged, and when G-d brings him to judgment, he will be required to give an accounting. The "din" referred to is the fact that he will be brought to judgment, rather than to the verdict of that judgment.

(In Biblical and Talmudic language the word "din" can refer to both the process of the being judged, as well as the verdict of the judgment. The Maharal is pointing out that in this Mishna it is not referring to the verdict, which obviously has to come after the accounting. The Vilna Gaon, bothered by the same question as the Maharal, has a different interpretation for this phrase. "Din" refers to the judgment G-d renders about a person's good and bad actions. In addition to being judged for the deeds a person did, he will also be held accountable for all the good deeds he could have done during the time he spent on the bad deeds. That is "din" judgment followed by "cheshbon" accountability.)

Why is the phrase "giving" judgment appropriate? Obligatory consequences that arise from a person's actions are called "giving" those consequences. When a person commits any sin, judgment for that sin is obligatory, so he has to "give" judgment. (See Bava Bathra 73b, which mentions an occurrence for which the Jewish people will have to ultimately give judgment.)

In order to understand this Mishna on an even deeper level, we must know that G-d is the Primary Cause ("eelah") of all existence, and man is the result ("alul") of that Primary Cause. (The phrases "eelah" and "alul" refer to an ongoing relationship between one who is the source and one who is the recipient of resources from that source. On the surface, it could be interpreted as a cause/effect relationship. But while a cause produces an effect which then exists independently of the cause, an "alul" constantly draws its existence from the "eelah." These terms are used frequently in the Maharal

(as well as in earlier philosophers), and from here on, we will use them, rather than the approximate translations that I have given in the previous sentence.) When man realizes that he exists as a result of the "eelah," with that relationship and dependency creating an attachment to that "eelah," he will not fall into the hands of sin. Man is capable of sinning only when he distances himself from the "eelah," and doesn't consider himself as an "alul," dependent on the "eelah" for his existence. (If, when we were conflicted about doing an improper act, we had absolute clarity that our entire existence at that moment was a result of a direct and existential will of G-d, it would be quite difficult to use that existence for anything that deviated in the slightest from His will.)

Therefore, we are told to contemplate three things in order that we avoid falling into the hands of sin, which would sever our attachment to G-d. As we have said earlier, the lesson that our origin is from a putrefied drop, and that our conclusion is in a place of dirt, worms and maggots, gives us the awareness that both our origin and our conclusion lack any independent significance. If we only had an awareness that our origin lacked significance, but we felt that our conclusion was one of significance, then we would feel a certain independence in our existence, and not be under the jurisdiction of the "eelah." The same would be true if we felt our origin had significance, even if we were aware that our conclusion lacked significance. Knowing that both our origin and our conclusion lack any independent significance makes us realize how completely dependent we are in our existence. But even with that awareness, we also need to accept upon us the jurisdiction of the Creator as an "eelah." This is accomplished with the awareness that we are destined to give a judgment and an accounting before Him, also enabling each person realizing that he is an "alul."

Through all three of the elements, man, as an "alul" places himself under the jurisdiction and authority of the "eelah," which saves him from the hand of sin, since the sin would eliminate that authority, and eliminates the control of the yetzer harah.

This latter explanation is similar to our earlier explanation if you delve deeply into its truth. Through contemplation of these three things, man prevents any separation between himself and G-d, and with this attachment he will never come to the hand of sin (insulating himself from the cause of sin)

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