

CHAPTER 3: MISHNA 2: PART 1

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Rebbe Chanina, the assistant High Priest, says: Pray for the welfare of the government. For without fear of it, people would swallow each other alive.

The first question that should be asked is what is the connection between the lesson of Rebbe Chanina and Akavia ben Mehalalel? (It should be noted once again that the Maharal expects logical connections in the order of lessons of the Rabbis. They don't teach things in a haphazard or coincidental manner.)

Furthermore, while it is certainly fitting to pray for the welfare of the government, why was the alternative presented [in such an extreme way] as "people will eat each other alive?" It would have been sufficient (and more accurate) to say that "without fear of the government, people couldn't coexist." (Viewing the words of the Rabbis as an exaggeration for the sake of effect is not a perspective tolerated by the Maharal. If the metaphor is an extreme one, it is done with precision to teach a specific lesson. We could formulate it as "Even the exaggerations are written with precision.")

The explanation is as follows. When you contemplate creation, you will find that man was created in a way that differed from any of G-d's other creations. All creatures were created in multitudes (many members of each species were created) while man was created as a single individual. (Many horses were created, many bumble bees were created, and many sharks were created. But only one man was created.) Even the female, who was originally supposed to be created separately, was first created in a united form with the male, making man's original creation was truly as a single individual. (See T.B. Berachoth 61a)

We are taught (Sanhedrin 37a) "Therefore man was created as a single individual, to teach you that anyone who destroys one Jewish life is considered by the Torah to have destroyed the entire world. And one who saves one Jewish life is considered by the Torah to have saved the entire world. And [another reason why man was created as a single individual was] because of [the nature of] people: That one person shouldn't declare "My father was greater than your father." And [a further reason was that] so that the heretics shouldn't say that there are numerous dominions in the heavens. And [a further reason was] to tell of the greatness of G-d. When a man mints several coins from the same mold, each one comes out identical. But the King of Kings mints each person from the mold of

Adam, and no one is identical to any other one. Therefore each and every person is required to declare "The world was created for me." (For those of you looking up the sources that the Maharal quotes something which is highly recommended it should be noted that there are some minor deviations between the language that we have in our Talmud text and the language as quoted by the Maharal.)

It appears that the reasoning goes as follows: Since the entire world was descended from one man, one who destroys even one life is considered as one who has destroyed the entire world. But this reasoning is not logically compelling. For the implication is that if man had not been created as a single individual, but rather there had been a number of men created at once, then no individual man would be considered as representing the entire world, since part of the world descended from others, too. But this leads to the conclusion that nowadays, when there are many people in the world, killing one person should not be considered like destroying the entire world!? There are many others from whom the world will continue! Furthermore, one who kills an old man, or anyone lacking reproductive ability, should not be considered as having destroyed the entire world! (Yet no such distinction is implied!)

The meaning of this statement is as follows. According to the fundamental wisdom of the design of the world, one man would have been sufficient to fulfill the purpose of the human being in the world, just as the wisdom of design required many of all other species. Man's role is to be the king of the lower (physical) world (as G-d is the King of the upper, spiritual, world) and it is known that there can not be more than one king. This is taught in the statement (Chullin 60a) "Two kings cannot serve with one crown." (See an application of this in relation to the interchange between the sun and moon at the time of their creation, cited by Rashi Breishith 1:16.) Since man is the king of the lower world, the structure of the world would require that man be an individual. So one who sustains one life is considered to have sustained the entire world, while one who destroys one life is considered as one who destroyed the entire world. (Each individual represents the human being who can be the single individual serving as the king of the lower world.)

Furthermore, man is the purpose ("tzurah") of the world, being the completion of creation, and it was for him that the rest of the creation was brought into existence. And it is a fundamental principle about purpose, that it is fundamentally one, not divisible. Therefore man was created as a single individual. (Every object can be viewed as having one fundamental and primary purpose. This is one of the understandings of the concept of "tzurah" that appears frequently in the Maharal, and which we have discussed a number of times.) So one individual man represents the [purpose] of the entire world, and one who destroys him is considered as having destroyed the entire world, due to the significance of the human being. Since each individual can serve as the purpose of the world, he embodies the entire world.

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