

CHAPTER 3: MISHNA 3: PART 4

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

We are then taught that even the person who sits as an individual and involves himself with Torah has a reward set for him by G-d. Although the proof text does not explicitly refer to one involved in Torah study, but rather to one who is accepting upon himself the yoke of the Monarchy of Heaven, it serves as a validation in the following way. It is written (Eicha 3:27) "It is good for a man to carry a yoke in his youth," which refers to accepting the yoke of Heaven. In the next verse, this yoke is explained with the words (ibid 3:28) "Let him sit in solitude and be still, for he has taken it upon himself" meaning that he has taken upon himself the decrees of the Almighty. There can be no greater acceptance of the decrees of G-d than to sit, be involved, and toil in the Torah which embodies the decrees of G-d that are imposed on man. Engaging in the struggle to know G-d's Torah is the most encompassing manifestation of man's commitment to accept upon himself the decrees of the Almighty. (The proof-text is especially appropriate to one studying Torah for the following reason.) While the performance of any other Mitzvah is done through action, requiring an active role in accepting G-d's decrees, the text cited implies that man is accepting this yoke through sitting in solitude. This can only happen while being engaged in the struggle to understand Torah.

Where does the text imply that G-d determines a reward for this person? The one described in the text is lovingly accepting upon himself the decrees of G-d as a way of taking upon himself the burden, the yoke, of the Monarchy of Heaven. Accepting upon oneself a burden [of responsibility] is the epitome of service, and all service generates a required compensation. Therefore, this person is worthy of compensation, which G-d determines for him.

This connection is also found by Aharon, who remained silent in the face of the decree of G-d which took his two eldest sons (Vayikra 10:3) and immediately was rewarded with an extra revelation. (See Rashi Vayikra 11:1,2, and Sifra 10:12) We see that silent acceptance of G-d's decrees brings about a special reward.

The person who sits as an individual, studying and toiling in G-d's Torah is clearly accepting upon himself the decrees of G-d, fulfilling the description of one who is carrying a yoke, and about whom the text promises "It is good." This "good" implies a special reward.

(Now the Maharal extends this interpretation to explain the alternate version of the Mishna, the one found in the Mishna text of the Derech Chaim, as I mentioned in our first shiur on this Mishna)

There is a version of the Mishna that reads: What is the source that even an individual person who

sits and reviews (Torah) is considered as one who has fulfilled the entire Torah? For it is written "Let him sit in solitude and be still, for he has taken it upon himself."

This version is even more difficult to understand, for how does the proof text indicate that he is like one who has taken upon himself the entire Torah? But with our interpretation, this version becomes very understandable. The first verse discusses the acceptance of a yoke, followed by describing this person as sitting in silence, accepting it upon himself. The yoke of the Almighty [which He placed upon us] is manifested by His commandments, and one who studies and reviews those commandments is doing so as a most intense expression of accepting upon himself the Yoke of Heaven.

(Reviewing the Torah that we know reflects a different attitude towards that Torah than when we study it the first time. It indicates our interest in meticulous, accurate and knowledgeable observance of the Mitzvot. This manifests a person's willing acceptance upon himself of the burden of serving G-d. A source for this idea is the Gemara (Chagiga 9b) which examines the verse (Malachi 3:18) "And you will return to see the difference between a righteous person and an evil person; between one who serves G-d and one who doesn't serve Him." The Gemara asks: The righteous person is the one who serves G-d, and the evil person is the one who doesn't serve Him! (There is redundancy in the text!). And the Gemara answers: Both the one who serves G-d and the one who doesn't serve Him refer to people who are completely righteous. But one who reviews his Torah one hundred times ("...who doesn't serve Him") is not comparable to one who reviews it one hundred and one times (...one who serves G-d).

(When our Mitzvah observance is done with minimum attention to details, in a haphazard fashion, looking for excuses and loopholes, this is resistance to the "Yoke of Heaven." If our approach to keeping mitzvot is similar to the way we go about paying our income tax, we may be complying with the law, and even accepting the burden. But it certainly isn't being done willingly and lovingly. How many people enjoy reviewing their tax returns many times, in order to make sure they did it right, not wanting to miss something the government would like to receive? If a review is done at all, it is done to make sure we can't be fined or prosecuted for income tax evasion. What is our attitude towards the detailed fulfillment of Mitzvot? Is our Torah study and observance being motivated by a love of G-d, looking for ways to get closer to Him? Or to ensure that we have protected ourselves from prosecution for missing some detail?)

It seems correct that study as an individual is considered a greater acceptance of the decrees of G-d than when two people are studying together. The typical interchange that takes place between two people studying Torah makes the Torah less of a yoke than when one is studying it by oneself

(This idea of the Maharal can be understood in two ways. First, learning together with a study partner is more stimulating, enjoyable and exciting. When he does it alone, it requires more self motivation and commitment, making it more of a yoke. Additionally, when one studies alone, conclusions that

are reached are self-imposed, being much more of a yoke than when a study partner convinces you of something.)

Given our explanations, the language of the Mishna "What is the source that EVEN an individual person who sits and is involved in Torah," (the word "afilu" which means "even") appears difficult. Since he is sitting alone studying the Torah, there appears to be a greater acceptance of G-d's yoke than when two people are studying together. Why should we phrase the question with ".even an individual"? The answer is that after the Mishna demonstrated that the Divine Presence resides in the presence of two people studying Torah, one needs a source that even one who studies alone, is also considered to have the Divine Presence with him. Therefore, a proof is brought to show that with his greater acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, the Divine Presence is also present for him, for he is considered to be fulfilling the entire Torah. And more that, that in fact the Divine Presence is with him, and G-d determines a reward for him.

(There are two ideas we have raised in this shiur that require further elaboration, and both of which are very relevant for Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. One is the relationship between serving G-d out of fear and serving Him out of love. The other is the difficulty in being "alone," having an independent identity and sense of self, as opposed to being dependent on others for our feelings of existence and self-worth. The next class will have sections dealing with each of these ideas. The first will be based on a section in the Maharal in Netiv Ahavath HaShem, Ch. 2. The second will be based on a section in Alei Shur V. II, (the contemporary mussar work by Rav Shlomo Volbe, shlit'a), pgs. 413-420.)

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