

CHAPTER 3: MISHNA 4: PART 2

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

(A number of you asked, after the last shiur, that we hadn't explained why THREE people were required for the law of the Mishna to be applicable. The explanation begins at the end of this shiur.)

There is a further point to be understood. Every king provides nourishment and sustenance to his subjects. A human king, who himself is a material being, is limited to providing sustenance for his subjects' material and physical needs. But the Almighty, who created both the body and spirit, provides sustenance for man's physical needs through the food and other resources he gives, as well as for his metaphysical needs, through the Torah that he gave. For man, having a spirit but lacking wisdom and understanding, would render that spirit of little true benefit. (See Mishlei 19:2 and Rashi ibid.)

(If man's purpose in this world is centered on physical pleasure and comfort, having an intellect and spiritual sensitivities can actually be to his detriment, if they are not nourished. Finding that most human beings long for more than simply physical nourishment and satisfaction is a compelling indication of the spiritual dimension of man. This metaphysical dimension craves nourishment no less than the physical dimension, and behavioral disorders, addictions and general dissatisfaction with life are the symptoms of an undernourished soul.)

When G-d came to rule as the King of the Jewish nation, he declared "I am the L-rd your G-d." He gave them the Torah, which was nourishment for their spiritual dimension., which followed His providing them with manna, which was nourishment for their physical dimension.

(The Maharal now builds on the Hebrew word for nourishment and sustenance, which is "parnassa," and one who provides this sustenance is called a "parnass.")

We find the word "parnass" used to describe G-d in the context of His being the One Who gave Torah to the Jewish people. (See T.B. Chagiga 3b) This is because the Torah was given to the Jewish people to provide them with nourishment. Therefore, a table at which words of Torah are spoken is considered to be linked to G-d, since the servants of G-d are receiving both their physical and spiritual nourishment from this table (material food for their physical bodies and Torah which nourishes their spiritual dimension.)

But a table at which words of Torah are not spoken can't be linked to G-d, since His table provides both physical and spiritual nourishment (which is not being provided at this table). Furthermore, this

table can't be linked to man, since when a person eats, he is like a servant partaking of the King 's food, rather than of his own.

The result is that one who eats at this table is considered to be partaking of the offerings to the dead. Since this table provides only nourishment for man's physical body, which is moving towards death, the table is compared to an alter for the dead.

(The nourishment being provided at the table without words of Torah is sustaining something that is on the path to extinction, man's physical dimension. This is also the meaning of the Talmudic statement (Berachoth 18a-b) "Wicked people, even in their lifetimes, are called 'dead'", and "Righteous people, even in their death, are called 'alive'." Sacrifices on an alter is conceptually related to providing "nourishment" to the recipient of the sacrifices. The word "lechem," bread, is used in the context of sacrifices, with bread representing the most fundamentally form of needed nourishment. See Vayikra 3:11,16; Bamidbar 28:2, 24; Gevuros HaShem Ch. 6g; Netiv Ha'Avodah Ch. 1.)

This perspective also applies to a meal at which a Torah scholar is participating. We were taught that one who participates in such a meal is considered to have derived enjoyment from the radiance of the Divine Presence. (Berachoth 64a that we quoted in the previous shiur.) G-d is the One providing nourishment for man's spiritual dimension, which is illustrated by the description of the World To Come. "The World To Come has no eating or drinking, but only righteous people sitting with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence" (Berachoth 17a). When a Torah scholar participates in the meal, just as the body is receiving its sustenance, so, too, does the spiritual dimension receive its sustenance, which is the radiance of the Divine Presence.

Why does this require three people eating together, with two not being sufficient (as in the previous Mishna)? The law being taught refers to people eating at one table. But this isn't limited to literally one table. The law is true even when the people ate at two tables, as long as they created a unity that bound them together, which renders the place in which they are eating into "one table." It is the unity between the people that creates the "oneness" of the table, and "oneness" is necessary to render it a table of the Divine. Just as there is only one Holy Alter for the One G-d, to be considered a table of the Divine the table must have a dimension of unity. (See our discussion in Ch. 1, Mishna 12 on the dimension of "oneness" in the Temple service.)

A table can be rendered as "one" only through three people. Two are always divided, with no unifying element. This is why the number two has "mem," the letter of plurality attached to it. The transition from one to two is the foundation of increase and plurality

(The Hebrew word for two is "shnaim," which has the letter "mem" at the end, something found in no other single digit number. The letter "mem" is used to transform a pronoun from singular to plural ["lahem" "lachen" etc.] and it is used to transform singular numbers into multiples of ten ["shloshim" "shmonim" etc.].)

(In other places the Maharal points out that the concept of "bracha", which implies increase, is

composed of the three letters representing two [beit] twenty [kaf] and two hundred [reish]. The word for the first born, "bechor," who is entitled to a double portion, is also built on the same three letters.)

Conceptually, the number two has no point of unification, but represents the many. The number three has a unifying element, and can represent a unity.

(Two discrete elements of a set can always be contrasted with each other. This is why they are said to lack of a point of unification. When three elements of the set are analyzed, two can always be contrasted to create the extremes, with the third lying somewhere in the middle, acting a bridge or unifier. We have discussed the significance of the number three in quite a few shiurim in Chapter 1, especially Mishna 1, pt. 3, and Mishna 2, pt. 4. We will review and expand on this next time.)

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