

## CHAPTER 2, MISHNA 4: THE WORLD'S USER'S GUIDE

*by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld*

***He [Rabban Gamliel] used to say: Do His will as your will in order that He do your will as His will. Annul your will before His will in order that He annul the will of others before your will.***

This mishna instructs us to not only follow G-d's will, but to make G-d's will our own. We are not only to perform the mitzvos (commandments), but to want to do nothing else. This seems a daunting and near impossible challenge, yet it is in essence the challenge of Judaism.

We must establish an important principle to begin to appreciate our mishna. It is one which is unfortunately often overlooked, certainly from outside the religious world but tragically sometimes even within. Parts of the following are based on a lecture heard from [R. Noach Weinberg](#) OBM of Yeshiva Aish Hatorah, Jerusalem.

There is a common misconception about Torah observance and Judaism in general. We often view the Torah as a set of commands whose primary purpose is to enable us to earn a share in the World to Come. More precisely, we see the Torah as a means of being miserable down here so that after a lifetime of struggle and deprivation, we will acquire our share in the hereafter. We would much rather enjoy ourselves and live as we please down here, but (perhaps) it is worth denying ourselves this world in order to get a share of the next one.

That perspective, however, is wrong -- dead wrong to be precise. And even more, it misses the entire message of Judaism.

The Torah is not a book about the World to Come, as we will see below. Rather, the Torah is a guidebook for living in **this** world. As R. Weinberg explains, whenever you buy an item of value, it typically comes with a set of instructions. Buy a vacuum cleaner and you'll get a one-page instruction sheet (the warranty, changing the bag etc.). Buy a stereo system and you'll get a pamphlet (setting the controls, cleaning, maintenance). Buy a car and you'll get a book, a mainframe and you'll get a shelf-full of wholly unreadable manuals.

Well, G-d gave us -- He entrusted us -- with something much greater and much more precious: that great big Spaceship Earth that we all reside upon and share with one another. G-d gave us a world in which we are to create civilizations, till the soil, develop relationships, build families, get along with one another, and share with millions of other species. What did He give us to operate it? How are we to live the most meaningful and rewarding type of existence on it? Where is the user's guide? It is the Torah.

The Torah is not primarily a book which concerns itself with the World to Come. Amazingly, it talks very little about G-d per se (as in, attempting to give us some Kabbalistic understanding of who G-d actually is). And it makes virtually no mention of the World to Come or the Resurrection of the Dead -- although such concepts are literally the cornerstones of our faith. The most the Torah (and by the Torah I mean Scripture -- the written part of our tradition) ever seems to promise for our good deeds is bounty in this world: "And it will be, if you shall surely hearken unto My commandments... I will give you the rain of your land in its time, the autumn rains and the spring rains, and you will gather your grain, wine and oil." (Deuteronomy 11:13-14). Doesn't the Torah have anything grander and loftier to offer us than rain puddles and grain?

The answer is that the Torah is very much a "this world" book. It is not a book which tells us about G-d or religious theology -- nor does it even bother to state that the true reward for our deeds will be in the next world. Rather, the Torah is the set of instructions G-d gave us for making sense of life and of human nature. It is a practical work -- for healthy and meaningful living in this world: how to eat, how to marry, how to build relationships, how to combine Torah study and worldly involvement, and even how to relax on the Sabbath.

The Torah is thus a work which understands -- and never denies -- human nature. It knows what our needs are and what our natures are, and it enables us to sublimate every one of our drives and talents towards the spiritual. It provides us with the keys to happiness and fulfillment in this world: through the ideal combination of ritual and individuality, of discipline and personal self-expression. It allows both our bodies and souls to be satisfied and fulfilled. And when the Torah is observed properly, rather than denying the physical side of man making us "miserable", both body and soul become fulfilled, transforming man into a single and complete being in the image of G-d.

(This incidentally is an issue the other great religions have grappled with far less successfully. I am certainly no expert on comparative religions, but my overall understanding is that Christianity has much more trouble relating to the physical side of man, sometimes seeing the ideal as celibacy and poverty. Islam on the other hand, not being able to discount such a central part of man's makeup, seems to have subjugated the spiritual side of man to the physical. Their version of the "world to come" is a huge harem of virgins (at least for men -- I'm not even sure what they offer women (perhaps one reason there are so far fewer female suicide bombers)). Judaism, however, has no such complex about the physical world. All aspects of humanity are purposeful and G-d-given. There is nothing which cannot be properly directed and turned into a vehicle for holiness.)

Thus, the rewards promised in Scripture are likewise limited to this world. The meaning is not, of course, that there will be nothing greater in the World to Come. The Talmud tells us, "There is no true reward in this world" (Kiddushin 39b). All this world truly has to offer is that nothing will go wrong: the rains and weather will cooperate, we won't get sick, the human race won't be wiped out by giant asteroid. True spiritual reward (and punishment) for our deeds is a thing of the next world. But the Written Torah, which deals with living in this world, does not focus on it. It rather tells us that

if we serve G-d properly, the world -- and especially the Land of Israel -- will function in harmony with man -- allowing us to serve G-d even better. Not only will our total selves -- body and soul -- be united in service of G-d, but the world itself will join mankind in complete perfection.

We can now begin to appreciate Rabban Gamliel's advice in our mishna. We should want to do the mitzvos -- not just in order to earn reward, but because we recognize that mitzvah observance is itself the reward. It is the most rewarding and fulfilling way to live on this earth. Of course, after our 120 years, the **actual** reward will come -- and we will hardly have to settle for any moral clichés that virtue is its own reward. But Scripture provides us with a wholly accurate depiction of life: Serve G-d down here and you will be happy. I am giving you these commandments for your own sakes, not Mine.

And if we recognize that G-d's will is what is best for us, He will do our will too. Our wants and His will no longer be separate. Our desire will be to serve G-d, to come closer to Him and to realize our own potential. We will want health, happiness and all the blessings but only in order to serve G-d better. And so, there will be a merging of wills. Both our will and G-d's will become one and the same.

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