

CHAPTER 6, MISHNA 1(A) : WHAT G-D REALLY WANTS - PART I

by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld

Rabbi Meir (Mai-eer) said: Anyone who engages in Torah study for its own sake ('lishma') merits many things. Not only that, but the entire world is worthwhile for him alone. He is called 'friend' and 'beloved,' he loves G-d, he loves man, he brings joy to G-d, he brings joy to man. It [the Torah] clothes him in humility and fear. It enables him to be righteous, pious, upright, and faithful. It distances him from sin and brings him to merit. [Others] benefit from him advice and wisdom, understanding and strength, as it says, 'To me is advice and wisdom, I am understanding, and strength is mine' (Proverbs 8:14). It gives him kingship, dominion and analytical judgment. It reveals to him the secrets of the Torah. He becomes as an increasing stream and an unceasing river. He becomes modest, slow to anger, and forgiving of the wrongs done to him. It makes him great and exalted above all of creation.

This mishna describes the exalted level of those who study Torah "lishma", literally, "for its sake" (even more literally, "for its name"). As we will see, this level of dedication to Torah not only raises the scholar to an exceedingly high level of closeness to G-d, but it endears him to all mankind -- as well as all mankind to him. (I'm going to use the Hebrew term "lishma" in the discussion below, partly because it conveys the idea more precisely (to my ears at least), and partly because it's easier to type.) :-)

It's important to state from the start that studying Torah lishma is considered an uncommonly lofty level of Divine service -- something not typically found even among accomplished scholars. Thus, we may observe that our mishna (as well as this entire chapter -- as we discussed last week) goes well beyond the "everyday" advice of most of Pirkei Avos. It instead gives us a glimpse of the sublime and glorious -- the world of true Torah study.

What does it mean to study Torah for **its** sake? The idea would seem to be studying Torah not to satisfy any of our own interests, but solely so that the Torah is studied. This would certainly preclude studying for status, recognition, Heavenly reward, or intellectual stimulation. It would even seem to preclude studying in order to get closer to G-d. That too would presumably contain the essentially selfish motive of wanting something ourselves -- as noble as that something might be.

The ideal motive would then seem to be to study for the Torah's sake -- seemingly just in order that the Torah be studied -- or better, that G-d's will that Torah be studied be fulfilled. This, however, does not seem to suffice. What's so lofty about the Torah being studied per se? Is there nothing more to Torah study -- and to all the mitzvos (commandments) for that matter -- than blind

fulfillment just because G-d says so? Shouldn't we attempt to gain an appreciation for the beauty and significance of what we do? Isn't a mitzvah so much less meaningful if we do not?

(It is well known that many of the greatest crimes against humanity (many recent ones come to mind) have been perpetrated in the name of religion -- under the pretext of blindly and brainlessly following G-d's alleged will (or at least what others claim it to be), no questions asked.)

Further, what of Israel's great love affair with the Torah? Isn't Torah study exhilarating? Hasn't its depth and wisdom brought cheer and inspiration to generations of suffering and exiled Jews who had little else? King David exclaimed, "If not for Your Torah, my delight, I would have perished in my suffering" (Psalms 119:92). (Put to stirring music by Shlomo Carlebach; was reputedly the favorite song of R. Aharon Kotler.) David likewise referred to Torah study as "music" to him (ibid., v. 54) (although G-d faulted him for viewing the Torah as merely a source of a "high" -- see Talmud Sotah 35a). Do we not -- how could we not -- study the Torah without becoming overwhelmed with the thrilling sense of the infinite wisdom of G-d? And is that appreciation somehow less than "true" Torah study lishma?

Let us back up a moment. Torah study lishma means studying because it is G-d's will. But what *is* G-d's will -- and why does He want us to study Torah? The answer is that G-d's ultimate will is to do good to mankind. He gave us a world in which we can serve Him and become worthy of reward -- closeness to G-d in the World to Come. (We've discussed in the past why G-d cannot reward us directly but requires us to earn it first. See for example [Chapter 4, Mishna 22\(b\)](#)).

Thus, one who studies lishma is doing so in order that G-d reward His creations for following His will. But let's take this a step deeper. What is the ultimate reward G-d will grant His servants? R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his seminal [Derech Hashem](#) ("The Way of G-d") offers a fascinating (though in a way self-evident) idea: The greatest good G-d can bestow upon mankind is that ultimate source of all that is good: G-d Himself.

Now how can G-d "give" us Himself? What does that even mean? The answer is that He does so by allowing us to develop a relationship with Him -- and thereby develop a sense of closeness to Him. This is the function of the mitzvos (commandments). They are not just arbitrary means of earning Heavenly reward. They **condition** us for a relationship with G-d. They develop us as human beings -- making us more godlike -- so that we will eventually be able to earn and savor a true relationship with G-d.

(By the way, an excellent English treatise based on many of the ideas of R. Luzzatto may be found in R. Aryeh Kaplan's "A World of Love," available as part of [The Aryeh Kaplan Anthology](#), published by ArtScroll Mesorah Publications. It also appears on-line [here](#).)

In this respect, Torah stands alone. Torah study is unlike all other mitzvos. Mitzvos make us more godlike sometimes in visible ways, but more often in subtle, metaphysical ways -- ones we will appreciate only in the World to Come. We don't shave off our sideburns, eat pork, or wear clothes

containing mixtures of wool and linen -- and we accept on faith that somehow these acts turn us into more divine human beings.

Not so Torah study. It brings us closer to G-d right here and now, and in leaps and bounds. We **understand** G-d. The deepest, most satisfying form of relationship two people can have is when they understand each other -- when they relate to each other's needs, feelings, and aspirations. We do exactly this -- **with G-d Himself** -- when we study Torah. We understand how G-d views life and the world. We begin to share and appreciate G-d's values and attitudes -- and we feel infinitely closer to Him.

We are thus instructed to study Torah lishma -- not with the blind sense of following G-d's instructions, but in order to fulfill G-d's true desire in this world -- that man become close to Him. And by coming close to Him, we are fulfilled and sated -- like no other experience in this world. We touch the infinite -- the part of our souls too dear and precious to behold. Our hearts sing and rejoice; we sense the infinite bounty and beauty of the World to Come. And this is exactly what G-d wants.

We can thus understand why our mishna states that the entire world is worthwhile for such a person. He single-handedly fulfills the entire purpose of creation -- that man attain closeness to G-d. But there are many more qualities our mishna lists -- as we will discuss G-d willing next week.

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