

# PIRKEI AVOS



## ETHICS *of the* FATHERS

### CHAPTER 2

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THE RABBIS' MORAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL  
*and* PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUCTION  
*for* HUMAN PERFECTION

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*Rabbi Israel Chait*

A STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPTIONS *of the* 1980'S LECTURES

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YESHIVA B'NEI TORAH

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## INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Israel Chait lectured extensively on Ethics of the Fathers—*Pirkei Avos*—throughout the 1980s. Each Sunday morning at Yeshiva B'nei Torah in Far Rockaway, N.Y., Rabbi Chait shared brilliant psychological and philosophical insights into the rabbis' (Chazal's) writings. He paused during one lecture and expressed this sentiment:

*One must have a tremendous appreciation for Chazal for the great kindness they showed us in explaining Avos and what "perfection" is on an in-depth level, on every point. Avos is an unbelievable tractate.*

We in turn express our gratitude to Rabbi Chait as he explained the Rishonim to us during those many years. Rabbi Chait enlightened us with endless Torah marvels, posing questions on Maimonides, Rabbeinu Yona and Rashi, and with his answers, he unveiled the depth of these rabbis' commentaries. Rabbi Chait's explanations struck his students with a deepened reverence for Torah. He patiently entertained our many questions.

In these lectures, the reader will find great appreciation for the Torah's depth and design, and wisdom of psychology, philosophy, morality, human character and human per-

fection, thereby growing in his and her love for the Creator. The reader will admire Chazal's ability to write concisely, yet encapsulate voluminous concepts and ideals.

Rabbi Chait gave 130 lectures: each one was 1.5 hours. The lectures were recently transcribed verbatim from the original audio and edited. Thus, the style of this book is a record of live classes. If certain topics were reintroduced or elaborated in later lectures, liberty has been taken to join those ideas with their original mention. As live lectures address students' questions and digress to various topics, themes within one lecture switch accordingly. Additionally, Rabbi Chait's treatment of a single mishna spanned many weeks. Therefore, at times, new topics appear to be introduced midstream, when in fact, the new topic might indicate a week's gap in that lecture when a new perspective was introduced. Regardless, each lecture and mishna has been recorded comprehensively. Each section and paragraph imparts coherent and novel ideas and should be studied independent of succeeding sections, or related, when warranted.

The sources which Rabbi Chait cited were researched and added in-line, and not as footnotes. For some sources, the full text has been included when deemed appropriate, although that text was not cited fully in the actual lectures.

Each lecture contains numerous vital lessons. To absorb

those many concepts, a patient read and review are highly recommended.

Rabbi Chait's lectures on Pirkei Avos are a must read for any person seeking to lead a perfected Torah life.



## 2:1 THE GOLDEN MEAN, ABSTINENCE, AND ASCETICISM

RABBI SAID: “WHICH IS THE STRAIGHT PATH THAT A PERSON SHOULD CHOOSE FOR HIMSELF? WHICHEVER [PATH] THAT IS [ITSELF] HONORABLE FOR THE PERFORMER AND HONORABLE TO HIM FROM [OTHER] PEOPLE. AND BE AS CAREFUL WITH A LIGHT COMMANDMENT AS WITH A WEIGHTY ONE, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW THE REWARD GIVEN FOR COMMANDMENTS. ALSO, WEIGH THE LOSS OF A COMMANDMENT AGAINST ITS REWARD, AND THE GAIN OF A TRANSGRESSION AGAINST ITS LOSS. KEEP YOUR EYE ON THREE THINGS AND YOU WILL NOT COME TO SIN: KNOW WHAT IS ABOVE YOU—AN EYE THAT SEES, AND AN EAR THAT HEARS, AND [THE BOOK IN WHICH] ALL YOUR DEEDS ARE WRITTEN.”

The first difficulty is the term “tiferes,” meaning honorable or glorified. This refers to one person receiving honor from others. If this is so, the second statement, “Honor to him from other people,” is redundant. What then is meant by the first phrase, “honorable for the performer?” Rashi solves this problem. He says, “honorable for the performer” refers not to something relative to others, rather, it is that which provides a benefit to the performer. Maimonides agrees with Rashi, but he discusses the matter further.

*It is clear that the right path includes the good actions we have explained in the fourth chapter [of the eight chapters]. And these are the Golden Mean [the principle that in all emotional spectrums one should seek to be equidistant from both extremes]. Because through them one will attain a worthy character and, therefore, he will be able to deal properly with people, and that is what is meant that he will gain honor from others.*

Since Maimonides refers to the fourth chapter, it is appropriate to review what he says there. It is quite an interesting chapter. I will summarize it briefly by asking two questions: What concerns Maimonides in this chapter, and what theoretical view emerges from Maimonides' words?

Here, more than anywhere else, Maimonides expounds on the importance of being "in between." Maimonides cites the traits of anger versus meekness, and hedonism versus asceticism, where either extreme is not proper. One should be equidistant from both extremes. Maimonides says that people make mistakes in these areas for they will err and praise a lazy man by saying that he is one who is happy with his lot, "somyach b'chelko." Meaning, in the area of perfection, one can delude himself and twist the matter to his favor (interpreting a negative as a positive).

Maimonides says how important it is that one lives prop-

erly and is concerned with his character traits, middos; he must take measures to improve them. This concludes the essential portion of the chapter addressing the Golden Mean. Then Maimonides says:

*What pious men sometimes did was to follow an extreme trait. For example, they abstained completely from meat, wine, intercourse, and wearing fine clothes. They resided in seclusion in the desert. They did so only to remove a problem. Therefore, they went to the opposite extreme as a method of healing, like taking medicine.*

*Another reason these pious men went to extremes was for the sake of members of society. As leaders, they demonstrated an example of what those members of society should do to remedy their flaws in order that those people should follow the example. But when fools saw those pious men without understanding why they acted this way, they thought these actions had inherent value. Thereby, the fools emulated the pious men in order to be like them. And they would make their bodies suffer with all types of pain, and they would think that through their actions they reached a very high level and that they performed a great good and this was a proper way to draw close to God, as if God is the body's enemy and wants to destroy and annihilate it. And the fools don't know that these actions are truly bad and through them*

*one only harms the soul. And these people are like those who know nothing about medicine, who saw a physician advise an ill man to abstain from certain foods through which this ill man recovered. He was saved from severe harm. A fool who saw this said, "If this method functions to cure the person of this terrible disease, certainly it will make a healthy person stronger and it will add to his health." Now, if the observer will follow the treatment that the physician gave to the ill man, the observer will no doubt become sick.*

*This Torah that perfects us, as God says, "The teaching of God is perfect, renewing life..." (Psalms 19:8), never commanded us in any of these things. The Torah wants man to live naturally. He should travel the middle road, eating what is permissible, and drinking what is permissible in moderation, having permitted intercourse in moderation, and building the land with justice, and not living in mountains or caves, or wearing inferior clothing, or torturing his body and making himself suffer.*

*In fact, the Torah says, "And atone for him on account that he sinned against his soul" (Num. 6:11). This refers to the Nazirite. What was his sin? He abstained from wine. Now, if one who abstained from wine alone requires atonement, certainly one who abstains from all enjoyments requires atonement. And we learn this from*

*the words of the prophets and chochamim; they always lived in moderation and they watched their bodies, as the Torah demands.*

*In Zachariah, we learned that they asked God if they should fast, and He said, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; therefore you should love truth and peace." God said one shouldn't fast, but should act in moderation. Truth refers to intellectual perfection and peace refers to character perfection. God's answer was that fasting was unnecessary, but that perfection is what is warranted.*

*Returning to the matter, if some people from our nation who follow other nations [Christians and Indians] will say that abstinence is a value in order to slightly incline toward the safe side [of character], this is a mistake. The Torah prohibited only certain things in order that we be in between. All prohibitions of food, intercourse, and prostitution are to remove man from his desires and lusts and to move a little bit toward the other side. And Torah commanded us in charity and tithes so man should not be stingy. This is a little bit more than the middle point so we should incline ourselves toward the correct behavior.*

Since people are for the most part stingy, the Torah commands us in this way, to move man toward the proper side.

*All mitzvos refine the instinctual forces like the prohibition of revenge, and vengeance on blood, and holding grudges, and respecting elders. Now, if a fool wants to add to these matters by prohibiting what is permitted more than what the Torah prohibited, and will prohibit intercourse on himself more than the Torah's prohibition, and he will be more charitable than the Torah's recommendation, he is performing evil. And he doesn't know that pretty soon he will be leaving the area of moderation completely and this will cause him great harm.*

*There is something in the words of Chazal that I have never seen, something more astonishing, where the gemara says people make prohibitions on themselves through oaths and swears: "Rav Iddi said in the name of Rav Yitzchak, 'Is it not sufficient for you what the Torah prohibited, that you must prohibit other things?'" (Nedarim, Chap. 9). And this is precisely what I have been discussing.*

From Maimonides, we learn that if one says that wearing certain types of clothing, or colors, or garments is a mitzvah, this is a violation of Ba'al Tosif, as it is written, "All

this word , which I command you, that should you observe to do; you should not add to, nor diminish from it” (Deut. 13:1). But if one says it is not a mitzvah rather a proper fence to distance oneself from wrongdoing, this is nonetheless prohibited. He is adding to the Torah’s prohibitions. For one who says this maintains that the Torah is not perfect and that God did not devise a perfect system. He feels he is improving upon God’s words. Maimonides definitely holds this to be prohibited. Maimonides also traces these notions to the other nations.

Maimonides’ concern for people was his motivation for writing. What was he worried about? He was concerned that people would not enjoy themselves. He was concerned that people would view enjoyment as evil. Maimonides talks about people not partaking in food, drink, intercourse, and clothing. He quotes the gemara, “Did the Torah not prohibit enough....?”

Maimonides expresses an important message and you won’t find too many ba’alei mussar saying this. Maimonides teaches that in order to attain perfection, one must enjoy oneself. Add if one feels such enjoyment is wrong, that is bad. This is the philosophy of the other nations. They go to the extremes because they condemn physical pleasures. Their virtue is abstention from physical pleasure. This is the premise in our society today. For if they truly enjoyed

themselves, they wouldn't have to overindulge. But society on the whole praises a person who goes through suffering and abstains from enjoying life, "As if God was the enemy of the body."

Why is Maimonides concerned that people enjoy themselves? Is Maimonides of the philosophy that there is an inherent good in enjoying physical pleasure, like the Epicureans? No. Maimonides' view is that human perfection is a "total picture." One cannot speak about individual parts. Part of man is that he is a physical being and physical beings require physical pleasures. This is part of his psychological nature.

The "she'hakol" blessing includes the words "on all that He created to sustain the souls of all life." Tosfos says, "God is the origin of the species, and besides those things He created as necessities sustain a species, He also created things for enjoyment." To live, man needs very little. Why then did God create such a vast array of fruits and vegetables and other enjoyments? In order that man have enjoyment. Man is a physical, psychological, and intellectual being. Maimonides maintains that man's perfection depends on satisfying the complete personality. Most people say perfection is learning Torah. They don't feel other matters are important. They do not recognize themselves as human beings and try instead to attain the perfection of an angel,

which of course results in harm.

This holistic approach is seen in Maimonides' medical writings as well. The physical is tied in to the psychological; the intellectual and the philosophical are all one. Maimonides once told the sultan that he suffered physically due to a philosophical problem: "Cure your philosophical problem and your physical ailments will be gone."

Maimonides holds that as long as one negates physical enjoyment, he will never be in the state of mind to enjoy wisdom and Torah. This is the concept of the middle path. In this state of mind, one does not view the intellectual enjoyments and the physical enjoyments as mutually exclusive.

As mentioned above, one makes a mistake when he views a lazy person and considers him to be a person who is satisfied with his lot. This same error in identification exists here too. Psychological enjoyments are tricky. Two people can eat the same piece of meat, but one person will be satisfied while the other is not. This discrepancy is due to how each person views the activity. Both people taste the same meat, but one person has a sense of guilt associated with eating the meat, which nullifies the enjoyment. It is more than the act per se that offers enjoyment, since man is not only physical, but also psychological. "The heart [mind] is most devious, it is perverse, who can fathom it?" (Jer.

17:9). The mind can prevent one's physical enjoyments.

Maimonides says that one who is psychologically ill should see a chocham to heal him. There are many types of illnesses, and one in particular exists in our society, and we are all victims to some degree. Maimonides says when one thwarts a natural function, he suffers a great harm. In our society, everything is viewed in terms of accomplishment. People should be enjoying natural pleasures. Philosophies then arise that are founded on the principle that enjoyments of the body are bad. Once an enjoyment is frowned upon, a substitute enjoyment arises. This is precisely the enjoyment that results from abstaining, which is expressed as, "I am a person who is on a certain level and who therefore doesn't need to enjoy this." One is exchanging a physical/psychological enjoyment for an egotistical one. The part of the mind called the superego gains some satisfaction. However, instead of obtaining the natural (physical) enjoyment, the person is focused on the ego, and the physical part of this person receives no gratification. This person is trying to gain satisfaction in an extreme measure from the egotistical part of his nature. (Perhaps one goes to the extreme because as a substitute, the ego satisfaction is not gratifying; the physical still needs gratification. Therefore, the person invests great energies into the ego in an attempt to attain physical gratification, but he fails.)

Why is the extreme bad? One reason is the loss of the mind's ability to function. It is only when one is in the state in between two instinctual poles (viz. courage/shyness) that the pull of both extremes are equal, allowing the mind to work. But at the extremes, the emotional pull is very strong and takes over the mind.

There is another idea. In all areas of enjoyment, there is a point of diminishing returns. One who overeats loses the pleasure. One who goes to extremes is attempting to derive more pleasure than the activity provides. The person would be better off without compulsion in satisfying his drives. This is the Golden Mean, where one derives the most satisfaction from any enjoyment. That is why a person will be psychologically satisfied. But one who tries to derive too much pleasure from any enjoyment is functioning with a warped psyche, and other parts of his personality are not being satisfied. Such a person can never be satisfied. The act becomes a compulsion. This is the harmful state that Maimonides calls bad. The Golden Mean is the proper state.

Today's society overindulges but not because people are hedonists, ba'alei taivah. (To be a ba'al taavah, one must be a chocham in order to work out such a lifestyle.) Today's society has no system of hedonism because it has no system at all. Epicureanism was a philosophy, but they

worked out a system. But our society simply believes that one should follow his emotions, which culminates in one's doom.

The true reason this society suffers from overindulgence and drugs, among other things is because of what Maimonides says: there is no Golden Mean. Therefore, society takes on one form of satisfaction: accomplishment. Because this is society's focus, people grow very frustrated when they cannot sustain their accomplishments. And in a large society, not too many people can accomplish. Thus, today's society on the whole lends itself to tremendous unhappiness: it takes away the plain pleasures in life.

But there is a specific harm: a person develops a value system (in this case it is "accomplishment"). The mind is thereby set to attain this one goal.

What is "Torah lishma?" It is learning for the enjoyment of Torah alone. This is what is meant by the morning blessing of "veha'arev na," "and please make pleasant the words of Torah..." King David referred to the Torah as a song and also as a plaything. (When a child plays with a toy he is fully engaged and fulfilled.)

When you have a distortion like we have in our society, where things can only be viewed in terms of accomplishment, Torah lishma becomes impossible. This is because a person cannot enjoy the Torah as a "plaything," as it does

not meet society's value of accomplishment. For what is one accomplishing in Torah study? Therefore, the only way one can learn is if he gives himself a quantitative goal, like learning X amount daily. People feel everything must be an accomplishment, and there cannot be any enjoyment in learning per se. Yes, when starting out in learning, covering ground is necessary. But if setting goals in Torah is part of a compulsive component of the person's nature, then he is not enjoying himself. He is suffering from a serious disease of the soul, "choli hanefesh." He will never achieve the perfection of learning Torah lishma, for the pleasure itself.

Maimonides points to a very important philosophical and psychological concept, which sits at the heart of perfection. This shows precisely why we suffer in our society. The distortion, as Maimonides says, originates with the other nations, but it affects us too. (Maimonides is the only one who gave mussar that one must enjoy oneself.)

We must recognize the subtle influence of society. The Nazirite sinned; he didn't drink wine. This means one is supposed to enjoy a bit of intoxication. The Torah considers relaxing and drinking to be good. But most people today frown upon drinking. We see the subtle influence of alien societies and how they affect us. Chazal used to enjoy wine, not to the point of drunkenness, but we learn from this

that some intoxication is not a bad thing.

Today, doctors say a few ounces of wine daily helps prevent high cholesterol. But they don't recommend this to their patients because they are afraid they will become alcoholics. This is the current philosophical trend: keep people away from certain pleasures to prevent overindulgence. But that is the opposite of reality. If there was an allowance for the pleasures, there would be no need for overindulgence. Overindulgence is the result of having no satisfaction.

Maimonides states that our instincts are our lowest part and that we should try to veer from instinctual satisfaction as much as possible. The question arises: How can Maimonides state that one should enjoy the pleasures?

Society tells us that we must react to Maimonides' rejection of the instincts in a complete denial of all satisfaction. But that is not the Torah's approach. Man must know what he is. As Chazal say, "A human being is a combination of an angel and an animal: part intellect and part instincts." Man must recognize what he is and live realistically. Man must recognize that his divine part, his intellect and his wisdom, is his highest element. But this must not compel man's denial of his instincts. That is absurd and denies reality. Some people find it difficult to accept that they possess an instinctual element. Their difficulty stems again from society's standard of self-glorification and accomplishment.

Therefore, it is beneath one's dignity to accept the reality that he is a lowly physical human being. This denial is bad and unrealistic. But some people find this view uncomfortable, saying, "For if my main component is wisdom, how can I admit to my physical part, that it will eventually decompose in the earth and become nothing?" The answer is that Judaism requires that one recognize this reality. While the only part of man to be praised is his intellect, he must accept the reality of his other component. If man rejects this reality, he will never attain happiness.

When Maimonides says one should enjoy pleasure, he is not suggesting indulging the instincts; that would be living a false life. His point is to reject the notion that abstention is a value. However, one should try to engage in wisdom as much as possible.

A question was raised about how Moshe Rabbeinu left his wife and no longer partook in marital relations. Is this not against Maimonides' view? However, Moshe was a different type of human being. He was so immersed in wisdom that engaging in instinctual activity would be a painful interruption of his true pleasure of pursuing wisdom. There is a dispute among Chazal regarding if Moshe and the prophets had a different human nature or if they were only quantitatively different from mankind. Kuzari holds that they were a different quality of man altogether.

The Yerushalmi states that for every fruit one passes up and doesn't enjoy, God holds that person accountable. This sounds strange to us, but only because of how we were raised and influenced. Christian asceticism and fanaticism has influenced our values.

In his book on prishus (abstinence) Rav Abraham ben ha-Rambam (Maimonides' son) gives quite a lengthy description of prishus. It is very interesting and reveals remarkable psychological insights. Considering the early era in which he lived, it is amazing that he uncovered the insights that he did. He discusses self-love, overestimation of the self, and other amazing concepts. When he gets down to what prishus is, he writes:

*A person who decides to proceed on a level of prishus must slowly minimize time spent with family until he reaches the point where he has no tie with anybody in the world in an ordinary sense, including his wife and his children, except insofar as he supports them. This also includes his parents. He has no inherent relationship at all with these family members. He eats only to sustain himself. He doesn't partake at all of any type of enjoyment of food. His house is nothing more than a shelter.*

Rav Abraham ben haRambam brings proofs from the prophets, such as Elijah, who lived in a shack and wore

coarse garments (poor man's clothing). Rav Abraham ben haRambam goes through every aspect of life and says the abstinent man reaches the level where he has no sexual intercourse. This is like Ben Azzai, whose soul clung to the Torah. This is the level of a prophet. Rav Abraham ben haRambam says that the chocham is removed from every physical and psychological involvement. He says this is the level to which one should strive, and gives directions. But it is interesting that he says the only way to reach this level is to do so slowly. For example, if one typically eats a four-course meal, he should first minimize it to three courses, then two courses, until he reduces his meals to just bread and water. He also says one must remove himself from seeking any honor and self-importance.

This is the view of Rav Abraham ben haRambam. And we know that he carried on his father's positions. He always defended his father's views when others wanted to put his books in cherem (banishment). Rav Abraham ben haRambam's position was to explain his father's position. That was his stance.

One would think that there is a contradiction between Maimonides and his son. Rav Abraham ben haRambam's prishus is reached through a slow process while his father says one should go to the other extreme. In his Eight Chapters, Maimonides says if one finds that he veers too much

toward one extreme he should go to the opposite extreme until he finds he is no longer pulled by that extreme and is equidistant from both poles. This is prishus. An example is an ascetic who must overindulge until he reaches the middle ground. Rav Abraham ben haRambam says that prishus is a slow process. This clear conflict makes one understand that Maimonides and Rav Abraham ben haRambam are discussing two different matters. (As stated, Rav Abraham ben haRambam supported all his father's views.)

At the end of his discussion on prishus, Rav Abraham ben haRambam asks two questions. First, how do we understand the story of Yitzchak telling his son Esav to catch and cook for him delicious food in order to bless him before he died:

*Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and  
go out to the field and hunt me some game  
Then prepare a dish for me such as I love,  
and bring it to me to eat, so that my soul  
will bless you before I die (Gen. 27:3,4).*

Apparently, Yitzchak enjoyed delicacies. His son also brought him wine and he drank (ibid.. 27:25). One can ask, "Is there any greater attachment to this world than enjoying meat and wine?" What type of prishus is this? The second question is why Yitzchak's blessing was tied to the

physical. Rav Abraham ben haRambam writes:

*One must understand that the soul is man's connection to God. A prophet's soul is dependent upon his body for the duration of his entire life. And since this is so, if the body becomes weak, this will affect his soul and his prophecy. Prophecy is the height of perfection and cannot rest upon a prophet unless he is in the perfect state. A proof is that the prophets would have others play musical instruments before the prophecy came to them. This prevented any sadness [placing them in an optimal state of mind.] My father explained this in the seventh chapter of his commentary on the mishna on Pirkei Avos.*

*When Yitzchak grew old, his body became weak, as it says, "And it was when Yitzchak grew old and his eyes dimmed from seeing..." (Gen. 27:1). This indicates not just blindness, but that his whole body was deteriorating. Yitzchak knew that his soul was not in a happy state. The blessing he was to give was not an ordinary blessing but was through divine inspiration. The proof is when later, after realizing his mistake [of blessing Yaakov and not Esav], Yitzchak said, "Yaakov remains blessed."*

This means that Yitzchak knew the blessings were given through divine inspiration, and the success of the bless-

ings' utterances revealed divine will: there could be no retraction.

*That is why Yitzchak requested the delicacies: it was to restore a balance where he would be happy so the prophecy would rest upon him . This explains the verse "In order that my soul bless you before I die" (ibid.. 27:2). [The enjoyable food was only for the purpose of receiving prophecy.]*

From this explanation, we answer our question of how Maimonides says one should enjoy life, while Rav Abraham ben haRambam says one should be an ascetic, the point where one is not attached to any physical or psychological enjoyment. His only tie is to wisdom.

We speak in two realms. One is psychological well-being. The second realm pertains to the philosophical. Prishus can be psychological or philosophical. Maimonides refers to psychological prishus, where the psyche is healthy. This is when the psyche does not partake of any extremes—neither extreme lust, or extreme asceticism. Extremes are a sign of compulsion and are unhealthy. Without a healthy psyche, one can never reach perfection. Once one obtains a healthy psyche (Maimonides), he is now ready for philosophical abstinence (prishus: Rav Abraham ben haRambam). (Thus, Maimonides and his son Rav Abra-

ham ben haRambam do not argue.) Prishus is where one substitutes higher enjoyments of the mind for his ordinary enjoyments. These are the enjoyments of the Tzelem Elohim (the intellect). But this substitutional process is not to be identified with asceticism. The latter is an unhealthy psychological state. In this state, one runs to the superego (self-image) and away from the id (pleasures). In true philosophical prishus, one is not involved in any extreme. One substitutes earthly pleasures with pleasures of thought and wisdom. There is no suffering; it is a conversion. Moshe Rabbeinu did not suffer after separating from his wife. On the contrary, he enjoyed the greatest bliss. For the enjoyments of thought are far greater than physical enjoyments. Chazal and (Gentile) philosophers who have reached this state agreed to this truth. It is rare, but those who have attained this level have written about it and say that their enjoyments of thought and wisdom far exceed physical enjoyment.

What test will determine whether one is an ascetic or philosophically perfected? On the surface, both personalities appear identical; both are removed from physical pleasures. The test is how one views the physical pleasures. If one views the physical pleasures as below him, as something bad, lowly, and worthy of shame, this is the ascetic. But if one shares Maimonides' view that "God doesn't hate

the body,” but that pleasures are good and work perfectly with the body, this person has found a higher good in the pursuit of thought, this person follows prishus and is not an ascetic. The proof is Yitzchak. If he had disdain for pleasure, he could not say, “Bring me a delicious steak and wine and I’ll enjoy myself, and then I will be able to bless you.” When it was necessary to partake in physical pleasures, Yitzchak was able to do so.

The problem with today’s society that does not preach prishus but only asceticism, is that we confuse the two; we view those who truly follow prishus as ascetics.

In Judaism, as you know, perfection is not simple. Asceticism is a very simple phenomenon; perfection is a bit more difficult. The true prophets were not ascetics; they were involved in philosophical prishus.

To proceed to a higher state, as Rav Abraham ben ha-Rambam says, one must accept restrictions on oneself; it is not a natural progression. But this is not to be viewed as asceticism. In order for one’s energies to attach to the higher pursuits of thought, one must first remove his attachments to the lower physical enjoyments. But these restrictions are not for the sake of restriction, and they are not painful. We project pain onto such restrictions due to our distorted understanding and values. The perfected man’s process of substitution (higher pleasures displacing lower pleasures)

is misunderstood by us as asceticism, and therefore we assume it to be painful. But in fact, the perfect person experiences no pain and actually experiences greater enjoyment, since the higher enjoyments of thought are far more pleasurable than physical enjoyments.

The question was raised as to how ascetics can sustain that lifestyle. They do so as they replace physical pleasures (id) with the enjoyment of a self-image (superego). They imagine how great they are by abstaining from physical pleasures.

A question was also raised concerning how one can start on the path toward perfection. From my observation, I am not certain Maimonides' method of going to the opposite extreme will work in all cases. His method works when one does not have a deeply rooted problem. The way Maimonides' method works is that when one frustrates his energies by going to the opposite extreme, his energies attach to that opposite pole, and he should remain there until he finds he can behave moderately between both extremes. But a deeply rooted emotional attachment means the energies are not free to manipulate. Such compulsive and deeply entrenched emotions won't benefit from this method. This type of neurosis requires a therapist.

But for a person who is not ill, he should try to go back in his mind and seek to understand from where his values

(that caused the flawed emotional attachment) originated. Many times, if a person can identify the point in time when he first adopted an incorrect value, this will have a tremendous effect on correcting his emotional attractions. It could be that as a youngster years ago, someone put some notion into his mind that influenced his values. One should identify these points of his younger years when certain strong impressions were made. Recognizing when one's emotions first became attached to poor values can help to remove the emotional strength and influence. One will recognize that those impressions were made at a time when he didn't have much of a choice or much knowledge. Using Maimonides' method will frustrate one's current energy flow and can be a good impetus to reflect on when one was first impressed to follow a certain emotion. When one airs out the origin of his youthful impressions, it will reduce the pull of that emotion. For example, one might be following emotional drives today because of his upbringing, when his parents said, "This is what life is all about." He thereby adopted this as a value. (Tracing these patterns back to his youth and identifying the conversations that impressed him emotionally can help release the compulsion.)

Returning to Yitzchak, halacha substantiates the philosophical perfection that Yitzchak displayed. Shabbos is the most sanctified of all days. It expresses perfection, as we

are to study Torah on this day. Rav Abraham ben haRambam says it is a day to learn metaphysics and creation. It is a day that is “kulo l’Hashem, completely dedicated to God.” It is also a day referred to as “may’ain Olam Haba, partaking of the [perfection of the] afterlife.” Shabbos is the ultimate day. And what is one of the laws of Shabbos? Physical pleasures: “oneg Shabbos.” This is comprised of eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse. One would think it absurd that the most sanctified of all days would not have such a law of engaging in physical enjoyments. However, this absurdity is only for people who have a misconception of physical pleasures. Since such people are tied to a certain view of asceticism, they will have difficulty accepting the Torah’s view.

This view that Shabbos is mutually exclusive to physical pleasure reveals how distorted we are. This value has become so ingrained in us that a law about perfection seems strange to us. However, one must first have physical health in order to attain the higher psychological health.

WHICH IS THE STRAIGHT PATH THAT A PERSON  
SHOULD CHOOSE FOR HIMSELF? WHICHEVER  
[PATH] THAT IS [ITSELF] HONORABLE FOR THE  
PERFORMER AND IS HONORABLE TO HIM FROM  
[OTHER] PEOPLE.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*Maimonides, of blessed memory, explained this mishna as regarding human character; to attain the middle path, which is the chosen path, and it dignifies the performer for it prepares a pure heart within man and renews inside him a proper spirit.*

What is Rabbenu Yona's "pure heart?" It means there is a certain balance of the psyche with which man was intended to live. And if one obtains that balance, he feels very good. He experiences a certain joy and happiness in life. And the reason people aren't happy is because they don't have this psychological balance. If a person is not on the middle path and is too much to one side, he must be in a state of pain. Therefore, such a person can never reach perfection. If one denies things that he needs or if he indulges, he loses that proper spirit. This is the meaning of the words "whichever [path] that is [itself] honorable for the performer..." Rashi says this means "It is pleasant for him and he benefits." He enjoys this state. When one is well-balanced psychologically, he has a good feeling about himself. He doesn't feel that he must seek certain activities to gain happiness because he is already happy.

...AND IS HONORABLE TO HIM FROM [OTHER] PEOPLE.

Maimonides says that if one follows the Golden Mean and he attains a balanced nature, he will then be able to properly deal with others. The reason people don't get along with one another is because they vent their frustrations and lash out at each other, creating conflict. But one who is in the middle—the Golden Mean—is happy and does not have frustrations, and this is measured by his friendly demeanor and good relationships. This is the meaning of the words "... and is honorable to him from [other] people." Such a person is happy to be among others; he enjoys their company and doing favors for them. It is a natural enjoyment. "It is honorable to him from [other] people" is a natural result of one who follows the Golden Mean and is content. But for a person who has conflicts, other people become the arena in which those conflicts are played out, and discord is sown.

In his Guide, Maimonides talks about how plentiful are all of man's needs. Man's most vital needs—air and water—are most abundant and are readily found and free. Fruits and vegetables can be planted or acquired with little expense and effort. If so, why are people so unhappy? It is because they blame external circumstances instead of real-

izing that their own distorted emotions are to blame. And once they blame the wrong thing, they are in trouble.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*When the mitzvos are performed, God is glorified by them and they glorify the performer. And this is the true dignity among men. Therefore, a person should choose this road.*

Rabbeinu Yona means that man should choose the path that has an element of dignity. However, every area lends itself to dignity. Every profession holds the promise of helping one develop a sense of dignity. For example, we hear people say, “That is a dignified lawyer”; “He is a great physician”; or “He is a great athlete.” However, typically, athletes don’t make it into history books because deep down people know an athlete’s greatness is silly. He has nothing to do with shaping world events. People realize sports is not the true greatness. The athlete’s dignity might be within a certain framework, but the framework itself is lacking.

People might then turn to world history to identify a dignified pursuit, as this shapes civilization into what it has become today. But there is a greater area: matters that relate to the Creator—that which man does to be in line

with the will of the Creator. This is the true dignity. Deep down everybody recognizes that is the greatest area of all. Therefore, man should seek dignity within a certain sphere, but the sphere itself must be the most dignified, and the most dignified sphere is God's Torah and mitzvos. Rabbeinu Yona calls this the "true dignity, tiferes amitus."

(To be clear, Rabbeinu Yona does not suggest that man's goal is his own dignity and that he should therefore perform mitzvos to obtain that dignity. Rabbeinu Yona means that the barometer of the most valued lifestyle can be measured by what people view as most dignified. Performing mitzvos is then for the purpose of perfection and not for public acclaim. Rabbeinu Yona says that people are accurate in what they sense is most dignified. They have the proper sense of whom to honor, and one who follows God is acting on the highest level. Using peoples' barometer, we determine the greatest good and we follow it.)

Man has an inner sense that the area of philosophy is of greater value than the area of wealth. However, people will make mistakes regarding who accurately represents the proper philosophy, explaining how people can follow someone like Gandhi.

Rashi writes as follows:

*[And it] is honorable to him from [other] people: [This refers to] matters that the entire world views as upright. And there is no sin that man will do that he will not regret and say in his heart, "What have I done?"—where he will suffer embarrassment from others.*

Rashi says that man possesses an inner sense of the true value system. This sense can guide man to the proper path that he should choose, provided that his society is not corrupt.

Rabbeinu Yona comments on the same words:

*[And it] is honorable to him from [other] people: [This is] that he performs the mitzvah in its proper time, as it says, "A matter in its time, how good it is" (Prov. 15:23). For it is possible to perform a mitzvah at a time that is not proper in other people's eyes, and there will be no dignity in it, and this is not considered performing a "complete mitzvah." It is also required that one beautifies the performance of mitzvos. [One should purchase] a beautiful palm branch, a beautiful tallis, a beautiful Torah scroll, beautiful tefillin, etc., in a manner that others will dignify him.*

The concept of “This is my God and I will adorn him” (Exod. 15:2) tells us to beautify mitzvos, like writing a Torah scroll in a beautiful Hebrew script. People have the notion to embellish the physical. Beautifying mitzvos means a person should take that notion and embellish the true objects of value: mitzvos.

Rabbeinu Yona says that the words “And it is honorable to him from [other] people” means it is relevant to others. Rabbeinu Yona speaks on two levels. A person senses that true dignity is defined as living in accordance with God’s will. This is the highest priority. But there is a higher level: when one’s activities are not directed toward the self but toward society. In his Guide, Maimonides says there are two levels of perfection. One level is where one perfects himself; the second and higher level is where other people are perfected. This is the meaning of Rabbeinu Yona’s words “[And it] is honorable to him from [other] people”: one lives in a way where others are brought to a higher level and recognize God. This is what Rabbeinu Yona means when he says that one can perform a mitzvah at a time where there will not be dignity. Rabbeinu Yona says that this is not a “complete mitzvah,” however, when one performs a mitzvah at its proper time, “Even a decree of seventy years is nullified.” When one is concerned to perform a mitzvah in line with God’s will, which concerns

society too (not just the self), this is the highest level and is expressed as “a nullification of decrees against that person.” (A manner of speech praising someone.)

AND BE AS CAREFUL WITH A LIGHT COMMANDMENT AS WITH A WEIGHTY ONE, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW THE REWARD GIVEN FOR COMMANDMENTS. ALSO, WEIGH THE LOSS OF A COMMANDMENT AGAINST ITS REWARD, AND THE GAIN OF A TRANSGRESSION AGAINST ITS LOSS.

Does this mean one should be just as careful with a mitzvah of less importance? If this means one must perform both, then we don’t need the following statement: “For you do not know the reward given for commandments.” The mishna should simply say, “Perform all mitzvos.” But, if this teaches that one must have equal caution for lesser mitzvos and more severe mitzvos, it is hard to imagine. If one mitzvah is more important, one should sacrifice more for that mitzvah. But afterward we are told “For you do not know the reward given for commandments.” This is a contradiction. For if we don’t know which mitzvah is greater, how can we first be told to show equal concern for greater and lesser mitzvos?

Maimonides first says that God didn’t reveal which mitzvos are more important, so we must fulfill all mitzvos. But

then he says you should try to determine which mitzvos are greater. According to this, we should not be as “careful with a light commandment as with a weighty one.” Therefore, we question whether or not one should show this care.

One must inquire regarding the difficulty of the area: Which mitzvah is primary in terms of subject matter? Another matter is regarding which question should be addressed first when one investigates a matter. These are two different questions relevant to importance; one is determined by the subject matter and the other by the investigative process. The latter does not always follow the subject matter. For example, one might have a question on a scientific matter, but the strength of the question does not mean that the answer will be found right away. In terms of the investigation, one might have to prioritize his steps.

What is the most important question to tackle in terms of the investigative process? It is Maimonides’ first distinction between negative commands and positive commands. Maimonides says that the Torah prioritized negative commands but not positive commands, giving eight levels of negative commands but revealing no levels of positive commands. What determined that this must be so? What is the distinction between negative and positive commands?

Ramban commented on “remember” (Exod. 20:8) the Sabbath day and “observe” (Deut. 5:11) the Sabbath day (zachor v’shamor):

*It is also true that the character of remembering [zachor] hints to a positive command. And this is something that emanates from the trait of love. A servant who performs the commandment of his master is loved by his master and his master has mercy on him. However, the character of observing [shamor] is representative of negative commands. And this is the trait of justice and it stems from fear. For a person who is careful to do nothing bad in the eyes of his master is afraid of him. Therefore, positive commands are superior to negative commands just as love is superior to fear. One who is careful to use his money to perform his master’s will is superior to the person who just refrains from harming his master. Therefore, they say “A positive command overrides a negative command” (assay docheb lo sa’asei). Also, violating negative commands meets with more severe punishments than positive commands.*

Ramban is discussing the same point as Maimonides. But as Maimonides says, that abstention from negative commands possessing great punishments are of great value, he seems to elevate negative commands over positive

commands. This seems to contradict Ramban.

Why must love be expressed only in the positive? Why can't one abstain from violating a negative command out of his love for God, just as one performs a positive command out of love? Conversely, why can't a person perform a positive command out of fear? Cannot a person wear *tefillin* because he fears that not wearing them might result in some unwelcomed result?

The answer is that Ramban is working with the premise that man's perfection requires activity (a positive command and not the inactivity of negative commands). The highest relationship between man and God is man's love of God, and love is only possible if man relates to God through an activity. Abstention (a negative command) is not an activity and can never lead to a love of God. Love of God is tied to the specific process of positive action. One can abstain from violating native commands because one loves God, but abstention itself cannot be the vehicle that generates love of God.

The purpose of abstention is to refrain from actions that harm the soul. There are certain activities that are beneficial and certain activities that are harmful. In the beneficial activities, man finds his entire purpose. Here he finds love of God. But negative commands are aimed at the avoidance of detrimental matters that prevent one's engagement

in the love of God. This is the difference between positive and negative commands. To clarify, love of God is attained only when man expends positive energy. Man must perform some enjoyable act that gives him love of God. Maimonides says that man is drawn to God through his love of Torah. The binding of Yitzchak (the akeida) was cited. According to Ramban, here, Abraham was taken from a state of potentiality to one of actuality. That experience was the love of God. (This positive activity embellishes the point that action is required to love God.)

Why is a negative command associated with fear? The reason for all the punishments is because a person—on a basic level—cannot abstain without a deterrent. Once one raises his level and is attached to the positive commands, he no longer requires punishments as a threat. For example, Moshe Rabbeinu did not require the prohibition against stealing. As he was involved in love of God, the negative commands didn't exist for him. The negative commands exist for lower people, whose energies are not being dispensed through love of God.

Parenthetically, fear has three forms. The first is one who sees great Torah or natural wisdom, which results in an awe of God. He experiences both love of that wisdom and an awe of the Creator. Then there is a person who abstains from sin, as he fears punishment. In between is the person

who fears self-harm, and therefore abstains from sin.

Returning to Maimonides, he stated that if a positive command has a severe punishment for failing to fulfill it, it also has a large reward when it is fulfilled. What are his criteria for evaluating mitzvos, and why should this be so? While failure to bring the Passover lamb results in excision of the soul (kares), why should the simple act of eating it in fulfillment yield such a great reward? Conversely, regarding the statement “Weigh the loss of a commandment against its reward, and the gain of a transgression against its loss,” Maimonides states that if a sin carries a severe punishment, abstention of that sin yields a great reward. Again, we ask, what determines that this should be so? (We are seeking an explanation for the commensurate levels of reward and punishment for mitzvos and sins.) Moreover, Maimonides says the following in his Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah):

*Every person has merits and sins. A person whose merits are greater than his sins is righteous; and a person whose sins are greater than his merits is wicked. [A person who has] half and half, [is an] in-between [type of person, called a beinoni] (Hilchos Teshuva 3:1). And this evaluation is not according to the number of merits and sins, but according to their magnitude. There could be a merit that is*

*equivalent to several sins, as it says, "Because in him there is found a good thing" (I Kings 14:13); and there could be a sin that is equivalent to several merits, as it says, "One sin destroys much good" (Kobles 9:18). But such calculations only take place in the mind of the Divine Intellect, He who knows how to evaluate merits against sins. (Hilchos Tesbuva 3:2)*

Mere quantity of mitzvos or sins alone cannot determine if one is a rasha or a tzaddik. This would seem to contradict what Maimonides says in Pirkei Avos.

To answer this problem, one must distinguish between the individual's reward and punishment and the Torah system. Pirkei Avos is not discussing a person's evaluation; that is addressed in Maimonides' Laws of Repentance. And only God can assess this. But there is something other than personal evaluation. There are mitzvos in the Torah that are vital for the system. And we can assess their level of importance. Any positive command that carries a severe penalty for failure to fulfill it, is vital for the Torah system. Fulfilling that positive command will yield greater reward than fulfilling another positive command. Similarly, if a mitzvah like idolatry carries a severe penalty for its violation, abstention carries a great reward because idolatry is much more important than kosher laws, for example.

But, as the positive commands on the whole do not reveal their reward or punishment, this would indicate that our ignorance is more beneficial to us than our knowledge of their reward and punishment. But what type of state of affairs is this that ignorance is preferred?

In his Guide (book III, chap. xxxi), Maimonides cites the other view that there are no reasons for the mitzvos, but he adds:

*But the truth is undoubtedly as we have said, that every one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners, or to warn against bad habits.*

Maimonides was convinced that the other view was wrong and he didn't consider it philosophical. But what is this view that there are no reasons for the mitzvos? Are we to say that mitzvos were made arbitrarily with no rhyme or reason? Talmud Megilla 25a says, "Anyone who says the reason for sending the mother bird away is mercy ... we silence him" for giving reasons for the mitzvos (this is a reference to the mitzvah of shiluach hakan). But Maimonides says that this statement is against his view and is in accordance with the view that there are no reasons for mitzvos.

And we cannot say that God benefits from our mitzvos because He needs nothing, as we state in the Neilah prayer, “If you are righteous what do you give Him?” (Job 35:7). In fact, all mitzvos are for our benefit. Again, what is the idea behind the view that there are no reasons for mitzvos?

The reason for the construction of every mitzvah in the Torah is one thing: human perfection. One should be involved from morning until night in certain performances that perfect him. How many and what type of performances does a person need? Only God knows that. Man requires halachic experience to attain perfection.

This view does not maintain that God’s mitzvos are capricious and arbitrary, which is nonsensical and is the opinion of idolatry. This view maintains that God constructed the mitzvos so that we fulfill the proper number of halachos each day. They believe that if one says that a mitzvah is based on having mercy for the mother bird they are in error, since the system is really for man. “Mitzvos are only decrees” means that God worked out a precise system for human perfection. But Maimonides rejects this view and explains the reasons for the mitzvos in his Guide. He writes with much depth but certain major premises are necessary to understand before grasping his explanations for the mitzvos. To simply read his explanation is not a good idea because you won’t understand exactly what he

means, and some of the reasons will sound strange.

Maimonides held that each mitzvah was constructed for particular reasons. For example, he explained that we cannot cut the corners of our hair (payos) since the idolaters had this practice. Why must we be commanded to do something based on the practices of a bygone idolatrous era? Furthermore, why is the Torah influenced by such occurrences?

The benefit from mitzvah is not mere abstention. There is not one mitzvah that doesn't have a system of halacha. For example, abstaining from eating milk and meat together is precisely formulated and offers man an entire corpus of halacha from which he greatly benefits.

Maimonides maintains that both opinions are true, as there are two frameworks. Maimonides disagrees with those who say there are no reasons for mitzvos. But he agrees in principle that there is one unified system of perfection that engages man to a degree that perfects him. However, Maimonides maintains that the specific form of some mitzvos has precise purposes. Maimonides disagreed with others when it came to those particulars. He felt that the reason for sending the mother bird away is in fact to express mercy on animals. But to simply add a halacha such as shiluach hakan to a situation of one walking in the woods, solely to increase the amount of laws, Maimonides

found to be strange and he rejected it. Again, he agrees that the corpus of Torah and halacha, as a system, aims to benefit man always and in all situations. But the specific mitzvah must also have a precise design and purpose. If one examines the mitzvos, he will see the marks of certain purposes. But to express another opinion, that sending the mother bird away was given because there simply weren't enough laws, does not explain all the specifics of every mitzvah. The mitzvah's designs must be tied to a purpose. But both views agree that the totality of all mitzvos are necessary for man to attain perfection.

How does the halachic system perfect man? This was asked in light of a menuval b'rishus haTorah, one who keeps within halacha but is excessive in his desires. The answer is that the Torah will raise man to the highest level, provided he has the correct foundation. "For the paths of God are upright; and the righteous walk on them, and sinners stumble on them" (Hosea 14:10). This expresses the idea that the same Torah system perfects the righteous person and harms the sinner. Similarly, a person can learn for the purpose of destroying another person—lomeid l'kantare—thereby doing himself the greatest harm. There is no particular activity that is a panacea for perfecting a person. But that does not mean that under natural circumstances the mitzvah will not lead one to perfection. If a

person follows the Torah system, seeing all the wisdom in every move he makes, and understands that it is all God's wisdom, this will raise him to the highest level. If one analyzes halacha and understands how it works, his perfection is derived from that appreciation of the wisdom. If, for example, one finds a bruise on a chicken he is eating, he reviews the halachos concerning kosher laws before he eats further. "Through the weariness of your labor you will eat; you will be happy and you will have good" (Psalms 128:2). By studying the laws, he might find that he may continue to eat, so he eats in this world and has "good" in the next world, for he engaged his mind in study. His eating is a different type of eating, unlike that of an animal.

Maimonides said, "God did not say which positive commands are more or less important." What is his meaning? There are two considerations. One is that man is involved in halacha at all times. Nevertheless, mitzvos are constructed from certain criteria that are necessary for the system. For if Israel was not protected from idolatry through the halachic system, and they worshipped idolatry, that would be the end of the Jewish nation. Therefore, not copying idolatrous practice through the prohibition of eating and meat milk (Guide, book III, chap. xlviii) averts the destruction of the Jewish nation, since committing idolatry is punishable by death.

Maimonides teaches that man operates under two frameworks. One is the particular value of mitzvos in terms of the system (ta'amei hamitzvos). The other framework is the halachic perfection that one achieves by being involved in the system. The reason there is no indication of greater or lesser value in the positive commands is because God gave this set of mitzvos to benefit man because of the second consideration: involvement in a halachic system. By God not disclosing which mitzvos are of greater or lesser value, man cannot select his preferred mitzvah. Instead, he must follow all positive commands, exposing himself to the totality of Torah. Had God revealed the level of importance of each of the positive commands, people would choose to perform only the most important mitzvos, abandoning others of lesser importance. Thereby, they would lose the benefit of the totality of the halachic experience. It is on this last point that Maimonides agrees with the other view.

Why is this experience found only in the positive commands? Because positive commands are where love of God is found. Now we understand why God concealed the value of most of the positive commands, even though many of them are based on more important reasons than others. Not knowing which positive commands are greater or lesser, man remains preoccupied in all positive commands, thereby exposing him to perfection on all fronts, in all of

life's experiences. Had man selected only the greatest positive commands, many aspects of his life would be bereft of the perfection offered by those other mitzvos. This explains the principle that one who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah (*osek b'mitzvah patur min hamitzvah*). The involvement is the priority, as opposed to performing a specific mitzvah. Immersion in the entire Torah system benefits man in a way that an individual mitzvah cannot. The objective is love of God. Therefore, what is important is the experience of halacha at all moments, and not the specific mitzvah.

This mishna presents a twofold approach. If a person wishes to perfect himself, he must concern himself with the perpetuation of the Torah system, and he must be concerned with his own perfection through constant involvement in the halachic experience. Of course, a person's first consideration must be for the system.

As the Torah shared with us that the punishments for violating *bris milah* (circumcision) and the Passover sacrifice both meet with excision (*kares*), it conveys an overriding consideration for these two positive commands [which we do not find a connection with other positive commands.] *Bris milah* and the Passover sacrifice are vital to the Torah system. (This explains why these two positive commands were given to the Jews before the Exodus. To merit salva-

tion, the Jews must have first demonstrated a perfection of their instincts—*bris milah* demonstrated the control of the sexual drive—and a perfection of their intellects—rejecting idolatry, i.e., the animal god).

ALSO, WEIGH THE LOSS OF A COMMANDMENT AGAINST ITS REWARD, AND THE GAIN OF A TRANSGRESSION AGAINST ITS LOSS.

FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW THE REWARD GIVEN FOR COMMANDMENTS.

The mishna identifies these two frameworks of sustaining the system—“... Weigh the loss of a commandment...”—and personal perfection—“For you do not know the reward...” Thus, when a severe punishment is stated, this informs us to override other considerations for the sake of the system. But, as most positive commands do not reveal their rewards, we understand that personal perfection comes not from individual mitzvos but from the totality of the system via involvement in halacha at all times.

As love of God is an intellectual matter, how do positive commands (mere activity) lead to love of God? All mitzvos are designed precisely so that they require wisdom to perform each one. Thus, one cannot perform a mitzvah without wisdom. This leads to the love of God through an intellectual relationship. Maimonides says that there isn't a

mitzvah in the Torah for which there isn't an accompanying section of Torah She-ba'al Peh, Oral Law. Every mitzvah is structured in a precise and definitive fashion; each one emerges like a formula.

There is a law that corroborates our point. A person who is constantly involved in Torah study (Toraso umnaso) is exempt from other positive commands. Since he is involved in wisdom per se, he is regularly engaged in the highest degree of love of God.

Maimonides' view is a twofold approach to Torah and mitzvos. But Rashi and Rabbeinu Yona state an alternative view:

*"For you do not know the reward given for commandments." To what is this matter similar? To a king who gave his servants a garden in which to plant trees. Had he told them which trees yield the highest value, they would tend only to those trees, and the garden would then lack all other trees. Similarly, had God revealed the reward for mitzvos, people would perform those weightier mitzvos offering greater reward, and abandon the lighter mitzvos yielding a lesser reward. Thereby, man would not be complete in mitzvos.*

What is the meaning of this metaphor? Mitzvos are to be understood in two ways. There are mitzvos that are more

important than others. But, from the Torah as a whole, there emerges a complete picture. Under the framework of individual mitzvos, there is a relative value system: some mitzvos outweigh the importance of others. Then there is the framework of the mitzvos as a whole: less important mitzvos must be performed equally to more important mitzvos. The metaphor of a garden is appropriate, since without the less-valuable trees, there is no “garden,” but only a few trees. This highlights the importance of a system. This is how Rashi and Rabbeinu Yona learn our mishna.

There is somewhat of a proof for the concept of a “total picture of mitzvos.” “These are the matters that Moshe spoke to all of Israel...” (Deut. 1:1). What is the difference between Devarim (Deuteronomy) and the books of the Torah that precede it? All were given at Sinai. Chazal make an interesting statement that many people misunderstand. The Torah contains two rebukes. One is located in Bechukosai (in sefer Vayikra) and the other is located in Ki Tavo (in sefer Devarim). The gemara says, “The rebukes in Bechukosai were stated by God, and those in Ki Tavo were stated by Moshe alone.” That sounds heretical, as the entire Torah was given by God. In all books preceding Devarim, God dictated them word-by-word to Moshe. Afterward, Moshe began to explain the entire system of halacha, “...Moshe began to expound this Torah” (ibid. 1:5).

Moshe invited anyone with questions to inquire from him. After he explained the Torah, he rebuked the Jews. These words of rebuke were Moshe's own formulations and not God's dictations. The same is true regarding Moshe's rebuke in Ki Tavo. Later, God told Moshe to incorporate all of his words into sefer Devarim so that they would become part of Chamisha Chumshei Torah, the Five Books. Thus, Moshe only initiated the rebuke in Devarim, God then endorsed all his words, including them in the Sefer Torah.

Ramban says that the words, "And God spoke to Moshe saying" are found nowhere in Devarim, a book solely comprised of Moshe's rebuke and his review of the mitzvos given earlier. But if this book is solely Moshe's words, how do we understand the mitzvos found only in Devarim? As Devarim contains no instance of "And God spoke to Moshe saying," from where did Moshe get these newly mentioned mitzvos?

Taryag—the 613 commands—is a totality, a corpus of the Torah. At Mount Sinai, Moshe received that totality. God gave certain mitzvos to Moshe to transmit to the Jews at a certain time. But there were other mitzvos for which God did not provide this instruction. However, since Moshe knew the corpus of Torah, in sefer Devarim Moshe completed the Torah and communicated those mitzvos for which God never instructed Moshe to transmit, through a

specific command. Why these mitzvos had no specific directive of transmission to the Jews at a certain time, some explain that they pertain only to the land of Israel and other reasons. But what we derive from this is that Moshe's completion of the Torah through giving these remaining mitzvos in Devarim indicate a totality of mitzvos.

It appears from Rabbeinu Yona that this totality's purpose is for the individual and not for the nation, as he writes that if a certain mitzvah is disregarded due to its lesser level of importance, "Man would not be complete with mitzvos." But I think it is for the nation too, because a person's completeness through performing the 613 commands is not for his benefit alone. In order for the nation to exist, there must also exist the total picture of Torah, expressed by individuals who observe all 613. But one cannot say that there is a "nation" per se, for the only real existences are individual people. ("Nation" is an idea, not a real existence. See Maimonides' Guide, book III, chap. vxiii.) The Rav (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik) once said, "There is no mitzvah to love Klal Yisrael; the mitzvah is to love the individual Jew." The klal (collective) is not in existence. This view of Rashi and Rabbeinu Yona is different from Maimonides'; they are speaking in terms of the system.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*Rabbeinu Hakadosh (this mishna's author) said, "Perform a lesser mitzvah—chasing the mother bird away—like a greater mitzvah means that even a lesser mitzvah has tremendous reward and one should not lose its great reward. And just like this light mitzvah, about which the Torah says, "In order to that it shall be good for you," referring to a world that is completely good, and "You will have length of days," referring to a world that is eternal ... certainly this will be rewarded for weightier mitzvos.*

Rabbeinu Yona says the mishna's author wished to provide enthusiasm to perform lesser mitzvos, as they have great reward.

Another point is that one might misunderstand the command of sending the mother bird away as offering some unique segula (guaranteed benefit) of longevity. Rabbeinu Hakodesh speaks against such a notion by saying, "Certainly this will be rewarded for weightier mitzvos." Chazal state the same idea about honoring one's parents. They state in the Yerushalmi as follows:

*Rabbi Avin said, "Just like it is written regarding an obligation 'in order that you should have length of days and in order*

*that you should have good,' is it not certainly true [that this is rewarded] regarding a command where an expense is incurred or if there is a risk of life?"*

Chazal convey that these two mitzvos (sending the mother bird away and honoring parents, regarding which it is stated a person will have long life) are not unique. Longevity (afterlife, "Olam Haba") is rewarded for all mitzvos. This is the meaning of the a fortiori argument previously mentioned. But there is another idea that Chazal share on the mitzvah of parents:

*Rabbi Yaakov said, "There is no reward for mitzvah in this world, for there is no mitzvah written in the Torah where its reward is stated next to it that doesn't depend on the next world."*

There was once a case where a father told his son to climb to the rooftop and send away the mother bird:

*There was one whose father said to him, "Climb to the top of the building and fetch me chicks." And he climbed to the top of the building and dispatched the mother bird and took the young, thereby simultaneously fulfilling the mitzvah to dispatch the mother bird from the nest and the mitzvah to honor one's parents, but upon his return*

*he fell and died. Where is the goodness of the days of this one, and where is the length of days of this one? Rather, the verse “that it may be well with you” means in the world where all is well, and “that your days may be long” is referring to the world that is entirely long. (Kedushin 39b).*

After hearing about this incident, Achare became a heretic. The gemara says that had Achare understood this account as referring to Olam Haba, he would not have become a heretic. But Achare was a great genius; there must be more to the story about him.

Chazal teach that not only is it a false idea that honoring parents and sending the mother bird away are unique in securing Olam Haba, but additionally, they teach us that there is nothing magical about mitzvos that helps man physically. If in the back of one’s mind one feels that performing mitzvos benefits him in a physical way, he is wrong. The true “length of days” is only possible after a person dies.

How do we explain the gemara that had Achare explained the verse as referring to Olam Haba, he would not have become a heretic? It means that down deep, somewhere in Achare’s mind, there was a subtle attachment to the physical. He felt that there was some earthly benefit in performing mitzvos. That was his downfall. Achare was

a great mind, but despite how much greater he was than we are today, the quality of this relationship of mitzvos to earthly benefit was present in him to some degree.

A question was raised concerning blessings in the Torah, "...in order that your days will increase and the days of your children on the earth" (Deut. 11:21). These words do not refer to Olam Haba, but to actuality. There is a special providence for the Jewish nation: If it observes the Torah's mitzvos, as a society, the Jewish nation will exist in the land of Israel permanently, one generation after another. This refers to the nation as a whole.

Thus, proper behavior earns God's providence. However, mitzvos per se do not guarantee any earthly benefit. People believe that a mezuzah and Kriyas Shema provide benefits. Meiri says that the mazikim (demons), from which we are told that Shema protects man, refers to poor ideas. And the belief that a mezuzah has protective qualities is a primitive and idolatrous notion. These beliefs are generated from the most powerful human motivation: insecurity.

*And a man cannot even know his time.  
As fish are enmeshed in a fatal net, and  
as birds are trapped in a snare, so men are  
caught at the time of calamity, when it  
comes upon them without warning. (Ko-  
heles 9:12)*

Koheles captures human insecurity. Man doesn't know when his time is up. This motivates him to take many false measures to secure his fate. But when a person improves himself and reaches a higher level, Torah She-ba'al Peh (the Oral Law) doesn't allow him to fool himself with these motivations.

A similar false notion concerns Rosh Hashanah, when people eat something sweet to ensure a sweet year. Do we then suggest that an evil person who ate sweets will thereby avoid punishment and have a sweet year? Will the righteous person who ate horseradish have a bitter year? Of course this is nonsense. Rather, one eats honey on Rosh Hashanah to remind himself of the sanctity of the day, a siman l'milsa. Honey is not a causative agent.

Another reason this is foolish is that a punishment is actually good for man. "Like a man afflicts his son, the Lord your God has afflicted you" (Deut. 8:5). Avoiding punishment is like avoiding a necessary operation. If one requires a bad year as a punishment, he is foolish to attempt to avoid that corrective measure.

The gemara in Shabbos says that had King David studied Torah, the Angel of Death would have had no power over him. Torah study too provides no protective quality. That is a childish understanding. Maimonides explains this in his Guide:

*If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God is with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him, for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents (Book III, chap. li).*

When engaged in God's wisdom, man is under a certain providence through God's will, but Torah study per se is powerless. The patriarchs, however, enjoyed this providence even in mundane matters:

*Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them (Book III, chap. xviii).*

The gemara in Pesachim talks about not drinking in pairs (i.e., two cups, four cups, etc.) lest one gets sick and dies. Another case is the recommendation against marrying a woman whose two previous husbands died. Meiri

and Maimonides explain these phenomena similarly. There is no law prohibiting marriage to such a woman. Rather, since people believed she was an *isha katlanis*, a murderous wife, Chazal recommended against marrying her. As most people by nature have these superstitions, one who marries this woman will feel he is in danger, and this stress can cause his death.

In his Teshuvos , the Rivash records that he was asked by someone if he can learn philosophy. He responded that people who study philosophy immediately stop davening (praying). Why is this so? Because they feel the statements of our mishna are false; philosophy teaches that God truly has no eyes with which to see, or ears with which to listen.

However, man must live in his own framework of reality and relate to God as he does to any important being. It is stated in the High Holiday prayers, “There is no forgetting before your glorious throne,” and “All of your actions are written in a book.” One must know it is false to suggest that God has eyes or ears. Maimonides explains such anthropomorphisms.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THREE THINGS, AND YOU  
WILL NOT COME TO SIN: KNOW WHAT IS ABOVE  
YOU: AN EYE THAT SEES, AND AN EAR THAT  
HEARS, AND THAT ALL YOUR DEEDS ARE WRIT-  
TEN IN A BOOK.

This mishna answers how one should act in the face of this conflict. Philosophically, man must realize he cannot speak about God in any of these human terms. Yet, man must relate to God in some way. How does man bridge this conflict?

Man knows that God is different and above anything he can perceive. But man must respond in a way that his reality dictates; this is the only way man can function. And if he does so, he can perfect himself.

KNOW WHAT IS ABOVE YOU.

This is an all-inclusive statement. But then the mishna breaks down the three items: a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and that all actions are recorded. The statement “Know what is above you” refers to what we must understand philosophically: that God is incomparable to anything we can conceive. (Maimonides explains that man can only understand negative concepts in relation to God.)

AN EYE THAT SEES, AND AN EAR THAT HEARS,  
AND THAT ALL YOUR DEEDS ARE WRITTEN IN  
A BOOK.

These three items teach us to relate to God in our own framework. Meaning, we know things through the senses, so God also knows things. But as we cannot fathom how God knows, we are forced to relate to His awareness in our own terms. But this is only permitted to say once we've posited the first idea, "Know what is above you." God is above anything we can know. Once we haven't admitted our ignorance of God, we are allowed to refer to His knowledge in our own terms. But had the mishna omitted "Know what is above you," and just said, "There is a seeing eye, etc.," it would lead to anthropomorphic results.

This mishna teaches that if a person is about to sin, he should think to himself, "If I knew this sin would be permanently inscribed in a book viewable by others, would I sin?" The same applies in relation to God. Therefore, one should relate to sin in the same way. The gemara in Bera-chos says, "It should only be that the fear of God should be as the fear of one's fellow." If a person were on the level where his sense of reality toward God equaled that of man, it would be a high-level.

In conclusion, what are the three parts of this mishna? First we're told to act in a way that is honorable, and for which others dignify us. Maimonides says this refers to psychological perfection. The second part of our mishna exhorts us to be equally careful with light and weighty

mitzvos. This refers to love of God: philosophical perfection. And the last part of the mishna addresses how a person deals with the conflict that arises from these two realms. Meaning, philosophically, we know God sees, hears, and remembers, but psychologically we cannot relate. Therefore one must operate in both areas simultaneously. Man can only achieve a certain level of perfection in the philosophical and the psychological. Man never reaches a state where he is 100 percent psychologically sound and 100 percent philosophically sound. That is only a myth. But he partakes of perfection in both areas. And since he partakes of them, he always meets with difficulties that he must resolve. How does he do so? That is the last part of this mishna.

## 2:2 HAUGHTINESS, WORK, AND COMMUNAL VALUES

RABBAN GAMLIEL, THE SON OF RABBI YEHUDA HANASSI, SAID: "EXCELLENT IS THE STUDY OF THE TORAH TOGETHER WITH A WORLDLY OCCUPATION, FOR THE EXERTION [EXPENDED] IN

BOTH OF THEM CAUSES SIN TO BE FORGOTTEN. AND ALL [STUDY OF THE] TORAH IN THE ABSENCE OF A WORLDLY OCCUPATION COMES TO NOTHING IN THE END AND LEADS TO SIN. AND ALL WHO WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY, LET THEM WORK FOR THE [SAKE OF THE] NAME OF HEAVEN; FOR THE MERIT OF THEIR ANCESTORS SUSTAINS THEM, AND THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL ENDURE FOREVER. AND AS FOR YOU [WHO WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY], I CREDIT YOU WITH A GREAT REWARD, AS IF YOU HAD DONE IT [ON YOUR OWN].”

There is some combination between Torah and work that prevents one from sinning. If a person were to be engaged in either work or Torah alone, he could not avoid sin. Rabbeinu Yona provides a clue to explain this:

*And he should never be idle, lest he indulge and his heart becomes haughty and he forgets the Lord, as the matter that is stated, “And Yeshurun will grow fat and kick [rebel]” (Deut. 32:15).*

Haughtiness (excessive self-evaluation) has two expressions: materialism and spirituality. Some people engage only in a materialistic lifestyle. This area is their value system and wherein they express their haughtiness. Then there are those whose haughtiness is tied to spirituality; they feel superior and special. They feel they are above

working; it is too degrading. However, Maimonides states, “It is better to flay the skins of animal carcasses than for one to say to the people, ‘I am a great sage, I am a priest (kohen), support me’” (Hilchos Matanos Aniyim 10:18). Even if one is a talmid chocham, if he is poor, he should subject himself to a degrading act as opposed to retaining his dignity and bothering others for money. We also find that Chazal accepted menial labor to support themselves. Chazal did not subscribe to this spiritual haughtiness. One who feels that he is too spiritually superior to subject himself to work is haughty and violates “v’ram livavecha” (Deut. 8:14)—haughtiness.

EXCELLENT IS THE STUDY OF THE TORAH TOGETHER WITH A WORLDLY OCCUPATION; FOR THE EXERTION [EXPENDED] IN BOTH OF THEM CAUSES SIN TO BE FORGOTTEN.

How does this combination work? When one learns Torah and sees that its wisdom is without end, he cannot feel haughty about his material possessions. He views such possessions as nonsensical. On the other hand, spiritual superiority is countered by engaging in work. Thus, engaging in both work and Torah prevents both expressions of haughtiness that can lead one to forget God. However, if

a person is self-sufficient and does not need to work, this mishna does not suggest that there is an inherent value in working. It discusses the normal case where one requires income. We are told that one should not avoid work by being spiritually haughty.

Perfection means that one must relate to reality as the situation demands. Therefore, if one has all he needs monetarily, work would then be an absurd action. Judaism has no work ethic—it has a reality ethic. We also understand from Adam’s punishment that work functioned so that he could perfect himself: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread” (Gen. 3:19).

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*When he neglects work, it brings him to poverty and it drags along several sins, and its evil is great. And because of it, he will “love gifts and not live” and flatter people even if they are evildoers, in order that they give to him. Also when the money from the gifts runs out, he will become a thief or a kidnapper (or a gambler) and he will bring home loot taken from the poor so that he not die of hunger. And when a person reaches these traits, his spirit knows no restraint and he will not rest and not be still until he transgresses all of the commandments that are stated in the Torah, since “One sin brings along [another] sin.”*

“The hater of gifts lives” (Proverbs 15:27) teaches that every person has this quality of dependency. Why is it that one who earns his own livelihood “lives?” That is the life of a free man. But one who depends on gifts has the mind of a slave. Such a person has not matured from the infantile mindset dependent on parents. The gemara says that three people have no life, and one of them is a person who looks to his friend’s table (depends on gifts). This person lives a life of torture.

*He will flatter people even if they are evil-doers, in order that they give to him.*

The dependent person develops a servile personality (one who flatters)—a further deterioration.

*Also when the money from the gifts runs out, he will become a thief or a kidnapper.*

The reason he doesn’t get a job is because he is convinced at this point that the world owes him a living. He does not feel stealing is unjust; in his mind his feeling of a debt due to him justifies his stealing.

*And when a person reaches these traits, his spirit knows no restraint and he will not rest and not be still until he transgresses all of the commandments that are stated in the Torah.*

Why will he violate all of the Torah? Since this person avoided work as something far below his spiritual superiority, and then he was forced to steal, he will lose that pride in the spiritual realm, thereby allowing him to violate all of the Torah. Rabbeinu Yona presents a step-by-step progression of deterioration. Chazal had amazing insight into the human personality.

*You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors;  
you shall be happy and you shall prosper  
(Psalms 128:2).*

“Happy” refers to the independence attained through work, which affords man nobility in his life. “Prosper” refers to Olam Haba. As he is not violating the Torah and he lives with the proper philosophical perspective, he earns Olam Haba.

Rabbeinu Yona adds the following:

*Therefore it is necessary for a sage to know  
a craft, as it is stated, “Good is wisdom  
with an inheritance” (Kobeles 7:11).*

Rashi adds, “This person who is driven to steal will forget his learning.” Once one is involved in stealing (sinning) this generates a conflict. He cannot violate Torah and simultaneously value Torah. This forces him to forget the

Torah he has already learned. Chazal said that one's memory depends greatly on his psychological energy. It is a negative command to forget one's Torah. But how does one forget? This occurs when one is in the state where knowledge conflicts with him. The only recourse to resolve his conflict is to forget his knowledge. Forgetting means his Torah fades and it doesn't have its impact anymore. This causes him to forget his Torah.

EXCELLENT IS THE STUDY OF THE TORAH TOGETHER WITH A WORLDLY OCCUPATION.

This does not negate the institution of a kolel (students who study all day without working), for this is important for the sustenance and maintenance of Klal Yisrael, in terms of Torah. Additionally, this quote has no bearing on arrangements such as Yissachar and Zevulin, since this was a private affair where one party offered to support another party's Torah study and share with that person a portion of Olam Haba. But it is interesting, how would Zevulin share Yissachar's afterlife?

One's state in Olam Haba is determined by his love of Torah: "Happy is Zevulin in your going out [labor] and Yissachar in your tents [study]" (Deut. 33:18). "Happy" in connection with Zevulin refers to his love of Torah as

he rejoiced in bringing Torah to the world. He was not on the level to study all day like his brother Yissachar, so he reached his potential by supporting those who studied and taught. Again, this is a private arrangement and is permitted. But one who doesn't work due to his spiritual superiority feelings is not perfected.

(Rabbi Chait now refers back to an earlier mishna in Avos regarding Maimonides' Golden Mean. See the end of Chapter 4 of Maimonides' Eight Chapters.)

What was Moshe's sin when he hit the stone? Maimonides said:

*Moshe inclined slightly toward extreme anger. Thereby, God criticized Moshe for a man like him shouldn't get angry before Israel in a situation where it was inappropriate. This is a profanation of God because people watched Moshe and learned from him, and they hoped, through Moshe, to reach success in this world and in the next world. How is it possible that anger manifested in Moshe Rabbeinu? It emanates from a lower part of human nature. But I will explain what is meant by, "You rebelled against My word at the Waters of Contention" (Num. 20:24). Moshe wasn't speaking to fools or those lacking a high level of philosophical development. For the gemara says that even the lowest Jew was on the level of Yechezkiel ben Buzzi. And all that Moshe said or did, the peo-*

*ple would question him on it. And when they saw Moshe get angry, they said, "It can't be due to Moshe's imperfection. If it wasn't that Moshe knew that God was angry with us because we asked for the water and we angered God, Moshe would not be angry." But in truth, we do not find that God was angry with the Jews because they asked for the water. And even though we departed from the topic of this area, we answered one of the Torah's major problems: many people often asked what the sin was.*

Every sin has two parts. First, a person must have an imperfection. But an imperfection alone is not a sin. If a person's emotions sway during the day, this is not a sin: "God does not render an evil thought as action" (Kiddushin 39b). Man vacillates daily. It is normal for different thoughts to occur to him throughout the day. For example, anger alone is not a sin unless it results in harming another person, or in a Torah violation, or in a fixed disposition of character. But without resulting in any of these, it is only an evil thought, and God does not view this as a sin.

Why did Maimonides say that Moshe's anger was a sin? It should not be a sin unless it resulted in action. The answer is that the people didn't think Moshe was unjustified in his anger. They viewed Moshe's anger as an indication

that God too was angry at their request for water. Thereby, the people blamed themselves and wrongly viewed the situation as their sin. This prevented them from perfecting themselves and this is how Moshe created a profanation of God (chillul Hashem). Moshe disrupted the psychological mean (equilibrium) necessary in the Jews' pursuit of philosophical perfection. When the Jews felt psychologically off-balance because of their mistaken self-blame, this corrupted their pursuit of philosophical perfection. Thus, Moshe's anger sent the wrong message to the Jews, the guilt of which impeded their perfection.

Moshe was punished because his anger gave the Jews an impression that affected their perfection. What was Moshe's error? One who is charged with a mission will always strive to preserve the path toward that ultimate objective. But the perfected person does not chase the objective. He has the objective in mind, but all of his actions are dictated by reality in every moment. However, at that moment, Moshe feared that the objective for which he strived his whole life might be lost. He focused on the objective. This was his error.

This is why a profanation of God is measured by the person. It occurs when one prevents another from gaining knowledge of God. An average person's actions are not watched, so there is no impact. But as Moshe was watched by everyone, he caused a profanation of God.

AND ALL WHO WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY,  
LET THEM WORK FOR THE [SAKE OF THE] NAME  
OF HEAVEN.

One reason a person might have an aversion to working with the community is because he must talk their language; he must lower his level of function and summon more basic emotions that relate to average community members. Therefore, one might think it is improper to join with the community for this forfeits one's own perfection. Maimonides says that although one works with the community, God nonetheless rewards him for other mitzvos he forfeited when assisting the community. This is because when one works with the community—provided he does so for the sake of Heaven—his level of perfection is not lacking. Forgoing one's personal path toward perfection to help the community is itself a higher level of perfection. This is what the mishna says with the words “For the merit of their ancestors sustains them, and their righteousness will endure forever.” Involvement with the community's needs is the highest perfection. There are other motivations driving a person to engage with the community, but if one does so for the sake of Heaven, as the mishna says, the merit of the forefathers will assist him. This means that he views the community properly, as descendants of those whom God chose. Thereby his perfection is not lost, but is

actually increased. He is helping those whom God wants to be helped. He is performing God's will.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*One works [with the community] not for honor, benefit, or leadership, but to guide them on the right path. And he does all for the sake of Heaven.*

There are three matters stated here that correlate to three wrongful motivations when engaging with the community: honor, benefit, and leadership. Honor is the primary motivation. The second is personal benefit; one thinks through working with others that a community member will help him succeed in business. These motivations are not for the sake of Heaven. The third motivation is to exert mastery over people, of which Dathan and Aviram accused Moshe: "Will you certainly rule over us?" (Num. 16:13). Thus, there are people who don't really care for honor or material benefits, but prefer domination.

What does Rabbeinu Yona mean by saying that the merit of the forefathers helps the community? This means that a person errs if he feels he is the cause of the community's success. This is false. In truth, God is the sole cause of the community's success. In his Guide, Maimonides states that God's providence relates to the community and not to the

individual. The Rav said that when one davens on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to attain a favorable judgment, he should have in mind to be tied to the community. That is the only way to feel secure that one will attain a favorable judgment, for then he is under the providence of the community. (However, a tzaddik or a prophet would have individual providence.)

The point here is that viewing the community's fate as providential, and not due to one's personal actions, enables one to act for the sake of Heaven. For if one takes pride in the community's success, he has not acted for the sake of Heaven. It is only when one accepts that God is the sole cause of the community's success that personal motivations are removed. In this manner, one's motivation can be to fulfill God's will and not for a personal agenda. This does not mean that if one senses a personal interest or motivation he should abstain from helping the community. A person is not an angel, and he will, at times, sense an emotional drive. There is no danger in having such emotions, but one must analyze himself and not be overpowered by those emotions. Having emotion is natural and not a sin. One should work with the community and understand his emotions in their proper perspective. That is termed working "for the sake of Heaven."

AND AS FOR YOU [WHO WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY] I CREDIT YOU WITH A GREAT REWARD, AS IF YOU HAD DONE IT [ON YOUR OWN].

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*Even though it is true that the reason the community succeeds is due to God's providence, you who work with the community, I consider that success is your doing.*

This is odd. At first we are told not to think one accomplished the community's success, for it was God's doing. Now we are told that it is the person's accomplishment. Which one is it?

One who works with the community must recognize that his success is only through God. Therefore, one cannot take pride in any success. With this final quote above, one is credited as if he accomplished it. That is, one who operates on that level of perfection receives the reward for the involvement. This doesn't mean that one's actions aren't instrumental. Rather, this means one must recognize that God's providence is at work with the community, and therefore, he cannot take pride in the result.

Rabbeinu Yona offers a second explanation:

*And do not say, "Why do I need this distress, to work for the needs of the commu-*

*nity?" And [he will think that] even if he does charity, the giving of the reward will only be to the community, as it is their money. You should not think this, as you will benefit yourself for your sake doubly, since "The merit of their ancestors sustains them," and you will be more successful when you work on their behalf, than you would be successful working for your own goals. And I will credit you with the reward, as if you had done everything from your [money] and as if you gave that which was given through you from your [own] pocket. And behold, you are gaining with your toil from their deeds more than you would if you were toiling for yourself, since their deeds are more numerous than your deeds. And "All that you do, the Lord will make successful in your hand," since "The merit of their ancestors sustains them." Hence one who works for the community will benefit himself very much, but only if he directs his heart to Heaven.*

I understand that the community enjoys the merits of the forefathers. But what does Rabbeinu Yona mean by "It is their money and their reward?" What is his point with these extra words? And why is it "their money?" It's your money too since you support the community like everyone else.

Rabbeinu Yona indicates that there is an emotion against

working with the community. Actually, this entire mishna concerns people's emotions against the community. Chazal's method is to identify the emotion, then they expose the error, and finally, they direct us to the proper path.

Here we have two opposing emotions. Some people dislike working with the community because they forfeit their narcissistic satisfactions. On the other hand, there are those who are gregarious and enjoy social intercourse when working with the community. Since most people function emotionally, we find both types of people: those who dislike and even have a hatred for the community as this forfeits their pride, and those who enjoy working with the community. Rabbeinu Yona says that this mishna addresses both of these emotions. One who works with the community is a small part of the whole, making one's satisfaction equally small; one's identity is obscured by that of the community. Therefore, one will be averse to working with the community, as one's personal pride and gain are obscured. When the community raises funds, the bulk of it is not the person's funds, and this overshadows his own gifts.

Therefore, Chazal say that one should work with the community. Since they merit from the forefathers, the individual will in fact gain more since he is guaranteed success. This success from the forefathers does not exist

in relation to him individually. The individual's charitable gift will find greater success with the community than by donating alone. Thus, Rabbeinu Yona teaches that a person's goal must not be personal satisfaction, but rather, the ultimate good he can generate, and that is found in greater measure with the community.

I CREDIT YOU WITH A GREAT REWARD, AS IF  
YOU HAD DONE IT [ON YOUR OWN].

There are two types of reward: personal satisfaction and the goodness that is effectuated in reality. Since with the community—and not individually—one is involved in a much greater degree in generating a benefit, the true satisfaction should be measured not personally, but in how God views it, i.e., achieving the greater good. And as a greater good is generated communally through their merit from the forefathers, that should be one's true desire. The phrase in the mishna “as if you had done it” is telling man that when one works for the sake of Heaven (i.e., when he forfeits ego satisfaction, and instead, seeks the greatest good, which is achieved only through the community effort) he has in fact achieved his “personal desires,” if his desires are God's desires. If man wants the true greatest good, he must upgrade himself from seeking personal pride to as-

sisting the masses on the highest level. Once man elevates his values to attaining this greater good, his personal desires equate to God's desires ("the sake of Heaven") and he attains goodness on a far greater level. "As if you had done it" refers to the greater value one places on communal success than on his personal desires. The communal success is now his personal desire, "as if he performed his personal desires." One who values the community over the self is actually performing his desires when he acts with the community.

Rabbeinu Yona adds "...But only if he directs his heart to Heaven." One can translate anything into the glorification of one's ego. Thus, even when one joins a community effort, this too can be a narcissistic expression. He can fool himself by saying, "I am a great person for joining the community; I am responsible for the good this community brings about." In this case, one forfeits any good. The correct attitude is to value teamwork with the community as the proper way in life. Performing the good itself should be one's satisfaction.

Why does community play such a role? Because community is the antithesis of the ego. To work with the community demands that one lowers his ego and becomes an equal with others, which is quite a painful emotion. Working with the community removes one's individuality and

sense of superiority. Working with the community is the antidote to this superiority over others. This explains why Chazal identified this emotion and offered a solution.

Another point is expedience. The good is brought about most expediently through a group. Therefore, reality dictates this method must be engaged over the personal desire for notoriety. Mordechai and Esther embodied how people can use everything at their disposal to bring about the greatest good for the community. Mordechai and Esther used great wisdom at every step of the way, and even committed self-sacrifice for the good of the community. Unfortunately, many Jewish institutions suffer because the board members do not view doing God's work (community service) as important as running their own businesses. Religious matters take a backseat to personal wealth.

Regarding perfection, working with the community is only the first step. To root out the emotions that, until now, prevented a person from working with the community, one must follow-up his communal efforts with introspection. If one does not do so, he won't change or perfect himself. Perfection is reached when one changes the soul, and this requires introspection and wisdom. Mere activity alone will not affect the soul: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, created the evil inclination, but He also created the Torah as an antidote" (Baba Basra 16a). The only true remedy for

the corrupt soul is Torah. The essence of the Torah system is not the performance of mitzvos, but rather Torah study. “Better is wisdom than fine pearls, and all desirous things [even other mitzvos] do not equate to [Torah]” (Proverbs 8:11). And what we refer to as Torah study is not limited to gemara, but includes all areas: Chumash, Navi, Mishlei, etc. The book Duties of the Heart (Chovos Halevavos) focuses on man’s perfection. Herein lays man’s perfection: the duties of the heart. This is the emphasis of the entire Torah system.

## 2:3 DEPENDENCY

BE CAREFUL ABOUT POWERFUL GROUPS [GOVERNMENTS], AS THEY APPROACH A MAN ONLY WHEN THEY NEED HIM. THEY SEEM LIKE GOOD FRIENDS IN THEIR TIMES OF NEED, BUT THEY DON’T STAND BY MAN IN HIS TIME OF TROUBLE.

Maimonides says this refers to shaltanos bimay kedem, certain factions that work against the government, or a government itself. An example would be the Mafia. Our

mishna warns one to be careful of such entities. However, as this is political advice, why is it included in Pirkei Avos?

This mishna relates to the previous mishna, “Excellent is the study of the Torah together with a worldly occupation.” A person can engage in Torah study and avoid working. But, as we have said, this dependent state of mind goes against Judaism. This personality uses the Torah as an extension of his childhood. One lies to himself, feeling that his Torah pursuits mutually exclude working. His dependent mindset uses Torah study as a spiritual self-righteous facade for his infantile dependency, shielding him from an independent life of exertion at work.

There is one entity that plays on this dependent state of mind: these powerful factions. These entities possess power and also provide a compelling attraction in the form of tremendous security: “Join us and we will take perfect care of you—financially and otherwise.” This is the fantasy of total security. They are like a “family”—the Mafia’s trademark. The Mafia is permeated with the theme of loyalty, as this is the emotion people seek. In contradistinction, King David said in Psalms 55:23, “Throw your load upon God and He will sustain you.” True security is found in God alone. One must abandon the infantile state and trust in the real Source of reality and security.

This mishna warns one to be careful of these factions, as

they play on that emotional need for security, but only for selfish motives. However, man cannot provide this security since he is selfish by nature; he benefits others only as long as he benefits himself.

When the dove returned to Noah in the ark, it held an olive leaf in its beak. Chazal said this particular leaf is bitter. But the dove said, “Better is bitterness from God than sweetness from man.” The concept our rabbis scripted in this metaphor is that animals live in line with how they are created: dependent upon God. The dove lived for a year on the ark, depending upon Noah, but here it expressed its preference to depend on God. Chazal’s medrashic message is that the latter is the proper value.

Our mishna teaches that one should depend on God and not upon man, which can only end in destruction. And we are not warned against these factions per se, but rather, to avoid catering to the emotion of dependency in all of its forms.

Based on the quote from Birkas Hamazon, “And let us not require the gifts of man or their loans, but upon Your open and full hand...,” one may ask what’s wrong with taking a business loan? Do not many business interactions rely on others? A person can take a loan in the capacity of an independent businessman using a strategic plan. But he can also take a loan in the capacity of a dependent person-

ality. The former is perfectly acceptable; the latter is not.

But it's not simply that dependency is bad for the soul. In reality, one will fail as well. However, why does the mishna state the warning in terms of the failure for man to come through for you? Instead, it should warn against dependency because it is an infantile psychological state. The answer is that had the mishna warned against the dependent psyche alone, if the factions would in fact come through in one's hour of need, this would validate dependency.

Rabbeinu Yona disagrees with this view. He praises government as it contributes to society. He writes:

*[They are friendly] when they have a shortage of money, but when desperate they don't have mercy upon the poor person until they impoverish him, and they forget the earlier [relations] since it is all past [and] gone. And such is the simple understanding of this mishna. But if the matter is so, it speaks about the defect of kings. But forbid it, forbid it, that such should be the matter and that it should arise. As through them the whole world is sustained and they create law and justice in the world. And there is no man that can be as truthful as they are, as they do not need to flatter creatures since they are not afraid; and [so] there is nothing that prevents them from walking the straight*

*path. And, hence, it appears [that it can] be said that the kings—be it their friendship or be it their enmity—are not in their [own] hands. And [so] when the king needs a person and brings him close and shows him friendship at the time that he benefits from him, it is from God that the matter went forth, and not from the king. And God arranged that this person be of benefit to the king. And when a man sins to God and he is guilty and He wants to press him, who can stand for him? And even if the king wants to do him honor, it is only in his hand to surely take the vengeance of God and to “Afflict the one that the Lord would love to chastise.” And this is what it states “Streams of water is the heart of the king in the Lord’s hand; He directs it wherever he desires” (Proverbs 21:1). He wants to say that just like a person can direct a channel to any side that he wants, so [too] is the heart of the king in the hand of the Lord to direct it to do good “to the person whose honor He desires” and “to pay back His enemies in his face to destroy him.” And he stated, “the heart of the king” and he was not speaking about other people; but so is it that all hearts are “in the hand of the Lord.” As even though, [a person] thinks thoughts and it appears to the eyes that he has the ability in his hand to act, in truth, he does not have the power in his hand to do bad or to do good, but rather [to do] the word of the living God.*

What is the practical and philosophical meaning of “Streams of water is the heart of the king in the Lord’s hand; He directs it wherever he desires?” Practically, this means that all people—no matter how powerful—are subject to whims. These whims can be responsible for doing something completely crazy and out of character. Man possesses a great amount of irrationality, of which he is unaware.

There is a dispute concerning from where one starts reading Megillas Esther. One opinion says it is from the verse “That night, sleep deserted the king...” for this is where the miracle began. But what do these words mean? One commentator explains as follows:

*Why couldn't the king sleep? In his dream  
he saw Haman take a sword to kill him,  
and this fright awakened him.*

And what happened once he awoke? Haman was in the courtyard. (The precise timing of these two interrelated and dependent events indicate God’s providence at work.) This association of the king’s nightmare and Haman’s presence can change the entire way the kingship plays out. In Achashverosh’s mind, this association can drastically change his actions. Chazal interpret this incident as “Streams of water is the heart of the king in the Lord’s

hand; He directs it wherever he desires”: God’s providence works through man’s unconscious. And this applies to anybody, not just to a king.

Another explanation is as the gemara says:

*Something occurred to the king. He said, “Why did Esther invite Haman to the wine fest? Maybe they both conspire to murder me. Is there no one around who is loyal to me, who can reveal to me if a conspiracy is afoot? Maybe I owe someone a favor?”*

A king must be careful to repay his loyal subjects to retain that loyalty. That is why he immediately summoned Sefer Zichronos, the Book of Remembrances. He found that Mordechai was loyal in informing him on Bigsan’s and Seresh’s plot to kill him. But his loyalty went unrecognized. Without rewarding Mordechai, the king would demonstrate that loyalty is purposeless. Achashverosh immediately changed course and followed through by honoring Mordechai. Esther plan worked: her wine fest intended to arouse the king’s suspicion against Haman. [It worked, for God synchronized the events to compliment her plan.]

According to Rabbeinu Yona, “Be careful of factions” means that when one in power bestows good upon another, that good should not be attributed to the person because

people are selfish by nature. Therefore, one must view the good as very possibly emanating from God. Since people are typically selfish, and the good one does for another should be viewed with this understanding. Thereby, one must realize God can intervene. Nonetheless, we must show recognition for the good that people bestow upon us.

In an unbelievable insight and a lesson about God's providence, Chazal recognized the unconscious forces of the mind and how they could dramatically change events.

According to Maimonides, this mishna addresses dependency. Rabbeinu Yona says it concerns philosophy. Chazal dispute whether it was Esther who evoked Achashverosh's change in behavior, or if the king's altered behavior was brought about solely through God's providence relating to his unconscious. But according to either view, the king's reaction was driven by unconscious factors.

## 2:4 GOD'S WILL, HAPPINESS, PROVIDENCE

HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO SAY: "MAKE [GOD'S] WILL LIKE YOUR WILL, SO THAT HE WILL MAKE YOUR WILL LIKE HIS WILL. NULLIFY YOUR WILL TO HIS WILL, SO THAT HE WILL NULLIFY THE WILL OF OTHERS TO DO YOUR WILL." HILLEL SAYS: "DO NOT SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE COMMUNITY. DO NOT BELIEVE IN YOURSELF UNTIL THE DAY OF YOUR DEATH. DO NOT JUDGE YOUR FELLOW UNTIL YOU COME TO HIS PLACE. DO NOT SAY SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE HEARD, FOR IN THE END IT WILL BE HEARD. DO NOT SAY, 'WHEN I WILL BE AVAILABLE I WILL STUDY [TORAH],' LEST YOU NEVER BECOME AVAILABLE."

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*[Just] as when a person acts according to his own will with want and desire, so should he do the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And [he] should not separate between the will of the blessed Holy One, Blessed be He, and his [own] will, but rather make both of them [into] one thing. This means to say that he should not will anything that is not God's will. And they said in the Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (Medrash Mishlei 9), "And so did David say 'But all is from You, and it is from Your Hand that we have given to You'" [I Chronicles 29:14]. And he gave*

*good counsel to people to overcome their passions [and] do the desire and will of God, may He be blessed—also from their money and from the acquisitions: because God gave everything and [what they have] is [only] a deposit in their hands. And when [one] brings this up into his heart, at the very least he will do the will of the owner—which is God—with the deposit. And with this, he will not worry when he gives charity and he will do the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, willingly and with a good heart, so that He will make your will like His will.*

King David gave this advice so one should not hesitate to use his deposit in line with God's will. Why? In order that God should do your will like His will.

*God, may He be blessed, "satiates the will of every living thing," and "gives bread to all flesh" and to every creature. God will supply you with your needs because God supplies every creature with its needs, and this is God's will. If you are fortunate to find favor before God, He will also perform your will in the area of your small world and He will supply you with your livelihood because that is His will. And you should negate your will and perform God's will in order that He negates other peoples' will for your will. [If others seek your harm, God will protect you.]*

Why is there a focus on financial matters? Additionally, this appears to suggest that one should follow God's will for ulterior motives.

Chazal indicate the source of unhappiness. When one deviates from reality, he encounters problems. Reality functions according to a strict design. Our problems arise when we do not conform to that design.

Man's reality is quite difficult due to his dilemma. Every organism—man or animal—seeks to satiate its desire. But a chocham who studies reality learns that the scheme of things is such that the world is made for the universals (and not for the individuals). In the case of life, the world functions to sustain the species, not the individual member of the species. An animal flees from its predator to preserve itself. However, that individual animal is insignificant. Its life-preserving instinct is not so vital regarding the individual, but rather, for the species' survival. In the biological world, each organism operates to preserve itself, but the objective isn't realized in the survival of one member of the species, but in the survival of the species. One day, this one animal will die, regardless of the many times it escaped its predator. Because of the instinct for survival found in every member of the species, the species survives. Viewing this phenomenon of a force that drives the preservation of the species, one sees God's will.

Animals are ignorant and therefore freely follow their instincts unimpeded. But man has a great problem. On the one hand, man's animal part possesses instinctual desires aimed at satisfying the self. But man also possesses a mind, and this element prevents satisfaction of immediate instinctual gratification. His mind permits him to see into the future. While an animal finds satisfaction escaping immediate danger, man's immediate escape from near catastrophe is not sufficient to offer happiness: man worries about his future. With his knowledge of the future, man's self-preservation seeks to secure not only the present. Since man seeks security, which encompasses a total picture of his existence, and since nature is not designed to cater to the individual but the species, man confronts a harsh reality. For man is attempting to devise a scheme in which the world conforms to his personal needs. But the reality is that he is just one individual—an infinitesimally small link in a huge chain of reality. And for him to try to change the scheme of reality is absurd. This is not within his power. Therefore, man must meet with unhappiness; there is no other possibility.

That is the human dilemma if one is a *rasha*, a wicked person. The *rasha* is one who attempts to change the scheme of reality to please himself. It is impossible for him to be successful; every move that he makes brings him

closer to confronting the universals. Each attempt to satisfy a personal desire collides with nature's universal laws that do not recognize the individual. His own death is the greatest obstacle that stands in the way of his desires and personal satisfaction. At the end of Koheles, King Solomon describes old age and the deterioration of the body. This reality derails the rasha's plans to engage the desires. And during old age, when man is in constant pain, all of his fantasies and accumulations are worthless. Histories of evil people like Hitler reveal their immense frustrations as their plans were foiled.

Ultimately, man loses the battle to force reality to conform to his own individuality. And as man requires satisfaction and cannot tolerate too much pain, when he ages and slowly deteriorates, and his enjoyments become very minimal, his pain becomes great, his state of mind changes, and there is no possibility of reaching even the minimal contentedness of even a pauper. At this point, man must face the reality that all of his fantasies were false. And even before reaching that part of life, he is aware of this. If this deterioration were to occur suddenly, it would not be as bad. But man has knowledge and knows this stage of life is inevitable. Furthermore, man cannot push thoughts of his slow demise out of his mind. The Torah describes this state: "And the wicked are turbulent as the sea" (Isa-

iah 57:20). This verse embodies the rasha's unsettled state based on the conflict between his attempts to secure his fantasies and his underlying realization that he can't. The suppression of the reality of his imminent failure generates a very troubled soul.

There have been leaders who desired to control the world. The insanity of such a notion renders this type of person very likely to fail, for his makeup is irrational. Since the world follows a rational course, reality favors the world's existence, not the ruler's irrational schemes of domination.

Thus, man is caught in a dilemma. To enjoy life as an individual is impossible. The world was created for the species, not for the individual. How then can a person achieve happiness? He cannot be happy with universals because he has animalistic tendencies; his desires are directed solely toward himself. And his knowledge prohibits immediate satisfaction, as he has concerns for the future too. How does man escape this dilemma? Chazal provide the answer.

Since man has the ability to think and reflect, he has an appreciation for the universals. When he appreciates universals, he gets lost in them; his attachment fixes on universals. Once this occurs, the self loses its importance. That is the only way man escapes this dilemma. Man's mind brings him to the problem, but—in very rare individuals—his mind also helps him resolve it. Man becomes

so overcome by the beauty of the universals that he is not upset about this situation. He is very happy to form but a small part of the system.

(To clarify, universals refer to God's plans seen in the goals of creation, like all laws that perpetuate the species, the laws and harmonious interplay between weather and vegetation, geology, astronomy, physics, biology, etc. When one appreciates the immense brilliance in the plan of the universe, the self is lost and the happiness in seeing the grand scheme fully satisfies man.)

Rabbeinu Yona says that one must perform God's will as his own will, "willingly and with a happy heart." One should not confuse this personality with those who simply refrain from satisfying their desires (self-deprivation as an end), for those people are unhappy and pessimistic, whereas a person who gets lost in wisdom and is enamored by God's universe is ecstatic. (His lack of involvement in pursuing his desires is a result of being engaged in his greater desire for wisdom). Even the person suffering from pain can be very happy due to his deep appreciation for the universals. His pains are of little concern, as he realizes his small place and appreciates the grand plan and all of the universals that brilliantly guide the universe. Furthermore, if one suffers from an illness, and he studies all the laws necessary to bring about that illness, he would

be in awe and the illness would lose significance. At first, a person's senses draw him toward the external world where he relates to particulars. But then his mind does not allow him to stop there, and he explores all of the causes of his illness. To complain about his illness would seem childish and egocentric, and even absurd. And a person on a high level would enjoy the universals even if faced with a disease like cancer. He would be happy and joyous and he would recognize that his cancer is a part of God's wisdom and His system of reality. And although one may not be on that level, the importance of Pirkei Avos is that for a moment, one might appreciate that level, and through such appreciation, one can raise himself to a higher level. (This does not refer to a case where the pain is so great that one cannot function, rather a situation of acceptance of one's own demise.)

King David writes:

*When I behold Your heavens, the work of  
Your fingers, the moon and the stars that  
You set in place, what is man that You  
have been mindful of him, and mortal  
man that You have taken note of him, that  
You have made him little less than divine,  
and adorned him with glory and majesty?  
You have made him master over Your  
handiwork, laying the world at his feet.  
(Psalms 8:4-7)*

With technological advances, we see the meaning of this last sentence, but what do all of these verses teach? If man simply strives for conquest, he will be unhappy. But if one views man's place in the universe, possessing intelligence to advance the world, and he appreciates this from the perspective of a brilliant set of universals, then he will find a deep happiness in this appreciation. He then views man's position in the world as God's will, and not egocentrically.

In the Temple, there is only one type of figure: the cherubs. Each cherub's face is a young child. These cherubs are above the ark that house the Torah and they look down at the ark (looking at the Torah refers to a preoccupation with it ). Why a child's face? Because children represent one who views God with great wonderment. Man's optimal state is the attitude where he views the universe with this wonderment. Records of the lives of great thinkers reveal that they retained this sense of childish wonder. Such people never cease to be amazed, just like a child. This is the attitude of "Nullify you will to His will." With this attitude, one's individual pain is lost in the appreciation of universals.

What does Rabbeinu Yona mean by "Man will view his possessions as a deposit, and he will use it for the good, and God will give him his food and a living ?" Insofar as man attempts to bend reality toward satisfying the self, there is

one area where it is expressed to a great degree: amassing wealth. If one has the correct philosophy, he will not seek money; he recognizes it as a small part of the picture. Having this proper perspective, he will naturally use his wealth for the furtherance of that reality, which is the promulgation of Judaism. Rabbeinu Yona does not refer to a person who experiences difficulty in giving charity. But with his words, “Nullify your will to His will,” he refers to a person who is attached to reality. He will also enjoy his wealth as part of reality, and not as one seeking to amass wealth. When the fantasy to increase one’s wealth is gone, one can enjoy his possessions. He views his wealth as an expression of God’s will toward every creature. This explains why anyone who says *Ashrei* (Psalm 145) three times a day merits eternal life—*Ashrei* includes “The eyes of all look to You expectantly, and You give them their food when it is due.” God will relate to such a person directly.

This mishna addresses two matters: 1) Man’s preferred frame of mind, and 2) God’s providence (*hashgachah*).

The second part of the mishna is a bit more difficult to understand because it tells us two things about providence. First is that one will have a living, which means he enjoys a special providence for his livelihood. And the second is, “nullify your will to do God’s will, so that He nullifies the will of others to do your will.” This means that one should

put aside his own will in place of doing God's will, in order that God avert the will of others wishing to harm you. We must understand that if a person's motivation is solely to gain God's providence, this will not work.

How does this system of providence operate? First of all, most of the harm caused by others is inconsequential. The most one can do is embarrass you. But this is just a general human emotion, a trivial matter. In terms of harm, there is very little another person can afflict upon you, provided that all you need is in line with reality. But the mishna also speaks in terms of particular providence. We do not know how providence works, but through Moshe Rabbeinu, God told us there is a special providence. We are taught here that God's providence relates to man when he is in line with the universals.

Universals are expressions of God's will. When man's mind attaches to those universals, he then comes under the influence of God's will. Then, anyone attempting to harm this man will fail because this perfected man is in line with what is truly in existence—universals—while the other person operates in the framework of that which exists only temporarily.

In his Guide (book III, chap. li), Maimonides reiterates the same idea, that even a great person when not involved in God's wisdom, can suffer a mishap (he is not under

God's providence at that moment).

Returning to the use of the word “deposit” (pikadon), this means it is not for him. The objective of that wealth is that it is used for the One who owns it.

How does requesting personal needs in tefilah (prayer) fit into this picture? We must understand that the Torah deals with a person on all levels: from a child to Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah addresses the person on each level and raises him to a higher level, directing him to the ultimate level. Personal prayer is not the highest level. The gemara refers to prayer as temporary existence; Torah is eternal life.

There is a story where one rabbi criticized another who was praying: “How long will you engage in temporary existence and leave eternal existence?” For one who is on the level of those rabbis, this is true; when one reaches a certain level through wisdom, personal prayer is a small thing. But we are not on that level; we cannot fool ourselves. So, we must direct our personal needs to the True Source. Rabbeinu Yona accurately calls the personal world the *olam katon*—the small world. However, one must direct any desire whatsoever toward God and realize that God may answer his request. Of course, one must not feel secure that God will provide. This is a bad trait. But it is equally wrong to think that God will not answer.

Parenthetically, when learning Avos' depiction of the perfect man, one must avoid the temptation to replenish his depleted ego by attempting to immediately assume the self-image of that perfect man. Studying Avos must not include a personal comparison between the depiction of the perfect man and yourself. Doing so will disturb you. However, how can we view ourselves as nothing, when we in fact have an eternal soul? The part of man that asks this question and feels satisfaction in knowing he lives eternally, is not the eternal part. This question is generated from one's instincts. Insofar as man is attached to his immortality, he diminishes his immortality because he engages in mortal fantasy. His concern for immortality is in fact a desire to extend life in mortal terms. Furthermore, true immortality would not offer one the satisfaction he seeks through feeling he is immortal, as truly immortality is of a different nature than what he imagines.

HILLEL SAYS: "DO NOT SEPARATE YOURSELF  
FROM THE COMMUNITY."

Rashi comments:

*Join with the community during bad times  
in order that you will rejoice with them,*

*as it says, "Join in [Jerusalem's] jubilation, all you who have mourned over her," (Isaiah 66:10), as it is stated, "Anyone who did not join with the community will not witness its consolation, and will never see a sign of blessing."*

The gemara says, "Whoever doesn't mourn with the community on Tisha B'Av will not merit to see its restitution and the Messiah." Why can't one simply say, "I won't mourn with them and I won't rejoice with them." The gemara also says intercourse is prohibited in times of famine. This teaches that one must have some identification with the community.

Chazal always point out human imperfection, conveying how it impacts a person's life. Chazal also desire to teach us what is the best life, and that is in line with how human nature is structured: a correct psychology and a correct philosophy. Chazal teach that by nature, people are gregarious and don't wish to live outside of the greater whole: society. That would be abnormal. And of course, all people partake of this attitude in varying degrees.

Here, Chazal refer to a certain egotistical disorder where a person breaks his identification with the community. If a calamity befalls the community, such a person is unaffected. The person who doesn't mourn with the community

will not be able to rejoice during their ultimate consolation. When the Temple is rebuilt and all members of Israel are complete and living in the proper way, every individual will partake in a tremendous sense of happiness because they will feel the enjoyment in their personal perfection, and in the community's perfection, which will be far greater.

The gemara says that since the destruction of the Temple, many things were lost. Since then, no one knows what security is. During the times of King David and King Solomon there was a sense of well-being. This was lost too. The gemara also says the pleasure of intercourse suffered. Human satisfaction was greatly impaired after the Temple's destruction. All of this supports our idea that one's happiness is bound up with the state of affairs of the community. Thus, our mishna warns one from departing from the community. This behavior is a defect that one should correct.

Rashi's point is that since the ultimate happiness is a societal phenomenon of the Temple, one should live in a way where he can partake of that communal joy and not abandon the community.

**HILLEL SAYS: "DO NOT SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE COMMUNITY."**

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*At the time when the community is involved with Torah [study] and with the commandments, it is the crown of all the world and the glory of all of His domain. As "with many people" that are gathered to fulfill His commandment, it "is the King's glory"; and [so] it is not fitting to separate from them, as it is stated (Deut. 33:5), "And there is a King in Yeshurun with the gathering." And this is with a community that walks in the good path and gathers to fulfill a commandment. But it is not fitting to attach oneself to a community that leans to the bad path, the deeds of which are corrupted. And one who separates from them, behold, he is praiseworthy. And about this, Jeremiah the prophet, peace be upon him, stated: "Oh, to be in the desert, at an encampment for wayfarers! Oh, to leave my people, to go away from them, for they are all adulterers, a band of rogues" (Jeremiah 9:1).*

Rabbeinu Yona states that if the people of a community are upright, one should not separate from them. But if they are corrupt, one should part from them, as Jeremiah says. Rabbeinu Yona teaches that there should be a perfected state, and this state is when mankind follows God. This would represent the perfection of God's kingship, referred to as *kesser kol malchuso* (the crown of His entire king-

ship). All other creations are perfected solely through God, but man must perfect himself.

Whoever possesses love of God will not separate from the community because he values that communal following of God; there is more glory to God when masses follow Him. And when man follows God's will, God's kingdom is thereby perfect. (As man is the only creation not naturally in line with God's will, God's kingship is imperfect until man follows God. And when man follows God, God's kingship is now over all of creation, and this is a glory to God. That is, man views God with greater honor, as he sees God's will is fully attained. Man's optimal honor to God is "God's glory.")

But Rabbeinu Yona addresses both cases: when to join the community and when to leave it. Perfected man is attracted to one situation and repels another. A properly functioning society attracts the perfected individual, while he naturally repels a corrupt society. The latter situation is a stain on mankind's recognition of God; it is a profanation of God and therefore one must depart from that society. That is why Jeremiah said "Oh, to be in the desert, at an encampment for wayfarers..." Of course, one should seek to help a faltering community. Jeremiah is expressing his assessment of the community, but he did not leave it.

AND DO NOT TRUST YOURSELF UNTIL THE DAY  
OF YOUR DEATH.

Maimonides comments:

*If one has acquired a virtuous characteristic and it has become strengthened in his nature, he should not abandon the performance of good actions in order to add strength [to this characteristic]. And he should not feel secure and say to himself, "I have already attained this worthy virtue and it is wrong to assume that this trait will ever leave me." For it is possible that this trait will in fact leave him.*

The statement is not as important as the philosophical attitude behind it. The one who describes it best is Rabbeinu Yona:

*This refers to one's outlook and to his virtuous actions—piety and faith—that even though you have been fitted with a faithful and proper spirit, you should not be righteous in your [own] eyes. And you should not say, "How many days have I not done any iniquity—I have defeated my impulse [evil instincts] and I am able [to overcome] it—it is beaten, already 'broken, and we have escaped' and it cannot divert [me] from the straight path." But it*

*is an enemy and seeks to ambush you when it finds you sometimes involved in your work and not studying and not thinking about metaphysics and ideas about God. It will then dance in front of you and speak to your heart to divert you to "roam in the earth and to walk" in a path "that no good man has trodden or sat there." And maybe it can [thus overcome you] and your soul will be taken in its hand. And so "guard yourself and guard your soul much," and do not distance its fear from you, and "act with your wisdom"; if you are a wise man always place your eyes and your heart upon its ways [study yourself], until it is not able to come close to you all the days of your life. And about this is it said, "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death."*

Why is the statement "Do not trust in yourself until the day of your death" so important that Chazal quote it often? It is important because, as usual, Judaism goes against people's natural instincts and desires. Man searches for a certain plateau where he can finally be free and where he can coast and no longer need to battle between his intellect and his emotions. Here, Chazal teach that there is no such plateau; it does not exist. Thus, on one's path of a religious life, one might equate his commencement of this path to his state long in the future; he finds no moment, either at

the beginning of his journey or long into it, where is he is at ease; he must constantly be on guard as he never escapes conflicts. However, the progress seems to offer no benefit (one is ensnared by his drives even years after living a Torah lifestyle). But this cannot be true, for the gemara tells us that Torah and perfection is a far better life. For if one follows the plan for the soul's harmony, he must enjoy a far greater existence. And if he does not follow the Torah, his life will not be harmonious. Judaism promises a much more enjoyable life. This being the case, the mishna's words "Don't trust in yourself until your death" conflict with this promise. It seems that one never progresses.

Additionally, we learn of people who are oveid me'ahava, those who serve God based on love, who naturally love the Torah life. In Chapter 4 of his Introduction to the Eight Chapters, Maimonides says that this personality type has no conflicts. In his medical writings, Maimonides discusses the perfect man as an even-keeled individual with no extreme highs or lows. As this is an achievable personality type, why are we told not to trust in ourselves? It would seem the oveid me'ahava personality has in fact progressed to a point where there is no danger, and he can trust in himself.

The answer is as follows. An oveid me'ahava is one who naturally follows the good life. However, the source of his

energies is instinctual. He converts those instinctual energies in application to higher ideals of Torah study. But he is not protected from his instincts overpowering him. As Rabbeinu Yona said, when he is not channeling his instinctual energies toward wisdom and metaphysics, his energies immediately return to his lower part and he can succumb to an instinctual act.

This explains why Judaism rejects the idea of a saint. This personality is a fantasy and does not partake of what is real. It is not within human nature to be free of the instincts.

If this is so, that even the ovoid me'ahava must be on guard, and though he is the most perfected personality, it would appear that no personality ever attains happiness!

The answer is that Chazal refer to a different type of happiness. In today's society, people are driven by success. And most people feel this success equates to happiness. This applies not only to business, but also to religion. To attain happiness, some people don't pursue business, but they pursue religion. They feel that by being a devout Christian or pious Jew, this "success" will yield true happiness. But Chazal say that this is false. Success in business, religion, or any other area will not lead to a happy life.

Who then is the happy person? One who enjoys reality, which is God's wisdom. The perfect person seeks an "expe-

rience,” while others seek the “person”; they seek personal success in the pursuit of establishing themselves as certain types of people. But Chazal sought to experience God’s wisdom, and in it they found tremendous enjoyment. In Judaism, the person never strives for “success.” The goal is not the self. The talmid chocham rises each morning to a beautiful day of enjoying God’s wisdom, living properly, and enjoying the happiness that his soul’s harmony brings. But he recognizes that this depends upon his psyche and how he disperses his energies. This is why one tanna (author of a mishna) structured a blessing asking God to prevent any emotional disruption; the wise man never feels the security in the self. And this insecurity does not make him unhappy. On the contrary, he is a free individual. He is free from the need for success that society has told him is so important. He recognizes this is false and he simply doesn’t have that need. As he does not chase success and other fantasies, he can spend his energies involved in the real world.

In addition to praying for protection against harm, a wise man also studies himself. Wisdom straddles all areas, including the study of one’s emotional makeup. Rabbeinu Yona said “If you are a wise man, always place your eyes and your heart upon its ways [study yourself].” The perfected person will enjoy understanding how he works

psychologically. The engagement in wisdom provides the truly enjoyable existence.

Socrates asked, “What is perfection? Is it knowledge or something else?” This is not a simple question, as we find knowledgeable people who are crazy when it comes to practical life. Pascal was one of the greatest mathematicians, and yet his personal life was insane and had no harmony. Thus, wisdom does not seem to provide happiness. And then we see a simple truck driver who seems happy. So, who is the happy person?

Chazal say it must be the wise man, the chocham, but his wisdom is of a certain type of knowledge. It is a type of knowledge that ties external knowledge to internal knowledge. Meaning, it is not simply knowledge of science, psychology, philosophy, or gemara. The chocham is a particular type of mind that incorporates knowledge of all areas and ties in to the knowledge of the self. Without knowledge of the self, one cannot have a life of knowledge, because the base from which he is working, which is instinctual, is not being dealt with. Thus, Pascal can be quite unhappy since he did not possess knowledge of his self.

When Chazal approached each day, they were filled with the happiness of possessing the faculty to perceive reality. No other creature has this gift. This perspective of valuing wisdom corrected their internal makeup. Chazal prayed

daily to be free from destructive forces so that they might focus on God's wisdom. It is only with psychological and philosophical knowledge that one can bring his instinctual world in line with wisdom and arrive at the happy life. But with wisdom alone, like Pascal, one will not arrive at a life that is harmonious. He might be knowledgeable in certain areas, but without addressing his internal world, he will be unhappy.

Man is not essentially harmonious. But he was given the ability to harmonize his nature. Once man attains knowledge of Torah and psychology, he can then study his own nature and bring his instinctual life in line with the world of wisdom. Man must study his nature and understand how he operates. Doing so, he monitors where he deviates from Torah and corrects himself. [For example, one who chases wealth or fame can study Koheles and learn how these pursuits offer false promises of happiness. Having realized this truth, he can then redirect his energies toward the pursuit of wisdom and realize immense joy. But without making this change that can only come about through studying Torah and psychology, he will remain steadfast pursuing wealth and fame and lead an unhappy existence.]

This perfected lifestyle is not achieved instantly but is a process. As stated, if one is constantly on guard and always

studies wisdom and his own actions, his instincts will not overtake him. This is the meaning of “Don’t trust in yourself until your death”: one never reaches a plateau of safety out of reach of instinctual urges. It is a relentless battle.

Today’s materialistic and religious cultures do not have this concept of happiness, which is achieved through the pursuit of studying God’s wisdom. Success and accomplishment, which are the driving forces behind materialism and religiosity today, miss the mark of attaining happiness, as they focus on the self, while the proper pursuit has no focus on oneself, but on God’s wisdom. Talmud Berachos describes one rabbi who was dying. Someone said to him:

*If you cry because you only learned a small amount of Torah, you are wrong to feel bad, for the amount is unimportant: “Whether one learned a little or whether one learned a lot, all that is important is that one was motivated for the sake of Heaven” [and not to amass a quantity of knowledge].*

If you learned based on your soul’s attitude of loving wisdom, that is all that matters.

[At this point, Rabbi Chait digressed to discuss the difference between Judaism and other religions.]

Other religions are based on psychological phenomena, while Judaism is based on reality:

*Lord, my strength and my stronghold, My  
refuge in a day of trouble, to You nations  
shall come from the ends of the earth and  
say: Our fathers bequeathed utter lies,  
things that are futile and worthless (Jer-  
emiah 16:19).*

Eventually all nations will admit the lies of their religions. What generated these lies? The next verse explains:

*Can a man make a god for himself? And  
behold they are false gods! (Jeremiah  
16:20)*

The gods of the nations are nothing more than their own emotional projections onto reality. The world's religions attempt to fabricate a god, "And behold they are false gods!"

Why does this verse shift from singular and plural? Since there are many different emotions, this verse indicates that the nations created many gods corresponding to their many emotions.

Joshua's prayer of Aleinu notes, "The nations pray to

gods that do not offer salvation.” Why then does his prayer not say that we pray to a God that does offer salvation? Why is the prayer inconsistent? What does this prayer say regarding God? It refers to God as the One who “spread out the heavens and established the earth.” We pray to the God of reality: we are not motivated by salvation. The religions of the world have one interest: personal salvation. Judaism does not seek salvation but focuses on reality, the Creator of the universe. Jeremiah continues:

*The sin of Judah is inscribed with a stylus of iron, engraved with an adamant point on the tablet of their hearts, and on the horns of their altars (ibid. 17:1).*

The Jews have become poisoned with the emotional desire for a personal god of salvation. This became deeply embedded in their hearts. And their sacrifices were nothing more than an expression of this primitive religious emotion.

*Like remembrances of their children, so were their altars... (ibid., 17:2).*

The loved their altars like they loved their children. Sacrifice was a totally personalized emotion; they had no concept of reality, only a projection.

Jeremiah continues:

*Thus said the Lord: "Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength, and turns his thoughts from the Lord" (ibid. 17:5).*

Why is this mentioned here? Because the primary drive of idolatry is the search for man, not a search for God.

*Cursed is he who trusts in man.*

The idolater searches for an image of his primitive and infantile past. Idolatry can be summed up as the inability to abandon psychological reality and accept true reality. One searches for an image of man, as his initial experience of human (parental) figures made a deep impression on his psyche, referred to as "psychological reality."

*He shall be like a bush in the desert, which does not sense the coming of good: it is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, in a barren land without inhabitant (ibid. 17:6).*

Idolaters are like "trees in the desert, unaware when the good arrives." One living in this psychological reality is like one living in the desert, unaware of reality, i.e., the real good.

*Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord alone. He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream. It does not sense the coming of heat; its leaves are ever fresh; it has no care in a year of drought; it does not cease to yield fruit (ibid. 17:7,8).*

One who lives in line with reality will always be productive because reality is designed such that those interested in the true good will obtain it with ease. This ease means it is a constant involvement.

Chazal ask, “What is fear of God?” They give a metaphor of a tanna who wanted to sell an item. A Gentile approached him and offered a price. But at that moment, the tanna had just commenced reciting the Shema Yisrael and could not interrupt to respond to the buyer. The buyer offered \$100, but the tanna did not respond. The buyer offered \$200. Again, the tanna could not respond. The buyer offered \$300, \$400, \$500. Finally, when the tanna had completed his prayer, he said to the buyer, “I will sell my item at your first offer of \$100 because that is the price I wanted [I accepted that offer when you first made it].” The gemara says this is a prime example of fear of God. The definition of fear of God is that which is only between you and God, when no one else can observe it. In such a

case, no ulterior motivation can exist [like one who elongates his prayers in front of others to appear pious]. In our example, no one could possibly know this tanna's intent. He could have accepted the \$500, and no one would know that he truly accepted the \$100 dollars when it was first offered. But he feared God, and as he had already accepted the \$100, it would be wrong to take \$500.

Judaism maintains it is impossible to know the level of anyone's fear of God. Rabbi Dovid Leibowitz supported this principle. He said that the gemara mentions that Elisha was a prophet. Once, an Isha Shunamis told her husband they should offer Elisha, this man of God, hospitality and a room, so they did so. The gemara asks how this woman knew that Elisha was a man of God. The gemara answers that a fly never landed in Elisha's soup [something everyone experiences. Elisha was divinely protected from such annoyances due to his level of perfection]. This teaches that without this evidence, one cannot discern the level of any person. Thus, if people claim a certain person has great fear of God, this is baseless, because fear of God is not observable. No one can accurately assess any person.

Jeremiah continues:

*Most devious is the heart; it is perverse—  
who can fathom it? (ibid. 17:9).*

Idolatry is not easily overcome. “The heart is perverse, who can fathom it?” Even a person himself doesn’t know his own heart. Many times, a person fools himself of his true motivations and desires. This verse explains why one cannot accurately assess any other person, because the crookedness of the heart drives one to act in a way that deceives others to believe that he is pious. And this deception is discussed earlier, “Cursed is he who trusts in man.” This means that man seeks the approval of others. The counterfeit pious man is hard to distinguish from the true pious man. Thus, fear of God is absolutely unobservable. Chazal also say, “It would be great if one’s fear of God equated to his fear of man.”

*...and turns his thoughts from the Lord  
(ibid. 17:5).*

This depicts the crime—one’s removal from God. For if one is not removed from God but is also attached to man, this is understandable, as this is part of the milchemes ha-chaim (the battle of life), to extricate oneself from that infantile attachment to man. It is a struggle that endures for a time. But if one is removed completely from God, this is the crime.

An interesting halacha echoes this principle. Before praying in the morning, it is prohibited to call or visit a friend.

The gemara cites the verse “Remove yourself from man, who has breath in his nostrils, for what is he considered?” (Isaiah 2:22). The gemara says: “Do not read ‘For what’ (bameh) is he considered, rather, read ‘an altar’ (bammah) is he considered.” Remove yourself from man because there is a powerful instinctual drive to worship him. This is the meaning of “who makes mere flesh his strength.” This is deification of man. This explains why halacha expresses this idea in connection with prayer, i.e., not visiting a friend before praying. He raises man above God.

DO NOT JUDGE YOUR FELLOW UNTIL YOU COME  
TO HIS PLACE.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*This is also from the topic that a person should not believe in himself and not overly rely on his intellect. And when he sees his fellow in a high position not acting straight, he should not say, “If I were to fill his place, I would not do [one] evil thing from all the evil that he is doing.” As you don’t know [this] and you are no different than he [as far as] being a person, and perhaps the position would sway you as well. [Only] when you reach his place and his position and forego your [weaknesses, then] do you have the right to wonder about his weaknesses.*

Rabbeinu Yona says that if you do in fact reach your friend's position, you have the right to question him. He means it is impossible for the mind to evaluate another person's trials. For the mind can only identify qualitative factors, but not quantitative factors. For example, one can witness a person fail in a matter. As long as one has not experienced the same situation, he has no method by which to grasp the strength of the emotions pressing on that person so as to judge him. One might be able to identify the emotion that caused the person's failure, but it is the strength (quantity) of the emotion that causes one to succumb. One who doesn't understand the mind does not know the psyche's dynamics, and therefore cannot accurately assess another person.

For example, one person might criticize another for his inability to control his weight. But this is wrong, since one cannot know all the factors at work in the mind of that person. It could be, if you suffered the same pressures as this person who failed to diet, you too would not be able to control your weight.

The mishna says not to judge another person until you are in his place. Rabbeinu Yona says that you are just like he is when it comes to instinctual urges. This refers to one person who looks up to another and sees a flaw in him, and therefore criticizes him, but he doesn't degrade him to an average person, rather looks down on him as someone with a deeply

rooted problem. He is on a lower level than the average person. He thereby makes a value judgment.

According to Rabbeinu Yona, how is this an extension of “not trusting in oneself until death?” The reason that one degrades another person, feeling himself that he would not fail, is because of the same self-image issue as “Do not trust yourself until the day of your death.” Criticizing another person for his failure is a defense of one’s own ego. His intolerance of personal failure forces him to criticize others. Chazal say that maintaining a fixed self-image is not realistic. This is the meaning of “not trusting oneself until the day of death.” Therefore, when witnessing someone greater than yourself meet with failure, one should say, “I could have failed too.”

*Do not say, “If I were in his place, I would not do [one] evil thing from all the evil that he is doing,” as you don’t know [this] and you are no different than he.*

What is the meaning of the strange expression, “You are no different than he?” There is an implication here that is important. Chazal’s purpose in writing Pirkei Avos is to uncover the mental falsehoods that we experience. A person lives in the framework of his mind. In this framework are many falsehoods, upon which one bases his life; they are

notions he passively accepts. The purpose of Pirkei Avos is to uproot these notions. Here, Rabbeinu Yona touches on an important idea that is quite prevalent and false.

“You are no different than he” means that most people feel they are different from others regarding their essential makeup: their emotions, their enjoyments, and their expressions. While it is true that people are different from each other, they aren’t as different as they imagine. The differences between people are in minute points, but people view them as essential and definitive. People make this false assessment to protect themselves from seeing any objectification [portrayal] of themselves in others. Thus, when others do something that goes against one’s value system, one disassociates oneself from that person and says he would never have performed that action. This is based on the false assumption that there is something radically different between oneself and others. “There is an essential difference between that person and myself,” one thinks. This is Rabbeinu Yona’s lesson of, “You are no different than he.” People are essentially the same.

This also explains the desires; here too people wish to express individuality. Automobile companies cater to this need by manufacturing many different car styles. They go so far as to manufacturer “limited editions.” And people also express this individuality in their clothing. However, if one

analyzed reality, he would find that people are essentially the same. The desire for uniqueness is responsible for one “not judging your friend until you are in his place.”

But one may ask, “Are we not different from the worst rasha (evil person)?” The response is that we are discussing quality, not quantity. Qualitatively, all members of mankind share one identical design. Quantitatively, man varies in the degrees of his emotions. We share the identical emotions possessed by the rasha; he is not a new creation. Just as all people possess the same bodily design, our psyches also share an identical design.

Rabbeinu Yona says that only once you are in the same situation and you succeed where your friend failed are you permitted to criticize his traits. The only way one can know how he would act is by experimentation. This knowledge is not available abstractly. In the quantitative realm, experimentation is the only method to gauge another. A psychologist once said that one can never predict human behavior because one cannot know the quantitative values.

This desire for individuality is very destructive. It causes one to forfeit his love for his fellow Jew and his love of all people. It is an emotion of false haughtiness and breaks down human identification. “Love your friend like yourself” (Lev. 19:18) is possible only if one has humility, the recognition that he possesses the same emotions as everyone else.

If one sees another person sinning or leading a corrupt life, the only justifiable emotion is pity—not haughtiness. Even if one is the worst rasha, the obligation to hate and destroy him is not to evoke a petty emotion, but is derived from the intellectual realization that such a person damages the Torah system and must be stopped or removed. “Sins should cease from the land and the wicked should no longer be” (Psalms 104:35) means, as Bruriah said, (Berachos 10a) that sins should cease, not that “sinners” should die. One does not respond with a petty attitude, but with an objective desire to preserve Torah and eliminate obstacles.

It is possible that the emotional drive to condemn one who has failed is an attempt to protect oneself from identifying that person who failed, as he senses that weakness in himself. The condemnation is a psychological maneuver to avoid facing this failure in himself.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*Also, concerning the matter of faith ... you [should] not study from heretics—and not even true things—as their damage is dangerous, lest the sinners seduce you and you desire their words, as they pull in the heart. “And do not believe in yourself until the day of your death,” to say, “I will listen to them.” And if you might say, “I will accept the good, and the bad I will not accept,” you should not rely upon your*

*intellect, as Rabbi Meir [did] in his studying in front of Elisha the heretic. [This] is found in Tractate Chagigah 15b—they said about him metaphorically, “He found a pomegranate, ate the inside, and threw out the peel.” [However,] not all people are the same. As you find Yochanan the High Priest who served in the high priesthood [eighty] years, and in the end became a Sadducee (Berachos 29a). As there is a very big punishment for even listening to them [speaking] words of Torah; and as we say (Avodah Zarah 16b) about that sage that was delivered to the heretics, and they said to him, “Maybe you heard heresy and it gave you pleasure, [etc.]”*

One must not learn anything from a heretic, even truths. One must forfeit this knowledge. Why? “Do not trust yourself until the day of your death” teaches that one must not feel he is emotionally safe, and that the heresies of heretics will not affect him. This is wrong. One must realize he possesses the same emotions as the heretic and that he can fall prey to heresy just like heretics. What about Rabbi Meir? No one says that he was wrong for learning from Elisha. They actually praise him. The difference is that Rabbi Meir knew that he functioned differently from others. (He was on such a level that he knew he would be unaffected by Elisha.)

If one today had no Torah knowledge and was taught to

respect Spinoza, reading his theology can no doubt turn that person into a heretic. One must not study the works of heretics. Do not trust yourself. Rashba placed a ban on studying philosophy until the age of 25. At that point, he felt a Torah student would have gained the proper Torah foundation to shield himself from falsehoods.

A person must be thankful to the hashgachah (God's providence) that he did not encounter certain false ideas earlier in life. For if he had, they could have destroyed him. But rabbis like Rabbi Meir have no fear of being damaged by alien ideas, for they knew that Torah is absolute truth and all other views are false. They created bans on certain books to protect people who were not developed enough to see their falsehoods. But the book bans of the other religions intend to restrict their followers from learning truths that undermine their religions with questions that the religions cannot answer. Had Christianity allowed philosophical works to be read, people would realize the fallacy of Christianity. Their bans were to preserve their blind beliefs.

Rashi cites a story regarding King Solomon:

*The king kept the keys to the Temple under his pillow in order that upon rising early, he could offer the morning sacrifice. Pharaoh's daughter (the king's wife) did not want the king to leave home so early so she could enjoy his company. Therefore, she*

*created a canopy over their bed that looked like the night sky with the stars and constellations. When the king awoke, he mistook the canopy for the night sky and he went back to sleep. Four hours passed into the day and he missed the time to offer the morning sacrifice. Yoravam gathered the entire tribe of Ephraim and came to the king to criticize and embarrass him.*

What is Rashi's point? How is this case of Yoravam an example of "not judging your friend until you are in his place?" In truth, this should not be considered an example of not judging someone "until you are in his place," rather, it is a case of not judging someone "until the matter is investigated."

According to Rashi, the meaning of "not judging your friend until you are in his place" warns against judging someone who lives a life completely different from your own. Certainly, leaders like King Solomon have hundreds of matters on their mind, ranging from political situations to the economy and agriculture. Therefore, someone not in his place cannot imagine the king's state of mind, and therefore cannot judge the king.

When somebody judges another person, there are two emotions at play: one—addressed here by Rashi—is aggression, which is the enjoyment of degrading someone, and the

second is the preservation of one's self-image, which Rabbeinu Yona addresses.

DO NOT SAY SOMETHING THAT SHOULD NOT BE  
HEARD, FOR IN THE END IT WILL BE HEARD.

Rashi explains:

*Do not tell a secret that must remain a secret. For if you repeat it, it will eventually become publicly known that you revealed a secret to him.*

Rabbeinu Yona says:

*A person must guard and be careful of all possibilities. Therefore, if you have a secret, do not tell it even to your soulmate. And don't say, "It is impossible that this thing be heard, as there is no stranger among us to repeat these words." 'And in the end, everything is heard.' Even between you and yourself, do not make it heard to your ears, as the rabbis, may their memory be blessed, metaphorically said, "Do not talk among the walls, for the walls have ears" (Berachos 8b). And about this, King Solomon—peace be upon him—said, "For a bird of the air may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may report the word" (Kohel 10:20).*

“The walls have ears” and “Don’t verbalize the matter even while alone” refer to man’s powerful drive to share a secret, which is a desire to gain a level of importance among others—to forge a special bond with and gain acceptance from another person. Chazal instruct us not to allow that strong emotion to destroy us in reality. As you have this emotion, so do others and they will violate their sworn secrecy and divulge the secret. [The metaphors of “walls with ears” and “birds carrying the voice” refer to the powerful emotion to share secrets and gain recognition and acceptance. So powerful is this emotion, that it is almost inevitable that one won’t contain oneself, as if the walls have ears and birds can speak.]

Sometimes the secret is a personal and negative matter. This can be very damaging, yet people wish to share such secrets to assuage their guilt. One must not cave to the powerful need for acceptance and thereby trade secrets, for that acceptance is short-lived, while the secret’s harm can ruin a person.

Rashi says, “The secret will eventually become known because you revealed the secret to him.” This means that most times when one suffers embarrassment, he was the one who revealed the damaging information.

Why were Chazal so concerned to teach this lesson? “And David was wise in all of his ways, and God was with him”

(I Sam. 18:14). King David performed all of his actions with wisdom. When one gives in to the need for human acceptance, although he understands rationally that it can harm him, it displays an excessive need for man. Chazal direct us on a path of perfection and this is not limited to religious matters alone, as King David displayed in “all” his ways. Thus, irrational actions, although not religious matters, reveal a problem with one’s relationship to God, which is the area of perfection. We also learn that acting intelligently earned King David God’s providence.

AND DO NOT SAY, “WHEN I HAVE FREE TIME I  
WILL LEARN,” [FOR] PERHAPS YOU WILL NOT  
HAVE FREE TIME.

If it had said, “You can be sure you won’t have free time,” I would have understood this statement as: One does not learn because he does not have the perfect situation. But the perfect situation isn’t at hand because one is not interested in learning. One makes excuses that this and that matter must be attended to, explaining why he cannot learn. This would follow if the statement was, “Surely you won’t have free time.” But the use of the word “perhaps” creates a difficulty.

This statement refers to a person who feels he needs a quiet situation in order to learn. Rabbeinu Yona says:

*Matters requiring one's attention never cease to rise and one will then depart this world without Torah. Rather, "Make your Torah study a fixed part of your day and make your work accidental" (Maimonides, Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:6).*

Why is there no end to matters requiring one's attention? Because they stem from one's internal self; such a person will never find a quiet time since he is endlessly pursuing numerous involvements. If so, the statement should not have been "perhaps" one will not find time, but "surely" he won't find time. What is the meaning of the word "perhaps"?

A person has an idealized concept of how his learning should be set up. Since learning is of high value, he idealizes the situation. So, he says to himself that he will take care of his needs in order to secure the perfect free time to learn. But Chazal say that this is a false emotion. Learning in an idealized state does not exist. Therefore, one should engage in Torah in a non-idealized state. If he does not, he risks leaving this world without Torah, perhaps he won't find the ideal situation.

One must use cold rationality in his plan for perfection, just as he acts in all other areas. One should not feel the area of perfection is different. This explains why one must not say "When I have free time I will learn," as if saying,

“I will rely on some miraculous force to step in.” One must not assume he will “somehow” have time to learn Torah. He will in fact not learn, just like any other pursuit for which he does not plan accordingly. Without applying rationality to any plan, it will end in failure. Without planning for Torah study, one will leave this world without Torah.

## 2:5 PERSONALITIES

HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO SAY: A BOOR CANNOT FEAR SIN. AN IGNORAMUS CANNOT BE PIOUS. A PERSON PRONE TO BEING ASHAMED CANNOT LEARN. AN INTOLERANT PERSON CANNOT TEACH. NOT ALL WHO ENGAGE MUCH TIME IN BUSINESS BECOME WISE. IN A PLACE WHERE THERE ARE NO MEN, STRIVE TO BE A MAN.

Maimonides defines a boor as one lacking both knowledge and ethical perfection. An ignoramus has no intellectual perfection, but he partakes somewhat in ethical perfection. As it seems obvious that a boor will not fear sin, what is the novel insight demanding this be included in the mishna? I understand the inclusion of an ignoramus in this descrip-

tion of one who cannot be pious, since people think that even a simple person with good emotions and religious diligence is pious. In fact, most people identify such simplistic religious behavior with righteousness. All religions identify religiosity in this attitude. But Judaism stands alone and says here that an ignoramus cannot be pious. This explains the masses who follow other religions. Most of the world does not possess intellectual perfection so people gravitate to a religion that allows them self-satisfaction with their religious goals and a righteous self-image. This is understandable. But how do we understand that a boor will not fear sin?

What is the fear of sin? It is a certain attitude toward sin. It is not because one lacks wisdom, for even the ignoramus lacks wisdom and he can fear sin. Boor does not refer to a stupid person but to one lacking character perfection. In simple terms, this means self-control. Without self-control, one is compulsive and responds to his urges and does not refrain from sin. But since he cannot tolerate that he is a sinner, he must justify his violations, and he does so by losing the sense of wrong regarding his sins. Although one who follows Torah out of fear of punishment operates on a low level, at least he partakes in some level of recognizing sin. The ba'alei mussar used to scare their students with threats of fire and brimstone to help them steer clear from sin. They felt it at least instilled some level of the fear of sin, but they agreed it was a low level.

## AN IGNORAMUS CANNOT BE PIOUS.

However, a talmid chocham can be pious. The ignoramus operates based on good emotions. He is moderate and doesn't chase crazy passions. But a pious person operates based on his intellect. The ignoramus cannot operate this way. Rabbeinu Yona says as follows:

*The ignoramus can be righteous and he can follow mitzvos, but the level of a pious person is unreachable unless one has excelled in his Torah knowledge, for that is the degree requiring purity of heart and innocence of soul.*

The latter refers to a perfection of wisdom. Pure of heart means he studies himself and studies the world, and functions on a very high level. This is only possible with wisdom, which is lacking in the ignoramus. Wisdom is necessary to incline a person to act above the letter of the law, lifnim mishuras hadin. What is this level? A pious man has the ability to walk away from the swindler who cheated him. He will gauge where and when such behavior is warranted and act accordingly. He can even be publicly embarrassed, and he will not care. His mind is focused on one thing: the proper action or decision in any given situation. This is the meaning of "above the letter of law," an attitude that is im-

possible for an ignoramus because the ignoramus functions based on emotions, and there is no emotion that could allow him to walk away from being cheated or maligned. But the pious man operates with wisdom and controls his emotions. He can decide if the situation warrants silence or action, and he is not driven by the emotions like the ignoramus.

Rashi comments:

*A boor is empty of all matters, like a desolate field, and he is worse than an ignoramus because he doesn't even understand business. And an ignoramus cannot be a pious man but he can fear sin since he is involved in business.*

Why can't the boor fear sin? A boor is a simple laborer; he is not creative. He performs simple physical actions. He functions on an infantile level. But an ignoramus is involved in business and with the world. He is not afraid of people. He invests, and he makes purchases. He is a mature individual.

The boor acts merely to support himself. His reality is limited to that base infantile state and doesn't penetrate the realm of sin. Therefore, he cannot fear sin. The first level of reality is obtained through business. One learns good and bad business decisions. He learns about benefits and repercussions. The primary drive of survival drives one toward activities that will support him. This requires intelligence,

planning, and strategic thought. Following an intelligent plan, one finds success. On this level, one's instincts have been aligned with reality. Business directs the instinctual energies to align with reality. This is the first stage in human development. And as the boor does not have this experience, he cannot sense the concept of harm, which is only learned from a life of business, with its ups and downs. The boor has no ups and downs since he follows his employer's direction to perform simple actions. He never engages strategies, or suffers the losses that such strategies, at times, deliver. The concept of harm does not register on his radar. Although business experiences offer such benefit, it is not derived exclusively from business. Some members of Chazal preferred a job as a laborer instead of business jobs in order for their minds to be free from the mental preoccupation that business strategies demand. A job as a simple laborer allowed their minds to be free exclusively for Torah thought. The first thing a person is asked after he dies is if he was honest in business. This is because this is the first translation of the instincts into the area of rationality.

A PERSON PRONE TO BEING ASHAMED CANNOT  
LEARN.

The wise man (chocham) is the most respected individual

in society. However, pioneers in thought are not recognized because thinkers originate ideas and values that are new and oppose cherished beliefs, which the masses don't find pleasant to hear. Therefore, the masses do not recognize that thinker as a means of suppressing his disturbing innovations . The next generation's values include that thinker's contributions since significant matters are passed down. The thinker left a mark; his books are on the shelf. (Society is always one step too late for the thinker.)

Perhaps this explains the Generation of the Desert . They were raised with one value system. Then Moshe came along and pulled the carpet out from under them. They had to drop all of their cherished ideas from their past. Chazal refer to them as a knowledgeable generation (*dor dayah*). And they are right. For if they were not, they would not have made it. Even so, their security was missing. Therefore, Moshe said, "Your children will inherit the land." The reason the children would succeed is because the Torah was not a new thing to them; they were raised with Torah from childhood. They were secure.

Why is it that one who is prone to embarrassment will not learn? As people praise wisdom over all else, one fears saying something that can make him look foolish, that would risk his very essence. He would sacrifice the respect that everyone desires to maintain: the respect of being viewed as

intelligent. Chazal say that only if one disgusts himself will he rise above his level. This refers to one who risks his reputation as a wise person, since his questions could make him look foolish. By not asking questions, he remains ignorant. But asking questions and taking the risk of bringing disgust to himself, one grows wiser through the answers he obtains. Judaism says that no attitude is inherently good. While humility and shyness have their place, they have no place in learning. Chazal also say that no one advances in learning without first stumbling. This is because the mind advances only through trial and error. The greatest intellect must have had foolish questions at some point. We also see that learning cannot be a passive process, but is one of interaction, i.e., one who is embarrassed to ask questions will not learn.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*A student should not say, "How can a fool like me ask a question of a wise man who is great in Torah? I have no knowledge or understanding." And if he acted this way always, from where would he obtain wisdom?*

One point is not to fear ridicule for asking questions. Another type of embarrassment is not the fear of ridicule, but the fear of confronting a wise person. In such a situation, one views his rank as far below that of a wise man, and he

feels unworthy to approach him. However, the Torah rejects the concept of propriety and rank. In Torah study, one must be able to ask a question from the greatest Torah giant.

# ONE WHO IS INTOLERANT CANNOT TEACH.

At times, Pirkei Avos defines a character trait. Other times, it discusses a behavior that may have several causes, without getting to the root of that trait. Intolerance is not truly a basic character trait; there are several causes for this behavior.

With regards to a rebbe, there are three possibilities for intolerance. A student must blunder. Sometimes he makes embarrassing mistakes that the rebbe must tolerate. What would be the reason for a rebbe's intolerance? One possibility is shifting self-blame. The rebbe hears the student make a mistake that the rebbe himself made, and the intolerance is a type of projection. The rebbe doesn't like that he erred identically, so he outlets his self-dissatisfaction on the student in the form of intolerance.

A baser intolerance is the rebbe's fear of uncovering an idea that rejects his own thesis. Therefore, the rebbe will not allow an open discussion, as he fears he'll be shown up. This is a dishonest teacher.

A third type of intolerance is when the rebbe is not interested in the subject he teaches. The teacher/student relationship is one of mutual discovery. If a rebbe's interest has advanced to higher areas beyond the basics, he will not be tolerant of students who aren't on his level. The rebbe will not be intolerant of entertaining discussions of lower-level topics. He should not be a teacher. They say this about Einstein. He did not have patience to review areas he already mastered and was not a good teacher. But this is not a character defect.

Euclid embodies a different type of personality. In his first book on geometry, he presents propositions in a beautiful and remarkable order. Although all 13 of his books are fine works, it is worthwhile to go through his first book. Although he was a genius, he was also able to set forth the simplest steps, one by one. The Vilna Gaon had his students translate Euclid into Hebrew as he felt it was such a beautiful work. Meharsha on Horiyus mentions the benefit of studying geometry. That benefit is seeing a beautiful arrangement of order. A rebbe must enjoy this process of presenting orderly concepts, step by step, although not everyone possesses this ability. Some great people do not enjoy reviewing basic concepts over again. "And I will return and I will [distinguish] them, between one who worships God and one who does not worship Him" (Malachi 3:18). The gemara says this refers to

the difference between one who learns a gemara 100 times, and one who learns it is 101 times.

Aidus Ne'emana is a book of reliable stories about the Vilna Gaon. It cites that when the Vilna Gaon was going through a book, he would look briefly at a page and then turn it, going through hundreds of pages in a short period of time. He possessed an amazing memory and a genius mind. While he was turning pages, someone slapped his hand down on the page and said, "What are you thinking right now?" The Vilna Gaon replied, "I just thought of an answer to a question on the Rif." The point is that although he was reviewing material that he had mastered, he was not just reading, but his mind was thinking creatively further into the area.

What is the idea behind there being no comparison between one who learned 100 times to one who learned the topic 101 times? The person who learns 100 times learns for the sake of accomplishment and not for the subject matter. The one who learns 101 times is not concerned with accomplishment, which would have allowed him to stop after 100 times. Studying something over 100 times indicates that one is studying for the enjoyment of the wisdom. This is the person who worships God. He who studies 100 times and stops is one who does not worship God. He seeks accomplishment—not wisdom—and this is for himself.

NOT ALL WHO ENGAGE MUCH TIME IN BUSINESS BECOME WISE.

Maimonides comments:

*Torah is not found in haughty people or in those who travel to distant lands. And the rabbis tie this to a verse in a metaphoric sense: "It is not in heaven, that one should say, 'Who might ascend to the heavens for us and take it for us and we will hear it.' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?'" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." (Deut. 30:12-14) So the rabbis said, "Torah isn't found in haughty people (heavens), nor in those who travel the sea for business."*

Maimonides teaches that there is an element of haughtiness in business that is an obstacle to becoming wise. What is the common denominator?

When referring to one becoming wise, we refer not to one who amassed facts, but to one whose nature is that he loves wisdom. Who is attached to wisdom? There are two possible attitudes of the psyche. Man's energies are great and seek satisfaction. One personality finds satisfaction in the self. He is convinced he is a great person. This is referred

to as “the heavens”—arrogance. The other personality is in search of something: “Once I acquire that object, I will be happy.” This is the “across the sea” personality. Either one has found his satisfaction in the self, or his happiness is to be found in the next conquest. In both personalities, there is no Torah. In the haughty personality, there is no Torah, as his energies are satisfied. In the other personality there is no Torah, as his energies await the next conquest. Who then is an individual who possesses Torah? What type of nature does he have? It is the personality that does not have the satisfaction of the arrogant individual, nor does he find satisfaction in that next conquest “over there.” The one who possesses Torah seeks satisfaction in the here and now.

*The thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.*

When a person recognizes this truth, he is then open to Torah. This is the state of mind necessary for becoming wise. This is Maimonides’ view and the first explanation in Rashi. Once one learns Torah and enjoys the experience of Torah study, his energies are consumed in the here and now. The person of Torah lives in the present. The philosophers said, “Life is strange: the future is not here, the past is gone, so one’s whole life is lived in the split second of the present.” The person of Torah lives in the present: he is not the person

of the future or of the past.

It is important to be mindful when learning Pirkei Avos, and personalities are depicted, not to think of that person as one with a fixed personality. We each partake of all personality types. Pirkei Avos isolates these personality types to best focus us on positive and negative values and traits. A normal person has parts of him that are “across the river” and “in the heavens,” and perfection requires us to unravel these parts of our nature in order to improve ourselves. One must not label himself or others, otherwise he forfeits the process of perfection.

Rashi offers a second explanation:

*If one wishes to become wise, he must engage in all areas of societal improvements, whether it's business or other areas of wisdom, so that he understands all areas.*

According to Rashi, becoming wise does not refer to abstract intellectual thought, because from business dealings, this will not occur. This happens only when studying the sciences. Rashi refers to a certain kind of perfection. To achieve this perfection requires one to understand the panorama of all human activities, since all activities stem from man's soul. To understand psychology, no area of human involvement can be ignored; one must examine all human

expressions. This is Rashi's meaning of "understanding all areas." Through this knowledge, one can perfect himself.

Why can't man simply read books on this? That would be suitable for intellectual perfection. However, to perfect one's complete nature, one must not simply learn cold facts, but he must deal with his nature and his emotions and relate to them as they interact with various phenomena. [Witnessing one's own feelings and reactions as he engages all areas of human activity, one can monitor his emotions and gain greater knowledge of how the human experience affects man, and apply that knowledge to his life. This cannot be gained by reading books.]

When Sigmund Freud wrote to Albert Einstein about his discovery, Einstein went to observe certain neurotics to see how such people operate. He was not satisfied to simply read about it; text cannot convey the knowledge that reality offers. This explains why King Solomon did not study human nature with intellectual analysis alone, but he engaged in activities to experience the phenomenon in reality. A philosopher can tell you about the proper lifestyle, but he cannot help one stop living the improper lifestyle. He can tell you it is foolish, but that will not help you if you are attached to certain emotions. King Solomon used himself to experiment with the many emotions and human pursuits to uncover how and why one is drawn to certain areas. The medrash says

only King Solomon was on the level to be an objective observer of his own emotions. King Solomon was unique in that he functioned like two people; he subjected himself to the various pursuits and then stepped back and objectively analyzed their effects on himself like an impartial outsider. Rashi did not say one should merely observe business, but one must engage in it. However, this is only one aspect of societal improvement. One must expose himself to government and to other areas too.

Most people live a reactive lifestyle; their actions are responses to arising situations. And as all people need to earn a living, their activities are typically limited to business and no other societal activities. Therefore, “Not all who engage much time in business become wise” means that people are not focused on other areas of society. Thereby, they lack the understanding of man’s other expressions and pursuits. This leaves one with little knowledge of man.

Therefore, it is not the reactive personality that becomes wise, but the proactive personality who guides himself outside the directive to work. He explores all areas of society and life from an internal quest to understand mankind, himself, and to apply that knowledge to perfect himself.

The Torah says, “And Moshe grew older and he went out to his brothers and observed their affliction” (Exod. 2:11). Chazal argue whether Moshe was 40 years old or 80 years

old. Did he not know about the Jews' servitude until that age?

Moshe Rabbeinu was an unusual person. Most people are attracted to politics because of emotional reasons; Moshe was not. He spent his life in wisdom. Before pursuing politics, one must know what justice is. Moshe was not naturally attracted to politics, but to wisdom. Once he mastered wisdom, he felt he was in a position to enter politics. Now he understood justice and was thereby equipped to determine if the Jews were subjected to true justice or not, and if not, how he could change it. Once a person attains knowledge of perfection, he can then determine how a country should be governed.

Today, the separation of church and state is an absurdity. Since a government governs human beings. And as human beings by nature have ethical questions, the two issues cannot possibly be separated. One choice the government can make is to abstain. However, as no one can determine when life begins, if the government permits abortion, this could be committing murder. What the government could do is allow people to act only when they do not affect another person. Also, if suicide is not permitted, the government is making an ethical decision, and this does not reflect the separation of church and state. The separation of church and state is impossible to resolve logically. That is why Judaism's laws

incorporate all areas, including ethics.

I mention Moshe Rabbeinu because Rashi holds that one must obtain knowledge before he explores all areas of society, just as Moshe did. Without knowledge, one cannot understand society in all of its forms. Thus, one must study from books and teachers first and then immerse oneself in experiences to gain further insight. Abstract thought must precede experience so that one has the tools with which to gain from those experiences.

IN A PLACE WHERE THERE ARE NO MEN, STRIVE  
TO BE A MAN.

“Man” refers to people of high caliber, like teachers. Maimonides writes as follows:

*Accustom and draw yourself to acquire good character and perfection. And since there are no wise men around to teach you, teach yourself.*

This seems obvious: If there are no teachers around, should I not teach myself? Why do I need a mishna to tell me this?

“Strive to be a man” means that one must engage in a process of self-study. “Strive” implies that effort is required.

One must study himself as an outsider would. If one has teachers, he need not undergo this process. But without teachers, one cannot simply assume he will improve without exerting effort to examine himself, identify where he must improve, and take the necessary steps to change himself. This is not a natural or instant process. One must establish a program in order to make changes. Chazal held that the biggest mistake people make is that they feel they can coast along and naturally improve. This is false, as an internal change requires a sustained effort. Just as progress in any area requires knowledge, practice, and rehearsal, self-improvement requires the same structure and dedication. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*If you see a generation where Torah is weakened, you should take efforts to invigorate Torah, as it is stated, "It is a time to act for the Lord, for they have violated Your teaching" (Psalms 119:126). Why is it a time to do something for God? Because the people have broken the Torah.*

We learn that our obligations are determined by this situation. Sometimes we do not act, and other times we must. The system of Torah is delicate. One must know what he is doing before becoming involved. If the system is moving along well, it is not a person's time to get involved. However, one must remain aware of the Torah's progress. Based on one's

love of God, when the generation warrants it, one is obligated to cease his personal activities and strive to repair the Torah, by teaching and engaging with others to assist their study and adherence.

The mishna addresses the perfected person who is content working on his own perfection. That is why leaving his life of personal perfection requires one to strive. He must abandon his preferred lifestyle for the sake of repairing the Torah. In his Iggeress Teman, Maimonides records how Saadia Gaon got involved to save his generation, and that if it were not for his involvement, the generation would have been lost.

Rabbeinu Yona offers another explanation:

*In a place where there are no others greater than you in wisdom, strive to become great. And do not refrain from becoming wiser, even though in your city there is no one wiser than you. And even if in your generation there is no one greater than you, imagine you live in a generation of the Talmudic sages, and you and they live in one place. Even if you reach their level, imagine you live in the place of the prophets up to Moshe Rabbeinu, and strive to attain their level. And through this you will never become weak and fail to learn. And every day improve your character traits because you will add to your wisdom and you will be as an ever-increasing well that always grows more powerful.*

There are problems regardless of whom Rabbeinu Yona addresses. If he addresses a person with a strong ego, this will encourage arrogance. And if he addresses a humble person unconcerned with his relative position in society, but is content on his level, comparing himself to previous generations to see his relatively low status appears unnecessary.

The key to the answer is from Rabbeinu Yona's final words, "...Improve your character traits because you will add to your wisdom and you will be as an ever-increasing well...." This is an important lesson. Most people stagnate after reaching a certain level; they remain there for decades. Rabbeinu Yona says this stagnation of wisdom is caused by one's character traits. In his Guide, Maimonides says similarly: Metaphysics is only for those who have perfected their character traits. And there are many traits to be perfected before one can advance his wisdom. Maimonides says every poor trait is a barrier between oneself and God. He also says, "Our nature and habit then draw a veil over our perception" (Introduction, The Guide for the Perplexed).

How does poor character prevent wisdom? As one climbs the ladder of wisdom, he should be able to see new qualitatively greater areas of thought. New vistas of wisdom naturally open to one's mind, provided he remains on the path to wisdom. However, one possessing poor character is one who caters to his instincts, thereby distracting his pursuit

of wisdom. Judaism differs from the world in this respect: Judaism claims wisdom depends on character.

This is the Torah's promise: if one perfects his character, as he learns he will arrive at truths. He will not stray from the main course of the Torah. If one is not perfected in his character, there is no telling where he is regarding his wisdom, for when he engages his emotions, he directs his energies away from wisdom. That's why we follow only talmidei chochamim, wise Torah students. We know they have perfected their character and this keeps them steadfast to the Torah and wisdom, and away from emotional engagements that block one from seeing the truth. They say about Rav Chaim that he grew wiser every year. And in his later years he became very abstract. He was an "ever-increasing well."

Rabbeinu Yona says part of this process is for one to study people greater than himself. Observe them to gain insight, whether they are alive or lived long ago. From them, learn the capacity of the human being. Our mishna's advice, "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man," addresses a person operating on a lower level—*lo lishma* (one acting for ulterior motives). It is precisely this personality type that assesses the level of other men: he lives relative to others, and has not yet attained the level where God is his only concern. For such a person, Rabbeinu Yona offers this advice.

To be clear, studying the great individuals does not refer

to psychoanalyzing them. It refers to Torah philosophies. They are called philosophies because they can only be discovered if one perfects his character.

## 2:6 MEASURE FOR MEASURE

[HILLEL] ALSO SAW A SKULL THAT WAS FLOATING ON TOP OF THE WATER. HE SAID (TO IT): “SINCE YOU DROWNED OTHERS, OTHERS DROWNED YOU. AND IN THE END, THOSE THAT DROWNED YOU WILL BE DROWNED.”

This is a strange statement. What is its relevance to Pirkei Avos? As Rashi states, it appears to be describing some type of divine justice. Rashi says that certain places omitted this mishna, as it deals with justice and not perfection.

Rashi comments:

*Those who drowned you will perish with the same death, for they are deserving death. But they will die this way because God will eventually exact punishment from them, as it says, “Wicked deeds come from wicked men” (I Sam. 24:13).*

For context, we must review the story of King Saul chasing David to kill him, and David's response. David addressed King Saul:

*And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say, 'David is out to do you harm?' You can see for yourself now that the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave today. And though I was urged to kill you, I showed you pity, for I said, 'I will not raise a hand against my Lord, since he is the Lord's anointed.' My father, take a close look at the corner of your cloak in my hand, for when I cut off the corner of your cloak, I did not kill you. You must see plainly that I have done nothing evil or rebellious, and I have never wronged you. Yet you are bent on taking my life. May the Lord judge between you and me! And may He take vengeance upon you for me, but my hand will never touch you. Like the metaphor of the earlier one, 'Wicked deeds come from wicked men, but my hand will never touch you.'" (I Sam. 24:10-14).*

Rashi has the same idea on this verse:

*[If] one smites his fellow and the fellow dies, he must be put to death. And a man that did not plan [to kill another], God will plan a circumstance for him, and I will give you a place for him to flee" (Exod. 23:12, 13).*

Rashi was bothered by the idea that God would get involved with the accidental murderer. For the verse says, "God will plan a circumstance" where he can flee for protection. Rashi questioned this, for it appears that God would be involved. Rashi writes:

*And why should God do such a thing? This is what David said, like the metaphor of the "earlier one": "Wicked deeds come from wicked men." And what is meant by the metaphor "earlier one?" This refers to the Torah; it is God's metaphor, as God is the "earlier one," the One who preceded all else. And where did the Torah say this, that wicked deeds come from wicked men? It is derived from "God will plan a circumstance for him...." Why should this be God's will? This refers to two people: one who killed accidentally and one who killed intentionally. In neither case were there witnesses. God then orchestrates their meeting at an inn. The one who killed accidentally ascends a ladder. The one who killed intentionally sits under the ladder. The accidental killer slips, he falls from the ladder, landing on the intentional killer, killing him accidentally. There are now witnesses to this event. The one who fell from the ladder is exiled to cities of refuge, and the one who killed intentionally is killed. Both receive their just rewards [for their original crimes].*

When he fled from King Saul, David said, “Wicked deeds come from wicked men.” King Saul was told that David was hiding in Ein Gedi, so he took 3,000 men to find David. A situation arose where David had the opportunity to kill King Saul to defend himself. But instead, David snuck in to where King Saul was, and cut off a corner of his garment. Later on, this disturbed David so much that he said to the people with him, “I should never have done this to my master, God’s anointed, to stretch my hand to him, for he is God’s anointed.”

At this time, King Saul was already chasing David without cause; he was fighting fantasies of his mind. Nonetheless, David regretted tearing King Saul’s garment, since he was God’s anointed king. David rebuked his people, preventing them from chasing King Saul. David then emerged from the cave in which he hid and called to the king, “My master the king.” David bowed to the king and said, “Why do you listen to people who say, ‘David seeks you harm?’ See today that God gave you into my hand and He told me to kill you. But He had pity on you and told me not to kill you.” David had the opportunity to kill King Saul, but he did not do so because he was God’s anointed. David said to the king:

*My father, take a close look at the corner  
of your cloak in my hand, for when I cut  
off the corner of your cloak, I did not kill*

*you. You must see plainly that I have done nothing evil or rebellious, and I have never wronged you. Yet you are bent on taking my life. May the Lord judge between you and me! And may He take vengeance upon you for me, but my hand will never touch you. Like the metaphor of the earlier one: "Wicked deeds come from wicked men," but my hand will never touch you."*

King Saul was very moved by David's words. He cried and told David that he was correct.

Let us understand David. What was his intent in cutting the king's garment? And, subsequently, why did he feel bad about doing this? David cut King Saul's garment to show him that David meant him no harm. Why did he regret doing this? His regret was that he disrespected God's anointed, explaining why David repeated the words "God's anointed." In other words, David said to King Saul, "You might think that I have animosity toward you." (It is not possible to argue with someone who feels persecuted. You cannot convince him that he is wrong.) David continued, "But my principles are such that I respect God's anointed, and on that basis, you should be secure that I am not going to attack you." David tore the corner of King Saul's garment to demonstrate his philosophy. That is why the king cried—David's argument penetrated the king. Had David tried to dissuade King

Saul by reason of the king's own delusion, David would not have succeeded. The psyche is such that once certain ideas become entrenched because of uncontrollable personal motivations, such a person is unchangeable. Therefore, David used the argument that he respected God's anointed. And in that argument David used the metaphor that Rashi quotes, "Wicked deeds come from wicked men, but my hand will never touch you." David meant that there is divine justice at hand. But, as David typically lived according to natural law and addressed life on his own and naturally, what compelled David here to say that there is divine guidance controlling the matter? It was due to King Saul being God's anointed. Thus, David felt he had no right to enter the situation.

A person functions within two systems. Judaism is not a system of passivity, where one withdraws and prays to God and let's matters unfold. When Jacob was about to confront his twin Esav (because he felt his life was in danger), he prepared himself with prayer, with gifts to appease Esav, and in military ways, in case all else failed. What lesson can we learn from this?

Certain people lean toward prayer. Such people feel that they have no control, so it's best to pray, and God will take care of everything. But they are wrong because we see that, aside from praying, Jacob also prepared a gift and prepared militarily. Other people rely exclusively on themselves and

will prepare only for battle, and they will not pray. This too violates the Torah. The Torah says that one must embrace reality. This includes one's own abilities and God's abilities. Both are true and can bring one's plans to realization. But prayer alone, or following one's own abilities exclusively, ignores a part of reality. Jacob was a realist. Therefore, he included all parts of reality in his plan. The fact that Jacob also prepared a gift conveys that he was not merely guided by aggression.

Which one of Jacob's preparations saved him? All three. Jacob lived completely in reality (he prepared on every front), and this perfection raised him to merit God's providence. Each preparation was not effective in its own right, but in as much as they all represented a plan by a person who embraced all of reality, God saved him.

David realized that King Saul was God's anointed. This demanded that he step back and evoke the metaphor of the "earlier one" and allow God to operate. David said that as King Saul was under God's providence, this situation did not demand human interaction.

When does one remove himself from administering human justice and rely on divine justice? It is when he realizes the Torah says otherwise. In such a case, man withdraws. This is Rashi's explanation on "Since you drowned others, others drowned you." Based on the incident of David and

King Saul, we see that there is divine justice.

If that is the case, perhaps we can now understand why this is included in Pirkei Avos. This is a lesson that man must assess situations in his life: when to act, and when to determine that divine justice must be allowed to proceed without interruption. Those who omit this mishna from their versions of Pirkei Avos do so because they view it as addressing divine justice and not ethics. They feel the lesson is too far removed from the plain meaning of divine justice (the skull). However, if we consider the lesson from David, that Hillel teaches man about assessing his situations in life—when to act and when to refrain—this mishna fits into the ethical guides of Pirkei Avos.

On the topic of justice, how was Abraham justified in questioning God regarding his plan to annihilate Sodom? “Will the judge of the whole Earth not perform justice?” (Gen. 18:25). Abraham knew that God gave man a mind that partakes of reality and can understand part of the reality that God created. This grants man the right to assess and evaluate situations according to his mind’s understanding. Additionally, man’s relationship to God is as a talmid to his rebbe—he is one who must inquire. If he cannot inquire based on how he perceives reality, he cannot gain from the rebbe. In prayer, too, one must evaluate his situation and pray accordingly, asking God for what he deems is right for himself.

SINCE YOU DROWNED OTHERS, OTHERS  
DROWNED YOU.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*Because you killed and caused the skull of  
the killed man to float, they killed you and  
made your skull float.*

Why will the people who killed them (this skull) be killed themselves if they acted properly? After all, this skull is of a murderer. Rabbeinu Yona says they will be killed as they did not kill him according to halacha. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*It is as if they killed innocent blood, since  
only beis din (courts) during the Temple  
era are authorized to carry out death sen-  
tences, according to the Torah. And anyone  
else who kill is worthy of death since the  
person's blood was not handed over to the  
killer.*

Therefore, those who killed this person had no right to do so, even though he was a murderer. For it is as if they killed an innocent man. Rabbeinu Yona means that justice can exist only when one functions within the halachic system. Without a system, if someone were to execute those who deserve death, it would destroy society. Without the halachic system, such justice leads to destruction. Therefore, the

Torah prohibits taking another life. But if one cannot take another life, how can beis din do so? It is because beis din functions within the framework of halacha. For it is only when one follows halacha that one has the security that he is acting properly. Wisdom directs Halacha every step of the way. When following halacha, one is completely removed from acting emotionally. But without halacha, people's emotions get involved and they will destroy society. Only the beis din hagadol (supreme court) can execute capital punishments, for they alone are authorized.

*God stands in the assembly of God (Psalms 82:1).*

This means beis din's execution follows God's word. However, does not beis din make mistakes? Since beis din is a rational system of wisdom, it alone is authorized to take human life. Maimonides offers a third explanation:

*Evil actions return upon the head of the sinner, as it says, "The wicked man's sins will trap him" (Prov. 5:22). And it is also written "He has dug a pit and deepened it, and will fall into the trap he made" (Psalms 7:16). And the rabbis said, "In the trait in which man measures, he is measured" (mishna Sota 1:7). And this is a phenomenon that is readily seen at all times.*

Maimonides' view is that this phenomenon is unrelated to God's providence and is seen at all times. Conversely, providence is not something one can see—it is a hidden matter. Maimonides continues:

*Anyone who lives a degenerate lifestyle will be harmed by those same evils that he perpetrated, for he taught that harmful things should be performed. Conversely, if one teaches good things, he will benefit from them because he teaches that good things should be done to him and to others. And the words of the verse are beautiful, "For the works of man will repay him" (Job 34:11).*

Maimonides teaches that this is not providential, but practical. What does he mean that the person is "teaching" either good or evil lessons? Whether he lives a degenerate lifestyle or the proper lifestyle, is he not simply performing one action or another, without teaching? Furthermore, no one teaches "bad" things; everyone thinks that what he teaches is good.

There exists a phenomenon of gangs. They commit crimes, but without loyalty among themselves they cannot sustain the gang. Regardless, gangs are not successful. This is Maimonides' lesson. There are two ways one can have others treat him well. One way is by teaching objective jus-

tice. If one lives according to an objective system, he will associate with others who follow that system. And there is in man a certain desire to recognize such a system. Therefore, by one's actions, he causes that system to grow.

Another way one gets others to treat him well is through a subjective system where he commands loyalty to himself. Such people seek to solidify personal loyalties from close friends. One says to his friends, "I am going to help you and you are going to help me." This type of bond is seen in gangs and in the Mafia. But this loyalty does not extend to others; it is acceptable that gang members kill members of other gangs. This is an evil system and one that Maimonides says always backfires; members of such groups will always get hurt.

This loyalty breaks down one's conscience: he is not loyal to anyone outside of his gang. Once one's conscience is broken down toward others, nothing prevents this gang member from directing aggression toward members of his own gang. That very personal loyalty that created the bond among gang members becomes responsible for infighting. This is the meaning behind Maimonides' words that the gangster "taught" that evil should be done. One's actions have an effect: they teach others. Thus, one creates a system of personal loyalty where he can abuse others outside of his gang. And since there is a breakdown of one's conscience,

once there is a conflict within the gang, these unconscionable gang members turn on each other. He who unleashed injustice against others will suffer that very injustice: “Since you drowned others, others drowned you..”

However, people who recognize and live by an objective system of justice will mutually benefit. Why is this so? As they all support a system outside of their own subjective views, they do not resort to expressing subjective feelings toward others, even when there is conflict between members. They all follow principles that guide man in the most just and harmonious manner. Additionally, the quantity of conflicts would be greatly diminished as they don’t act emotionally and subjectively. And even when conflicts arise, as the members are attached to an ultimate system of justice, they would never override what is objectively just. Thus, they will not be mutually harmful. On the contrary, generally, when the system works properly, they will benefit. This is because as they grow in this path of objective justice, they will help each other in an objective manner.

This explains Maimonides’ view that this is a common phenomenon—personal systems of loyalty end in great animosity.

Therefore, to enjoy a good life, join a society of objective goodness. In such a society, the goodness grows as greater knowledge is shared. And this benefits you as you associate

with others seeking what is objectively good, who do not follow subjective emotional aggressive actions.

## 2:7 HAPPINESS: INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL PURSUITS

HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO SAY: THE MORE FLESH, THE MORE WORMS. THE MORE POSSESSIONS, THE MORE WORRY. THE MORE WIVES, THE MORE WITCHCRAFT. THE MORE MAIDSERVANTS, THE MORE LEWDNESS. THE MORE MANSERVANTS, THE MORE THEFT. THE MORE TORAH, THE MORE LIFE. THE MORE SITTING [AND STUDYING], THE MORE WISDOM. THE MORE COUNSEL, THE MORE UNDERSTANDING. THE MORE CHARITY, THE MORE PEACE. ONE WHO HAS ACQUIRED A GOOD NAME HAS ACQUIRED FOR HIMSELF. ONE WHO HAS ACQUIRED WORDS OF TORAH HAS ACQUIRED FOR HIMSELF THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME.

One believes that by increasing his physical strength, he increases his happiness. This refers to bodybuilding. From the time of the gladiators to modern-day gyms, man has not changed. Chazal said this pursuit does not lead to happi-

ness. Centuries later, people still pursue this fantasy. Chazal recognized that this pursuit is generated from deep swells of emotions; there are great energies behind this value. The source of this emotion doesn't see the light of day, but it influences man in a certain way. The person himself doesn't realize the serious nature of this driving force. But if one observes the bodybuilder's involvement, he sees this pursuit become his entire life; it becomes his essence. And although most weight lifters don't take the emotion to the same extreme as the bodybuilder, the source of the emotion is the same. The value of this philosophy is equally enjoyed by those partaking in all levels.

People in every generation follow this value, from the gladiators to today's muscle man. But each generation tries to make its version new. People must feel that they are onto something novel. This is what King Solomon addressed:

*Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, "Look, this one is new!" [However], it occurred long ago, in ages that went by before us (Kohel's 1:10).*

People can't get involved in something that failed. They also cannot follow the practices of people who lived in the 1920s. What happened to them? The answer: "The more flesh, the more worms": they died. This kills the fantasy. To

renew the fantasy, one must develop or attribute some novelty in the pursuit, for example, new methods of bodybuilding never tried before.

*It occurred long ago, in ages that went by before us (ibid.).*

The gemara says, “The evil instincts renew themselves everyday” (Kiddushin 30b). Intelligence rejects desires that have failed to deliver. Therefore, the instincts try to view a desire as something “new” in order to bypass the intellect’s rejection. Therefore, the mishna says that the increase of flesh (muscle) culminates in increased worms: a losing battle.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*A person thinks that through pleasures and luxuries he will achieve longevity because he follows the natural course (he follows what feels good and this will offer happiness). But there is no avoidance of death, and the food luxuries of which he partook will not help him. On the contrary, they lead to more decomposition.*

One feels that the path to ultimate salvation is to satisfy every instinctual need. There is an innate feeling that this is the correct way of life. Today’s society expresses this with

naturalists: those going back to nature. People feel this lifestyle offers a certain salvation; it is like a religious emotion. There is a feeling that this is proper. But the mishna alerts one to the realization of decomposition: the very reality that opposes this emotion. The knowledge of one's death (decomposition) inhibits one from getting a "high" from following this delusion of escaping death through these back-to-nature of philosophies.

There is another way to understand this. There are people who feel that it is fine and healthy to cater to their sensitivities. An example are Roman baths and massage spas. But what underlies this philosophy of pampering? Deuteronomy 28:56 references this:

*The tender and delicate woman among  
you who would not venture to set the soul  
of her foot upon the ground for delicateness  
and for tenderness.*

The Torah goes on to say that when the enemy surrounds the city and the inhabitants are starving, this delicate woman would eat her own children. But what is this description? It means it is a way of life; some people behave delicately and sensitively. Rabbeinu Yona says that this is a false emotion. To such people, "increasing worms" is most detestable. Pampering is a complete denial of death. This is the

philosophy of “If it feels good, it is good.” This philosophy is based on the convincing nature of human emotions that people tend to believe. And this is a cause of great harm to man. This is the second meaning of the “increase of flesh.” It refers to pleasures and pampering.

Why does the mishna highlight the word “increase”? This refers to “excess,” beyond that which is required by necessity. And necessity is that which reality dictates. Thus, “increase” refers to something outside of reality. Man seeks to satisfy an urge that is other than reality. What is that urge? It is the desire for the ultimate salvation, his ultimate happiness. And this fantasy is always accompanied by the fantasy of immortality. Death is the very antithesis of man’s urges and fantasies.

One may ask why we must be so pessimistic and focus on death with the words “increased worms.” Why not be optimistic? After all, why should one not be happy while alive? Why not encourage man’s pursuit of body building and being a naturalist and enjoying life?

There are two answers: one is psychological and the other is philosophical. Speaking psychologically, such a lifestyle is impossible because in the back of one’s mind he knows the reality of his mortality. Behind any effort to indulge in bodybuilding, naturalism, or any other fantasy to satisfy one’s search for salvation and happiness, man knows of his

inevitable destruction. This knowledge prevents any satisfaction in these areas as he senses the fallacy of these pursuits. One faces constant pain as long as he attempts to deny his demise through vain pursuits. This explains why man is driven to innovate new methods to achieve happiness. Thus, the mishna recommends that one should not follow the path of increasing flesh because in fact, it increases worms.

The philosophical reason these lifestyles must fail is because even if man could totally suppress his mortality and fool himself into thinking that he has found that pursuit that will provide ultimate happiness, it would still not be the proper lifestyle, because for a person to live properly and be happy, he must live according to his nature. This is the most basic rule for achieving happiness. Since man directs his own life to live in accord with his nature, he must direct his life properly. Animals in their natural habitat need not direct their lives, as they naturally follow what is in line with their natures. But man is different and directs his life. To do so, he must obtain an understanding of his nature. And when he obtains this knowledge, he may then live in accord with his nature.

If one made a minor error about something, that would not be so terrible. But, for example, if one used cardboard to erect a home, thinking it was steel, the home would quickly collapse. Thus, it is essential that one understands what

something is. An error here would be a major mistake. If man misunderstands human life, thinking it to be immortal, that is a major error in understanding the object of his consideration. By making such a grave error, man cannot direct his life in a beneficial manner. (This lesson is treated more fully later in the book.)

#### THE MORE POSSESSIONS, THE MORE WORRY.

One seeks happiness through accumulating possessions. Increasing flesh is one expression of the search for happiness relating to the self: the body. Others assume they will secure happiness through an extension of the self: possessions.

How do we understand the increased worry? If one relates to objects properly, meaning, to derive satisfaction and nothing more, that would be acceptable. But our mishna does not refer to that, rather to the person who is compelled to obtain more and more possessions. He has some need to constantly increase his acquisitions. In his mind, these possessions offer some security.

Within this philosophy there are two expressions. One personality obtains many possessions and goes from one to the other seeking happiness from them. The other personal-

ity incorporates a value system into the pursuit of desires. For example, one will buy a home and several cars, for this is the value system of his society. He does not derive pleasure from these objects, but he is driven to obtain them as he has adopted a value system that says these items are important: the “American Dream.” His fantasy tells him that increased possessions of a certain standard will provide happiness. The fantasy can be ecstasy or extravagance, it doesn’t matter. Had he simply engaged his possessions to provide a natural satisfaction and not obtained them for the fantasy, this is in line with the Torah. We are not ascetics; one should enjoy real physical pleasures. But this mishna refers to one seeking positions to fulfill some value system.

The result of many possessions is worry because the fantasized pleasures wear off quickly. But as one is compelled to follow the value of retaining and maintaining his home and cars, once the short-lived pleasure of his possessions vanishes, he is left with the burden to upkeep all his possessions. This thrusts upon him much labor and toil and produces much anxiety and stress.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*A person should not think that because of wealth and possessions he will spend his life very nicely and sweetly. In fact, he will worry about his possessions all year.*

*Ask the rich who live this lifestyle and  
they will tell you this is true.*

THE MORE WIVES, THE MORE WITCHCRAFT.

Everyone must have a value system. The Torah says Esav married at 40 and his wife was an idolater. Rashi says Esav was equated to a pig, for when a pig sleeps, it stretches its feet forward with its split hooves, as if to say, “I am kosher.” While Esav married at 40, before this he raped married women. When he turned 40, he said, “My father married at 40, I will do the same.” The rasha is not devoid of a value system.

When one marries many women, he causes them to be superstitious, as they try different tactics to gain the husband’s favor. Due to the competition for the husband’s attention, the wives’ emotions start venturing down unrealistic avenues: superstitious paths.

INCREASING MAIDSERVANTS INCREASES SEXU-  
AL LEWDNESS.

Rabbeinu Yona says these bad actions are performed in man’s house.

## INCREASING SERVANTS INCREASES ROBBERY.

This will result in problems for the master.

What is the mishna teaching us through these cases? Man seeks happiness and security through his body, his possessions, and by controlling other people (servants). This last method provides a sense of power, and one's fantasy is very attracted to this method.

The mishna breaks down the third category of people into three groups. Increasing wives refers to the romantic relationship where one views himself as a suave man who attracts all women. The second method—increasing maid-servants—is where one uses others to gain a level of sophistication and class. The last method is increasing servants, which is power over others. This mishna describes one who engages the desires because of a value system and not simply for pleasure.

Even after the fantasy and enjoyment wane, one maintains these people and possessions because they are a value. Our mishna depicts the emotions a person engages after the fantasy is gone. Regarding servants, one's fantasy is to display power, and having servants expresses this. After the fantasy is gone, he is left with these low-level individuals and their poor character—they steal. And this idea runs true for wives and maidservants as well. The mishna teaches that

one is attracted to these three types of people in order to gain self-importance. This is the initial attraction. In the end, the master must deal with the defective natures of the people he bought off. He could buy them since they are of defective character. This character then creates problems for the master. The same applies to maidservants; they too are of low character as they can be bought off. And in the end, the master must contend with their lewdness.

#### THE MORE TORAH, THE MORE LIFE.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*This matter contrasts to that which he said, "The more flesh, the more vermin." As through enjoyment, he will shorten his days; but through toil in Torah they will be lengthened. And it also corresponds to "The more possessions, the more worry," as the worry over possessions shortens his years. But the worry over Torah [thinking over a question]—even though it is a great worry—to the one who understands, when he figures out the law to the point that he can "Say the thing in an apt fashion"—this worry cannot cause him evil. Even though the wise men of science have said that concern is a sickness of the heart and worry is destruction of the*

*heart, worry over Torah “will increase for him the length of days and years of life and peace.” And about this [King] Solomon, peace be upon him, said, “The fear of the Lord adds life; the years of the wicked will be shortened” (Proverbs 10:27).*

Rabbeinu Yona says that worrying about one’s possessions abbreviates one’s life. But one who lives the best life (of Torah) will live longer, and even worrying about ideas during one’s Torah study will contribute to one’s longevity, although worry in other areas causes harm. How is the Torah different?

King Solomon said, “But my wisdom stood with me” (Koheles 2:10). The word “but” is “af” in Hebrew. Af also means anger. Chazal make a play on words here and say that the wisdom that King Solomon learned with anger and tension is the wisdom that stood with him, i.e., wisdom that he retained. Chazal too say that learning is not a relaxed activity, but there exists a mental tension. If there is no tension, one is not concentrating.

Tension per se is not bad for a person. What is harmful is a deeply rooted worry when that worry concerns the self. All the areas in this mishna that produce negativity are concerns for the self. Whether it is the body, possessions, or servants, these concerns focus on the self. Deep down, man

knows the fantasy will never be fulfilled, as Ibn Ezra states “The day of death is always between man’s eyes.” (Death inhibits fantasies, for they require a backdrop of an infinite time of enjoyment to provide appeal.) Koheles says, “...Also the world of God has placed in their hearts...” (3:11). Ibn Ezra comments: “Man lives as if he will never die.” (These two statements tear at man: earthly pursuits create tension between his true mortality and his false immortality, which is fantasy.)

As long as one is involved with the self, his worries eat him up inside. But if one is tense about Torah problems, “Increased Torah increases life.” Why is this so? In Torah study, man is not concerned about the self, he is concerned about external matters. He worries about reality and this does not harm him. On the contrary, it provides man with a tremendous release of energy and satisfaction, in addition to a sense of relief. It makes man feel great.

Having no tension is bad. Retirement is not a good thing. Man must express the extreme amounts of energies he possesses in his psychological makeup, and this expression and tension occurs when man is preoccupied in a pursuit.

Man’s energies take one of two courses: internally toward the self, or externally toward the Torah. The first course reduces one’s life while the second course increases it.

After studying for his entire life, one psychologist wrote

that his happiness was found only when he was not thinking about himself, but about ideas. After sitting down to write a few ideas, he reflected and said, “That was the best hour I spent in a few weeks.” And all the efforts and steps that he took seeking happiness were painful at best. Even the best attempts were miserable. This is expressed as “Increased Torah increases life.” This also explains why Torah lishma [for its own sake] is the highest level, while Torah study not for its own sake focuses on the self [viz. learning to cover ground, and not studying to appreciate the ideas.] One is permitted to study not for its own sake—lo lishma—only because it will eventuate in studying for its own sake—lishma. But if it did not eventuate studying lishma, it appears it would not be a fruitful activity.

#### THE MORE SITTING, THE MORE WISDOM.

Rashi comments:

*This refers to one who has students who ask questions that sharpen the rebbe.*

Rashi agrees with Rebbe’s statement, “I have learned a lot of Torah from my teachers, I learned from my friends more than from my teachers, and from my students I learned more than from all of them” (Makkos 10a).

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*This refers to the wisdom of definition. And through this comes increased sitting, and students will come to hear his innovative thoughts and grow sharper together, to learn the method of how a definition develops, for it is a separate area of wisdom completely.*

Rabbeinu Yona says one must acquire this special method of thinking; he refers to the study of proper methodology in thought. This is something Rabbi Chaim Brisker introduced. Before him, people thought one simply sits down and learns. Rabbi Chaim Brisker said that a proper method of thinking must be developed, and all that falls outside of that method is improper thought. Thought must be refined and developed in order that one knows the proper methodology. When one gains this, and develops a “form” [structure] in his mind for how a definition [svara] should look, then one can distinguish between a good definition and one that is not. Rav Chaim also said that if a youngster doesn’t understand the definition, it is not a good definition. This is because Rav Chaim maintained that a definition is nothing more than uncovering what is natural in the mind: what the mind perceives naturally. Therefore, if the definition is good, it should ring a bell in a child’s mind.

The mishna then continues with, “Increased counsel increases understanding.” What is meant by all these statements? The first one of this second section of our mishna—“Increased Torah increases life”—speaks against the wrong direction of energy: focusing on one’s self. We stated that one’s energies must be directed toward Torah, externally. But the following “increases” are different.

People’s energy expenditures take different routes. One route is toward the physical. The second route is taken not by those who learn Torah for its own sake, but by those who study Torah as they are told it is the proper action. One does not have an option, he must be one who “increases” in some area. He must exert his energies in some direction. These last few “increases” (viz., sitting, counsel, charity, peace) refer to people who follow Chazal because they told them these actions are proper. Meaning, this personality finds it difficult to increase his sitting (learning) but he does so, although he has to force himself. He then becomes amazed at the tremendous wisdom he learns. The one who chased wives and servants too was surprised, for his fantasies backfired. This is the mishna’s point: in both cases, there is a surprise.

INCREASED COUNSEL INCREASES UNDER-  
STANDING.

“Counsel” refers to advice against the instincts, the yetzer hara. This refers to one who analyzes his instincts and tries to change himself. It is a difficult process. He can work on himself only because in the back of his mind he knows it is the proper thing to do. But then it says he will increase understanding. He finds out that the benefits of that counsel—those adjustments he made to his personality—now bring him into a new perspective, a different reality. He is surprised and enjoys the benefits. [Through revamping his character and channeling his energies toward Torah—a difficult process at first—what he didn’t expect to provide such enjoyment, offered him more pleasure than all other previous pursuits chasing the instinctual fantasies.]

#### INCREASED CHARITY INCREASES PEACE.

Rabbeinu Yona says charity generates love between people. Charity is a difficulty; it goes against human instincts to give what is yours to others. Therefore, Chazal viewed it as an important act: one must relate to money realistically. At first, it is painful to part with one’s hard-earned wealth. But then it increases peace. This peace is that the donor sees himself as just another person. An egocentric person cannot give charity because he cannot recognize others outside of

himself. But one who gives charity will find peace within himself. He has a realistic view of the self and this is in complete harmony with what his mind tells him is God's will: all people should exist and have their needs addressed.

Why is "Shalom" [peace] one of God's names? "He performs peace in His heavens..." (Job 25:2). There is a harmony in the heavens. God's name is Shalom since He is the source of harmony in the universe. Man is not in a state of harmony because of his free will. But if he uses his free will properly, he can attain harmony and peace.

"Rabbi Chanina said, 'Wise Torah students increase peace in the world'" [final words in Talmud Berachos; both Jerusalem and Babylonian versions.] This means that only wise Torah students can increase peace in the world, for only one who partakes of peace can increase it. If one does not know what peace is, he cannot increase it in others.

Man must engage in three matters to attain perfection: 1) He must increase his study to attain wisdom, 2) He must improve his character by increasing counsel, and 3) He must give charity to break his egocentricity.

IF YOU HAVE ACQUIRED A GOOD NAME, YOU  
HAVE ACQUIRED SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF.  
IF YOU HAVE ACQUIRED WORDS OF TORAH,  
YOU HAVE ACQUIRED ETERNAL LIFE.

Rabbeinu Yona says a name surpasses wealth, since it is yours. The Torah bears that out: “And they leave their wealth to others” (Psalms 49:11). Wealth is transferred to others upon death. And to those who value the bequeathal of an inheritance, the gemara says, “Who can tell a man his praises when he is in the grave?” Attempting to gain satisfaction by bequeathing wealth is an unrealistic fantasy once one is no longer alive to enjoy the feelings of being a benefactor or the praises from the inheritors.

*Better is a good name than good oil, and  
[better is] the day of death than the day of  
birth. (Kobeles 7:1)*

A good reputation is better than good finances. But what does birth and death have to do with a good name—why are both mentioned in the same verse? Chazal say that oil also refers to anointing, as in anointing a person to an elevated position. Therefore, the comparison is between one with a good name—a tzaddik—and one in a high position.

There are two types of popularity. One type is very glaring and has great impact. “Good oil” refers to this type of popularity: the person in a high position. Then there is a quiet type of popularity: a person with a good name. Of the two, it appears that the man of position is more powerful. One would think that this personality type holds the greatest

prominence, while the man with the good reputation leading a good life is not as well known or as prominent a figure. In fact, just the opposite is true. Abraham was never anointed, he was in jeopardy and had to leave his land. Despite all that, he changed the entire ethical tide of mankind. This was an expression of God's promise to Abraham, "And I will make your name great" (Gen. 12:2). Even Gentiles, who reject Judaism, admit that Abraham affected their religions.

What is the difference between the man of position and the man with a good name? Also, why does the man with a good name attain that good name, but only very slowly? Somehow the good name gains traction, but only over time.

Position is obtained through the public. The masses project fantasies onto the public figure because they're looking for a hero. This explains the initial intensity of people's emotions surrounding that figure. When the public finds a hero and votes for him, they project all of their hero worship onto that figure: he is instantly famous. However, since the rave for this personality was a projection, once the true person emerges and the projected image is exposed as mere fabrication, his popularity plummets.

In contrast, the man with the good name does not achieve that name through the opinion of the masses. Rather, he attains a good reputation because of his good qualities. The people sense that he stands for truth and reality. However,

this type of person receives tremendous resistance from the people, but only at first. And in the end, usually after his death, this type of person is more powerful than the man of position. Maimonides told the following to one of his students who always fought to defend him against his detractors: “Do not worry, after I die my book will become one of the greatest works.” What he meant was that after a person dies and his personality is no longer around, the public views his words objectively.

A good name, which is truly part of the person’s nature, is stronger than the man in position. This is true even during his lifetime. For example, people will sacrifice for a great Jewish leader, but will not do so for a political figure. The man with a good name has a stronger effect on others than the man in position; his quality of popularity is different. Due to his great impact on people, even in mundane areas, the man with a good name will eclipse the political figure. This is what King Solomon meant by “Better is a good name than good oil.” Even in the world of the popular public figure, the man with a good name will be greater.

*Better is the day of death than the day of birth.*

It is interesting that this statement doesn’t say the “time” of death, or “death surpasses birth,” but it says the “day” of

death. What does “day” imply?

The gemara’s advice for a sinner is to remember the “day” of death. On that day, reality is undeniable: the time of the fantasies, which cause sin, are over. This stark realization will help prevent a person from sinning.

In contrast, the day of birth represents the day of fantasy: a new life with infinite opportunities. Most people seek to avoid the day of death and live according to the fantasies of the day of birth. This prevalent notion is expressed by our society, which views youth as the greatest virtue. And even the people who say that one must “live in reality” refer to getting a job and not simply sitting and learning. But they omit one crucial truth from their reality: the day of death. Their philosophy is to work so one can enjoy the physical existence. Had they included the day of death in their considerations, their arguments would fall short; they would not push others so hard to work for earthly success.

Some people argue, “Why should we be so realistic and dwell on death? It takes away from the day-to-day joy of living.” An observation was made that astronomers lose their zest for life. Astronomers recognize the extreme age of the universe and the vast distance of the stars. By contrast, they view human life as nothing. The astronomer’s perspective is that his own life is insignificant as compared to the age of universe. And physically too, he sees he is just a speck in

a vast sea. Man is nothing. People with a zest for life view themselves as the center of the universe.

What is happiness? It is the state where an organism has satisfied all its needs and desires. Man must direct his life, and he requires knowledge to properly do so. If he succeeds, he will be happy. But if one merely follows any whim, he will not succeed or achieve happiness. Man must use his mind, and doing so requires knowledge. Happiness is the result of following the system of reality. Thus, knowledge of reality is vital. This knowledge encompasses the knowledge of the world and knowledge of oneself, knowledge of what man is.

If one were to make a disastrous mistake regarding the knowledge of man's nature, all his decisions would lead to disaster. In order to possess knowledge of something, one must know the nature of that thing. One of the most basic concepts of a thing's nature regards its very existence. If one lacks the knowledge of the nature of this thing's existence, he is in no position to determine what will benefit or harm that thing. As mentioned, if one uses cardboard thinking it has the properties of steel, the cardboard will fall apart. Therefore, the most basic area of knowledge regarding anything concerns the nature of its existence. If one treats a flimsy object as sturdy and strong, or a temporary thing as a permanent thing, he makes a very grave error regarding the

nature of the substance.

Similarly, if one makes a basic mistake about the nature of his own existence, and assumes his nature to be totally different from how it really is, he will not be able to satisfy his needs. And once we admit that man can be happy only by directing his life according to his true nature, he must know the nature of his existence. And the question regarding man's nature is simply this: Is man an eternal or temporal creature? If man makes a mistake on this point, thinking that he is eternal, there is no greater error. Therefore, he cannot achieve his goal of happiness, as he has a totally false understanding of himself.

This explains King Solomon's words, "Better is the day of death than the day of birth." The day of death refers to the true knowledge of the soul. One who possesses this knowledge is far better off than one who maintains the fantasy of immortality expressed in the words "the day of birth."

Man lives both psychologically and philosophically between these two "days", i.e., the immortality fantasy and the reality of death. These two days vie for power in man's mind. The question is, which day will prevail. In the mind of the wise man, the day of death prevails; in the fool, the day of birth prevails.

The Torah does not celebrate birthdays. The only birthday mentioned is that of Pharaoh. He was a man living in a world

of fantasy. Chazal say that the day the righteous man dies is the same day he was born. This could be teaching that for a tzaddik, there is no conflict between his birthday and the day of his death. He is not disillusioned by an immortality fantasy like others, because in his mind, his birthday is viewed together with the day of his death. The immortality fantasy is thereby neutralized. Moshe Rabbeinu was born and died on the same date. Passing away on the same date as one's birth means this tzaddik directed all his energies toward reality, his day of death. His birth date and death date are not in conflict.

The gemara says, "This world is like a wedding: grab and eat, grab and drink." One is surprised to learn that Chazal said this. At first glance, this seems like the corrupt philosophy of "Eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13). However, there is a great distinction. Those who say, "Eat and drink..." are disturbed by death. Their eating and drinking is a compensation for their inevitable "tragedy." But Chazal meant to say that man is a temporary creature, living moment to moment. If one can live with this reality regarding pleasures, it is a high level, as this person can accept today for what it is, without the fantasy of immortality. Chazal's philosophy of "Grab and eat, grab and drink" is a proper denial of immortality. In other words, "Enjoy the present realistically." We learn that Chazal enjoyed the

fruits of Genusar: “Rabbi Abbahu ate fruits of Genusar until the sweet, lush fruits made his skin so slippery that a fly would slip from his forehead” (Berachos 44a).

Man is a temporary being and he should enjoy things within this perspective. King David lived this way, planning his life wisely within reality. When he drew close to death, he planned realistically once again and commanded his son Solomon on specific matters. But we don’t see anywhere throughout the Torah that the tzaddikim were upset about their approaching deaths. Death did not come as a surprise to them. All their lives they knew the reality of their temporal existence. The reason Chizkiyahu did not want to die when he became ill was not because of an aversion to death, rather he felt it was not the opportune time. And he was correct, as we see that he prayed and repented, and God granted him more years. We also see that upon drawing close to death later on, he did not again pray to be spared, because that later date was the best time for his death.

*Better is a good name than good oil, and  
better is the day of death than the day of  
birth.*

What is the connection between these two ideas that they are placed in one verse? I believe it is the same idea we discussed in Pirkei Avos:

IF ONE ACQUIRES A GOOD NAME, HE ACQUIRES  
SOMETHING FOR HIMSELF. IF ONE REQUIRES  
FOR HIMSELF WORDS OF TORAH, HE ACQUIRES  
AN ETERNAL LIFE.

The “good name” does not refer to the popularity of one’s name. As we said, a good name is a result of one who partakes of the good, and mankind recognizes one who lives in this fashion. Partaking of the good [Torah study and character perfection] results in a good name and also results in the ultimate good: Olam Haba.

*These are the things that a person eats of  
their fruits in this world, but the principle  
awaits him in the next world” (mishna  
Peah 1:1).*

From this mishna we again see that there are two good things that result from the right life. One is the practical good—“[He] eats of their fruits in this world,” and the other good is an eternal life.

*Better is a good name than good oil.*

The good results in a good name, the result of which is the enjoyment of certain earthly benefits.

*Better is the day of death than the day of birth.*

The true benefit comes from living in line with the reality of mortality, but in a different realm.

*All prophets did not prophesy except about the days of the Messiah, but regarding the World to Come, "No eye has seen it, except for You" (Isaiah 64:3, quoted in Talmud Berachos 34b).*

We do not know what the World to Come is, but we know that man partakes of wisdom, which is eternal. By living properly, one can cross over to an eternal existence. But it is not a thing man can imagine, for all our experiences, senses, and imaginations are tied to a physical existence. Even if one desires the World to Come, he bases his desire on his physical existence [he erroneously equates the World to Come to his physical existence], and thus, that desire is a fantasy since "No eye except God has seen the World to Come." This satisfaction of fantasizing about the World to Come is based on a false idea, and stems from the fantasy of immortality. Therefore, the Torah does not mention anything about the World to Come. This would only cater to fantasy and not to reality. The physical reality that we experience in our lives can, in no way, convey what the metaphysical World to

Come is.

However, we must understand that there exists a reality that is greater than our physical reality. And in so far as one partakes of that greater reality—the world of eternal ideas—after he dies, he enjoys a tremendous satisfaction. But we cannot know what that is. Avos 4:17 says that all of the enjoyments of this world do not measure up to a moment of pleasure in the World to Come; the nature of the World to Come is different. As physical beings, there is no possible means to grasp what that nature is. But Maimonides says that one on a higher level has a greater perception of the World to Come. However, if we cannot understand what the World to Come is, what does Maimonides mean?

One cannot understand the World to Come in terms of sensing a satisfaction, since its nature is unknowable to man while alive; it is not subject to detection by human senses. However, one can draw closer to it by partaking of the eternal, and seeing the reality of that which is eternal. The person who engages more in Torah and wisdom views ideas as more real than earthly life and physical existence. He has a closer view of how it is possible that the World to Come is the greatest enjoyment, for he understands that wisdom is the source of everything. In one of his letters, Maimonides says that most people view the physical as “what is real.” But the truth is that the entire physical universe exists and con-

tinues because of the world of ideas. [Everything exists and functions based on laws and scientific principles, and these laws and principles do not exist in the physical universe, but “outside” of it, what we refer to as the “world of ideas,” or the “metaphysical world.” Thus, these ideas, laws, and principles are the true reality, for they guide the universe.]

As far as one is tuned in to this abstract eternal world, he recognizes that world is the real world. Knowing this, he can understand how it should be that a creature that perceives eternal reality must enjoy a certain satisfaction. Satisfaction from a temporal thing cannot exceed the temporary nature of that object, i.e., the satisfaction can only be temporal. [One can only enjoy his food as long as it is not eaten.] But if the object of that creature’s perception is the eternal world, the satisfaction must be commensurate, meaning an eternal satisfaction. The one partaking of the eternal [Torah and wisdom] enjoys an eternal satisfaction.

Maimonides equates a blind man and color to a man’s knowledge and the World to Come. Neither person has any concept of color or the World to Come. Regardless, man does encounter the eternal. And his encounter is where he touches on the World to Come.

IF ONE ACQUIRES A GOOD NAME, HE ACQUIRES  
SOMETHING FOR HIMSELF.

This is something perceivable.

*All prophets did not prophesy except about  
the days of the Messiah.*

This too is perceivable.

IF YOU HAVE ACQUIRED WORDS OF TORAH,  
YOU ACQUIRED ETERNAL LIFE.

This is a totally different and unknowable phenomenon. But when man is involved with wisdom, he partakes of that eternal world. It is a strange type of meeting, but this is man's nature. All the Torah commentators explain Tzelem Elohim as the ability to perceive wisdom.

Physicists and philosophers question whether there exists a "reality" to ideas. Do ideas share the quality of existence, or are they human imaginings? Judaism takes a definite stand: there is no question that the reality of ideas exists. "The statutes of heaven and earth" (Jer. 33:25) refers to a metaphysical reality that guides the physical reality.

## 2:8 HAPPINESS &amp; RELATIVISM

RAV YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI RECEIVED [THE TRADITION] FROM HILLEL AND SHAMMAI. HE USED TO SAY, “IF YOU HAVE LEARNED A LOT OF TORAH, DO NOT CREDIT IT FAVORABLY FOR YOURSELF, BECAUSE FOR THIS YOU WERE CREATED.” RAV YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI HAD FIVE STUDENTS: RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS, RABBI YEHOASHUA BEN CHANANYA, RABBI YOSI THE PRIEST, RABBI SHIMON BEN NETANEL, AND RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH. HE WOULD RECOUNT THEIR PRAISES: RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS IS A PIT COVERED IN PLASTER THAT DOES NOT LOSE A DROP. RABBI YEHOASHUA BEN CHANANYA—HAPPY IS THE ONE WHO GAVE BIRTH TO HIM! RABBI YOSI THE PRIEST IS PIOUS. RABBI SHIMON BEN NETANEL FEARS SIN. AND RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH IS AN EVER-STRENGTHENING FOUNTAIN. [RAV YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI] USED TO SAY: “IF ALL THE SAGES OF ISRAEL WERE ON ONE SIDE OF A BALANCE SCALE, AND RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE [RABBI ELIEZER] WOULD OUTWEIGH THEM ALL.” ABBA SHAUL SAID IN HIS NAME, “IF ALL THE SAGES OF ISRAEL, INCLUDING RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS, WERE ON ONE SIDE OF A BALANCE SCALE, AND RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE [RABBI ELAZAR] WOULD OUTWEIGH THEM ALL.”

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai learned every mishna and every Torah verse. Therefore, his statement [over others] “One who learns much should not credit himself” best ex-

emplifies this character trait. Thereby, others will be more prone to follow this lesson.

Let us step back and understand what perfection is. It is a certain type of knowledge that becomes part of a person's makeup . It is not an abstract knowledge, but knowledge that man acts upon, i.e., man's emotions comply with that knowledge in his daily life. The perfected man is one who understands a truth, and that truth finds no opposition from his emotions. The phrase "He used to say" implies that this statement reflected his typical speech, emanating from his very nature, and not that his words were said casually, without conviction or personal value.

Rashi comments that one who learned every mishna and verse should not feel that because of his studies, others should honor him. His point is that one's thought becomes part of one's nature only when it reflects part of his experiences. Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai's statement was made from his experience, since he studied all of Torah; he had that intellectual conquest. Therefore, he could make this statement. Pirkei Avos comprises statements regarding human perfection, and therefore, they are not mere intellectual perceptions, but values and convictions, where the entire person—including one's emotions—follows those ideals in a perfected life.

IF YOU HAVE LEARNED A LOT OF TORAH, DO NOT CREDIT IT FAVORABLY FOR YOURSELF, BECAUSE FOR THIS YOU WERE CREATED.

This advice is difficult to accept. A person who learns a lot of Torah, while others do not, will naturally feel he has excelled over others. Why should one not feel satisfaction?

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*You are still at the beginning, and when will you reach the middle and the end? The Torah's "measurement is longer than the land and wider than the sea," and human comprehension is not able to reach the far end [of it]. And how distant is a man from it; and [so] how can he credit it favorably for himself? And he has not accomplished even one thousandth of that which he is to accomplish.*

The process of learning has one requirement: one must be immersed in knowledge. Knowledge is not the amassing of facts. Man is said to possess knowledge when his soul is directed toward knowledge: he is fully preoccupied in his reflection on knowledge. When a person attains this level of perfection, he has no energies left to consider his status, i.e., as one who learned much and thereby stops and takes pride.

Most people live in the "relative world": they compare themselves to others. When this comparison reveals that one

is greater than others in some respect, it results in pride. If one feels inferior, one feels bad. This relative comparison to others is not limited to the physical, but also exists regarding metaphysical pursuits, like learning. Here too people compete and judge themselves relative to others. But, the one who learns Torah for its own sake leaves the relative world and lives in the “absolute world.” That is the world or mind-set where comparison is not the barometer of value. Here, value is attributed to inherent properties. Therefore, the relative quantity of one’s studies is of no value. One values the ideas inherent in his studies. A relative measure varies, and therefore is not an absolute matter, and anything that is true must be absolute. If one were to say that X is true, but in fact X varies based on a relative comparison, X is not always true. The perfected person is fully absorbed in reflecting on truths, and truths are eternal. They are absolutes reflecting God’s wisdom.

*And the man Moshe was extremely humble, from all men who are on the face of the land (Numbers 12:3).*

Moshe was the most humble man because he was the man most involved in reflecting on the external world of reality. Moshe deserved this ultimate praise of perfection as he played no role in his own pursuit of knowledge. Moshe

focused exclusively on wisdom. Chazal too reached this perfection to a high degree. That is why certain statements sound strange to us. Rav Shimon bar Yochai said, “Perfect-ed people are very few, and if there are two of them in the world, they are my son and myself.” Another gemara says, “Rav Shimon bar Yochai met a man on the road coming from another town. The man was very ugly. Rav Shimon bar Yochai asked him if all the people in his town were as ugly as he was. The man replied, ‘Why don’t you ask the One who created me?’ To this, Rav Shimon bar Yochai felt bad and apologized.”

These stories teach that Chazal were unconcerned with relative matters. Everyone—especially arrogant people—know that they must hide their arrogance. Otherwise they cannot enjoy it. Therefore, people display false humility. If one were to express his true arrogance, people would ridicule him as arrogant and no longer associate with him, and he would lose the very popularity he seeks.

Rav Shimon bar Yochai lived in the absolute world. He viewed the man’s ugliness as a mere objective fact. For us it is hard to comprehend how he spoke that way. He was also able to assess himself and his son objectively, stating, without arrogance, that the two of them were the most perfect people.

Another gemara states that on the holidays when the Jews

ascended to the Temple, Ben Zoma said, “All this was created for me.” Ben Zoma understood his nature and how he partook of all the enjoyments of life to such a great degree, while others did not. He knew his soul. Maimonides said that such perfected people are one in one billion, or one in a generation. At the end of Talmud Sota, the gemara says, “Once Rebbe died, humility ceased. One tanna said, ‘But I am still humble.’ They replied, ‘That is the greatest arrogance!’” Again, we see a rabbi speaking objectively: he knew that he was on that level of humility. His statement was purely objective and was spoken with no arrogance. The fact that we laugh when hearing such statements reveals just how far we are from absolute truths.

#### DO NOT CREDIT IT FAVORABLY FOR YOURSELF.

When a person is attached to learning solely to appreciate absolute truths, he will not take pride in his learning, for that is a relative emotion from which the perfected man is completely divorced. This is Rabbeinu Yona’s first point.

#### BECAUSE FOR THIS YOU WERE CREATED.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*The Holy One, blessed be He, only brought you into existence to do His will. And also for this reason it is not for you to credit it favorably for yourself if you have accomplished much Torah, "because for this you were created." There is a metaphor [about this]: If a debtor repays his debt, do we credit it favorably to him for that? And this measure is also [true] for the commandments—that if you have done many commandments, "Do not credit it favorably for yourself, because for this you were created."*

As the first reason Rabbeinu Yona gives is that one should live in the world of the absolute, the second answer must apply even to those who live in the relative world of comparison. Therefore, why should one not feel proud of his studies?

Rabbeinu Yona means to say that man's natural state is to be involved in wisdom. God created man in a way that his main energies should be directed toward thought. That is his natural state. If he does not live this way, he is then diverted toward human imperfection and all the problems resulting from that corrupt state without wisdom and thought. Human history of strife, war, and suffering will continue until man returns to his natural state and directs the main stream of his energies toward thought. Then man will be happy and live in peace. But without the pursuit of thought, man becomes

embroiled in conflicts over relative concerns.

“Do not credit it favorably for yourself” means it makes no sense to take pride in operating in line with one’s nature. If a person lived among people who became sick from taking the wrong medication while he took the proper medication and was healthy, pride would not be the appropriate feeling. He would feel fortunate. So too is the case when one learns a lot: he should feel fortunate but not proud.

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai says that there is no area in life in which pride is justified. The relative world is an illusion. [Comparison exists only in one’s imagination and not in reality.] An intellectually honest person does not feel pride. Rather, he is happy that he lives properly. Pride is based on a false assumption: “I am performing a favor, either for God or another, or I am doing more than I’m supposed to do.” This applies to all pursuits that man feels are good for him. Rather, one should say, “It makes no difference if others do not perform good for themselves while I do.” This should not result in pride. Others play no role in one’s concern to lead a happy life. Feeling better than another person does not provide happiness. And doing that which provides happiness does not depend on others. Therefore, relative concerns, such as pride, are of no concern to a person seeking happiness.

Another example is helpful. If one is hospitalized along

with other patients, should he seek to medicate himself more often than others, or should he seek a state of objective personal health? It is foolish to be concerned with taking medication in relatively greater quantities than other patients. The patient's concern should be in objective terms: to arrive at a state where he is functioning optimally. This applies to both one's body and one's soul.

Pride is an illusion. One erroneously feels that there is no absolute activity that secures happiness, but that happiness is derived from a relative comparison. [When a value is relative to another, the value is not absolute, but it depends on the comparison. And as there are many people to whom one can compare himself, what he requires for happiness (pride) will greatly vary with each comparison. Thereby, one does not isolate any fixed "real" measure or value to provide happiness.] Again, comparisons do not exist in reality and are merely imaginations. To guide one's decisions based on imagination is futile and removes one from reality. In actuality, each person lives his own life and the comparison is unwarranted. One should live according to his nature and not according to someone else's nature via comparison. This explains the Torah's prohibition of envy, the last of the Ten Commandments. If someone suffers somehow, this does not make you greater by comparison; it does not change you at all. And if another person succeeds greatly, again, you are

unchanged. Comparison is a fantasy. All that exists in one's reality is you and God. What must a person's objective be in his search for what is good? It is the single concern to live in line with his nature.

*So says God, "Let not the wise man praise himself in his wisdom, nor the mighty in his might, nor the wealthy in his wealth. But only in this let the one who praises praise ... understand and know Me, for I am God, performing kindness, justice, and righteousness in the Earth, for in these do I desire," so says God. (Jer. 9:22,23).*

Jeremiah says that none of these matters help man (Radak). Only that which is part of man's essence can help him. Certainly, strength and wealth are not part of man's essence. But even wisdom is merely an acquisition for many people. The only case that knowledge forms part of man's essence is when the soul is completely involved in that knowledge. Only then has man attained good. "But only in this let the one who praises praise" does not mean that one should parade his pride. It means that this is what is praiseworthy.

Radak comments on Jeremiah's words, "So says God":

*There are wise men among you; do not praise yourself for your wisdom for it will*

*not save them. Since they do not know God and they don't walk in His ways, of what use is that wisdom? And like it is stated, "They are wise to perform evil." And similarly, if there are among you mighty men, do not praise yourself for your might because it will not save from death or from captivity. And so also if there are among you wealthy men, do not praise yourselves for your wealth because it will not save you from the sword, because you and your wealth will be destroyed.*

What is the knowledge of God? It is the recognition that He is the Creator. Radak continues:

*It is the recognition of the Creator's unity; He is eternal; He is not physical. He created everything and governs and guides His world with His wisdom; the higher and lower entities and this knowledge is to result in man performing kindness, justice, and charity, for God performs these.*

Knowledge of God is a study of God's unity, eternity, and metaphysical nature. It is a knowledge one can study his entire life. Unity of God is the essence: "Hear Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One." The concept of the unity of God represents all the knowledge of God. [As stated, unity of God refers to His exclusive role as the Creator (omnipot-

tence for He created all; and omniscience for He knows all that He created), His government of all creatures, His eternal nature—being the first existence—and His metaphysical nature for having preceded the physical creation. All of these qualities belong to God and to nothing else.] This is the knowledge for which man can have a philosophical “praise”: he knows that this knowledge is the good in life, and he partakes of this knowledge. But it is not a pride or an emotional praise. One who partakes of the good is no fool: he knows of what he partakes, but he does not enjoy any emotional accompaniment like pride.

#### DO NOT CREDIT IT FAVORABLY FOR YOURSELF.

Returning to Rabbeinu Yona, there are two reasons one should not take pride in himself. One reason is that the nature of study doesn’t allow one’s energies to flow toward pride. The second reason is that the emotion of pride is inapplicable to study, just as it is inapplicable to the patient who took the proper medication. In the first reason, the very state of studying wisdom prevents pride, and in the second reason, the objective prevents pride.

A question was raised regarding whether one can engage in any area of wisdom to attain perfection. This is not pos-

sible. Sciences and math, for example, do not lead one to a Torah lifestyle. These are isolated areas that do not relate to one's personality or to his search for God. [But the Torah addresses every aspect of knowledge and human life, from the knowledge of God, His unity, creation, and divine providence to human character and mitzvos.] Einstein obtained one aspect of knowledge of God. But as he knew nothing about God's providence revealed in the Torah, he was nowhere near the level of Moshe Rabbeinu or a tanna of a mishna. Knowledge of God must be seen in all areas, from creation, perfection, justice, providence, and all of the areas that the Torah addresses. But, studying one branch of knowledge alone severely limits one's knowledge of God.

As man searches for knowledge, new ideas naturally lead to new questions, and then to new answers. It is a never-ending cycle. These new questions expose previously accepted truths to be false. This is what Maimonides discusses in Book One of his Guide, when he references "negative knowledge." Man cannot obtain positive ideas in relation to God; he can only know what God is not. [This is because our mind is dependent on our senses, and the latter cannot detect that which is not related to the physical world.] And the more man removes false notions in connection with God, the closer is his knowledge to the truth regarding God.

During Newton's era, science thought that man could at-

tain positive knowledge. As it turns out, not only do we not have positive knowledge in relation to God, we do not have positive knowledge regarding science either.

When man is not involved in the search for wisdom, or he becomes involved in nonsense, the Torah has a remedy: mezuzah. In Hilchos Mezuzah (6:13), Maimonides states the following:

*People must be very careful about the mitzvah of mezuzah because it is an obligation on everyone at all times, so that any time [one] goes out or comes in, [he] will encounter the unity of the name of the Holy Blessed One and remember God's love and wake up from [his] sleep and the errors in the futilities of daily life and know that there is nothing that lasts forever except the knowledge of the Rock of Ages. And [he] will then immediately return to the true knowledge and walk on the right path."*

Does this mean to say that one who is engaged in vain matters and nonsense will, upon seeing the mezuzah, instantly become a tzaddik? Maimonides says that we all operate simultaneously on different levels. We can see an idea and instantly be moved and feel, "How beautiful is knowledge!" Wisdom is quite compelling. At other times, we can abandon a life of thought and succumb to our instinctual

urges. This is Maimonides' idea: catching a glimpse of the mezuzah awakens a spark of wisdom and returns man into the true world. Man is not instantly converted into a tzaddik. He will once again become involved in nonsense and emotions. Judaism admits that man is multifaceted and swings between his instincts and his intellect. The idea of mezuzah is that man must work with this natural duality. One should try to increase his involvement in the infinite, i.e., knowledge of God, which is the only eternal matter, as Maimonides says.

The reality of the human condition is that man vacillates between his two natures. To believe that man can be a saint is a false religious notion. It also causes man grief since he cannot escape his emotional and instinctual component. Mezuzah indicates man's true nature: he needs a reminder to help him refocus on the infinite.

This explains why Maimonides was so upset by people who used the mezuzah for physical protection—they took something that intends to direct man to the highest level and utilized it for bodily protection. This is a destruction of the entire mitzvah, and mezuzah is one of the most important mitzvos in the Torah.

[A few additional sources are noteworthy:

*...But these (people) who write on the inside of the mezuzah the names of angels or sanctified names or passages or seals, they are in the category of those who have no [share in the] World to Come. Because it is not enough that these fools have taken a command and nullified it, but they rendered a great command—the unity of God, the love of Him, and the worship of Him—as if it’s an amulet for personal benefit, and they assume in their foolish hearts that this will give them pleasure in the futilities of this world (Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Laws of Tefillin 5:4).*

*If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as a reward for doing so, he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes (Gilyon Maharsha, Yoreh Daya, 289).]*

Mezuzah, tefillin, and Sefer Torah are the essence of Judaism. Those who use the mezuzah for bodily protection distort the essence of the Torah and have no share in the World to Come.

This explains why a mezuzah is not placed on the door of a beis medrash or a shul, but only on the door of one’s home.

The home is one's ultimate place of rest and enjoyment [not a focus on the infinite]. Before one enters his home, he encounters God's unity [the mezuzah contains the Torah portions of the Shema]. This means that a mezuzah functions to counter those emotions that draw man away from focusing on the infinite. [But as the beis medrash and the shul focus on the infinite, they do not require a reminder through the mitzvah of mezuzah; the very purposes of these locations focus on God and His infinite wisdom.]

IF YOU HAVE LEARNED A LOT OF TORAH, DO NOT CREDIT IT FAVORABLY FOR YOURSELF, BECAUSE FOR THIS YOU WERE CREATED.

Rashi comments:

*For this purpose, you have come into existence, as the verse says, "It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day." This teaches that God made a condition with creation: "If the Jewish nation will not accept the Torah, I will revert the universe to its primordial state of chaos." It thereby turns out that we have a great obligation, and one is not learning Torah out of any extra goodness.*

With his words "great obligation," Rashi says that certain

ideas have a coercive effect on man. Similarly, standing “before God” in prayer and grasping what that means can have a paralyzing effect. But what is the thrust of his message?

Rashi teaches that the plan of Creation was for an intellectual being to emerge. Man was not created as a separate [merely additional] creature. On the contrary, the entire purpose of Creation was geared toward the emergence of man: an intelligent being that could perceive God’s knowledge. Had man not emerged, the entire order of Creation would not have unfolded this way. Man is a central part of the metaphysical scheme of Creation, which regards Earth. However, regarding other parts of universe, God can have purposes other than man. Man is not the only being that has a purpose; angels exist too. Maimonides says it is ego-centric for man to assume he is the only being that has a purpose in existence. But regarding the scheme of creation of the Earth, Rashi says the order of creation of the six days, from plants and animals to everything else, was geared towards the emergence of an intelligent being, namely man. For there is nothing else in earthly creation with the capacity of knowledge. Without an intelligent being that can perceive the Creator, Creation would have no purpose.

Rashi’s point is that man is the ultimate reality in Creation. The physical creations are merely a steppingstone toward man’s activity of pursuing knowledge. Most people

think the opposite, that the universe is the essence, and that the existence of man is an addition to it. Rashi teaches otherwise. This is the opposite of the Darwinians. They say the biological component is the essence, and that the intellect evolved later; it was an accident.

Therefore, as thinking man is the most natural existence, there is no room for man to take pride in his Torah knowledge.

RAV YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI HAD FIVE STUDENTS: RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS, RABBI YEHOSHUA BEN CHANANYA, RABBI YOSI THE PRIEST, RABBI SHIMON BEN NETANEL, AND RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH. HE WOULD RECOUNT THEIR PRAISES: RABBI ELIEZER BEN HORKENOS IS A PIT COVERED IN PLASTER THAT DOES NOT LOSE A DROP. RABBI YEHOSHUA BEN CHANANYA—HAPPY IS THE ONE WHO GAVE BIRTH TO HIM! RABBI YOSI THE PRIEST IS PIOUS. RABBI SHIMON BEN NETANEL FEARS SIN. AND RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH IS AN EVER-STRENGTHENING FOUNTAIN.

“Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos is a pit covered in plaster that does not lose a drop.” His praiseworthy trait was a perfect memory and instant recall.

“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya—happy is the one who gave birth to him!” Maimonides says he had tremendous perfection of character, good middos. Rashi says he was flu-

ent in all areas, he was learned, an advisor (requiring all areas of knowledge), and he was close to the government. He was well-known. His mother was happy from the pleasure she derived from his position.

Rashi adds that his mother caused his greatness in learning. While she was pregnant with him, she frequented all of the yeshivas in the city said to the Torah students and rabbis there, “Beseech mercy on this embryo that he should become a great talmid chocham.” Another gemara also says that a pregnant woman should come to the beis medrash and listen to words of Torah and this will cause the embryo to become a talmid chocham.

Chazal teach the importance of the relationship between a mother and her child insofar as making the child a talmid chocham. This is interesting, since one would think the father is the one most responsible for creating a talmid chocham. But we are taught here that in one respect, the mother is more responsible. How does this dynamic operate? The mother paves the way for the child’s personality in order that the father can teach the child Torah. But the mother’s intent cannot be an egotistical drive where the child is viewed as an extension of herself. This is an improper motivation. Chana expressed the proper motivation, as she said, “I have given him over to God”:

*"It was this boy I prayed for; and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. I, in turn, hereby lend him to the Lord. For as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." And they bowed low there before the Lord (I Sam. 1:27, 28).*

Chana removed all desires to derive personal satisfaction from her son. Chana was not motivated to have a child in order to benefit from her friends' praises about him. She recognized God's will and that the world requires leaders. She sacrificed her personal satisfaction in order to do what she saw was God's will. But those who relate to their child to satisfy personal emotions cause the child harm. When the proper parent acts solely for the child's benefit, she will not enjoy personal gratification from her child on the whole. Many times, parents identify with their child and cater to all of their child's desires. This is because parents recall how they did not have those things. Therefore, parents fulfill that wish through the child, but thereby, inflict harm.

#### RABBI YOSI THE PRIEST IS PIOUS.

He followed the principle of lifnim mishuras hadin (acting over and above the letter of the law). Torah, in all of its halachos and mitzvos, targets perfection. The Torah cannot

legislate perfection, nonetheless, perfection is the objective. [The Torah does not limit the quantity of food one may eat (i.e., legislating perfection of the appetitive drive), but one attains perfection by moderate behaviors, as one disengages more from hedonism when he eats moderately. This applies to sex and other emotions as well.] The person who lives *lifnim mishuras hadin* is one who enjoys the benefits of fulfilling the system. He does more than halacha asks of him, which means he understands that the target is perfection. This motivates him to strive for that unwritten level, for he sees this is the Torah's objective.

#### RABBI SHIMON BEN NETANEL FEARS SIN.

This doesn't sound like praise; it sounds like a description of a low-level person, for he serves God out of fear and not out of love. Rabbeinu Yona says fearing sin refers to a barrier that Rabbi Shimon made to prevent him from sin. Why is this so praiseworthy?

We stated that a person operates on many levels simultaneously, and all people have the capacity to serve God out of love—*oveid me'ahava*. Man sees the truth of the system, but he must contend with the other part of nature that doesn't realize that good. It is a difficult task. When dealing with one's

emotional component, one must use his rationality. This was Rabbi Shimon's perfection. He was able to take the necessary steps to contend with his instinctual element, regardless of the painful nature of these self-imposed barriers.

Maimonides says that one must subdue his instincts with his knowledge. How does knowledge fit into this picture? The person sees how his emotions lead him away from reality, but [even in that emotional state] there is one small part of his mind that sees reality and recognizes the error. He then sets barriers for himself that will drive him toward following his rationality. [This is how knowledge interacts with man in his emotional mindset.] Most people function based on one emotion or another, but do not turn their intellect's eye on to their emotional component, to examine it and strategize means to refrain from following their instincts. But one who conquers his instincts—"koveish es yitzro"—is the man who fears sin. This was Rabbi Shimon.

This is an internal phenomenon and only certain perfected people are successful. We learn that even a tzaddik like Rabbi Shimon had a part of his personality that required further perfection. At the end of Hilchos Teshuvah, Maimonides says that even the greatest wise men did not reach the level of serving God totally from love.

## RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH IS AN EVER-STRENGTHENING FOUNTAIN.

Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh was a creative intellect who expanded on new ideas as he learned. Rabbeinu Yona says that the comparison between Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos (who had a great memory) and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh is not an argument as to which trait is superior. One outweighs the other only within a select framework. When evaluating memory, Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos was most superior. But when it came to a creative mind, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh surpassed all others.

Having read through this mishna, we wonder how a comparison is made between two different areas, i.e., between character traits (fearing sin and piety) and intellectual skills (memory and creativity.) These are two unrelated areas with no relevance for comparison. The proper comparative evaluation could be made if the five students were first measured in terms of character, and then measured again in terms of intelligence. However, the mishna's comparison seems out of line.

Maimonides says that man's perfection is measured by his actions and his knowledge. What is this combination? In Judaism, man's perfection refers to the soul's relationship to God, and there are two ways that man relates to God. Wis-

dom is the essential relationship: man comprehends wisdom and understands that God is the source of it. But if one is wise and spends only five minutes a day in wisdom because he is not interested in knowledge, we cannot say this person's soul is directed toward the good, because for the vast majority of his day he engages in nonsensical matters.

Then there is the reverse case where one has a tremendous desire for Torah and wisdom, and therefore his energies are properly directed. However, this person doesn't have much wisdom. Therefore, how much energy can be directed toward something of which this person has very little awareness? He has a lot of energy, but there is no object that he perceives due to his limited wisdom.

Therefore, to reach a high level, the combination is necessary. One needs to direct all his energies toward wisdom (actions) and he also requires wisdom. This explains all mitzvos: they direct our energies toward actions, and the primary mitzvah of Torah study directs us toward wisdom. One's soul is judged by the ratio of how these two combine. The most perfected person is the one who directs his energies toward wisdom and attains much wisdom. And if one knows himself and does not have a great capacity for wisdom, but however much wisdom he has he values as the ultimate good, he can share in the wisdom, like Zevulun, and use his possessions to support a wise man like Yissachar.

In this manner, one dedicates himself to the greatest good of wisdom on his own level, and this is a high level. This is the meaning of sharing in another person's Olam Haba. The benefactor gains a great reward for supporting another's Torah learning.

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai spoke of this perfection. In each of his five students, he isolated the character that was most prominent in that student's perfection. He did not praise Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos for his memory per se, but because he valued ideas so much that he would not forget even one (Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos could not imagine losing even a single idea). To him, ideas were like precious gems. His perfection was an attachment to Torah knowledge. Thus, his ability to retain his studies was based on a love of wisdom, and not simply because of a great memory. [Many people have great memories but do not have a love for wisdom. Such people would not be praised for their memories alone; mere possession of that faculty is not a perfection. Perfection is using one's unique abilities in his relationship to God.]

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai praised Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh for his creativity. His soul was attached to the good through the creative process. He had a deep appreciation for how the human mind could unravel God's wisdom. This is how his soul was attached to the good.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya had a perfect character. The measure of his attachment to the good was evident in his character traits. He directed every ounce of his energy toward the good.

When the mishna says Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos outweighed all others, this does not refer to the quantity of his wisdom. How could it, as all of the other chochamim were on the other side of the scale? [He could not possibly have known more than thousands of others combined.] It means his attachment to wisdom—the love of every point of wisdom—was greater than any other chocham. Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai made a qualitative evaluation and not a quantitative one.

Regarding the evaluation of Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, why is it stated that even if Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos was included in all the other chochamim on the other side of the scale, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh would outweigh them all? We do not see this stated regarding Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos. The answer is that the highest level is the attachment to creativity.

We are very fortunate today that due to the permission to write down the Oral Law, we can be involved in the creative process, even without possessing a great memory.

The purpose of this mishna is to show that everyone is different regarding his attachment to the good. Everyone has

these character traits. And we do not say, for example, that Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh possessed creativity but little wisdom. He was a great chocham too. But the mishna teaches that each student expressed his perfection to a higher degree and in a different character from others. Each person has a different attachment to the good and he must know what that is in order to work within that framework. This mishna directs everyone to follow this lesson to reach a high level of attachment to the good in one's own strengths.

Maimonides characterized these students' strengths as follows:

- Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos: great memory
- Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya: energies directed toward good character
- Rabbi Yosi the Priest: possessed both a fine character and intelligence, and had a harmonious soul
- Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel: fear of sin helped him erect barriers against sin
- Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh: intellectual creativity

Is there a picture that emerges from these specific five traits? Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh shared the category of wisdom, which is comprised of their two perfections: memory and creative thought. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya had a superior psyche, as dem-

onstrated by his character perfections. Rabbi Yosi the Priest was attached to the good in character and intelligence, which means his philosophy was highly perfected. And Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel's fear of sin reflected one whose energies are properly directed. Thus, these five perfections—wisdom (memory/creativity), the psyche, philosophical outlook, and direction of energies—comprise all of man.

Rashi makes a point that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya (happy is the one who gave birth to him) is an expert in all areas of life. What would prevent a person from achieving this? It would be an emotional hang-up. Rashi teaches that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya had no emotional issues disrupting his energy flow. He mastered all areas as he experienced no emotional conflicts. Maimonides teaches that a prophet can have a minor emotional issue; we learn that Jacob was afraid (Gen. 32:8, when the wicked Esav and his four hundred men approached him), but nonetheless he was a prophet. Only a major emotional issue would prevent one's ability to prophesy. An example again is taken from Jacob, who had no prophecy during those twenty-two years that he was separated from Joseph.

## 2:9 PATHS OF PERFECTION

HE SAID TO THEM: GO OUT AND SEE WHAT IS A STRAIGHT PATH THAT A PERSON SHOULD CLING TO. RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "A GOOD EYE." RABBI YEHOSHUA SAYS: "A GOOD FRIEND." RABBI YOSI SAYS: "A GOOD NEIGHBOR." RABBI SHIMON SAYS: "SEEING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ONE'S ACTIONS." RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: "A GOOD HEART." HE SAID TO THEM: "I SEE THE WORDS OF RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH [AS BETTER THAN] ALL OF YOURS, BECAUSE YOUR WORDS ARE INCLUDED IN HIS." HE SAID TO THEM: "GO OUT AND SEE WHAT AN EVIL PATH IS THAT A PERSON SHOULD DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM." RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "A BAD EYE." RABBI YEHOSHUA SAYS: "A BAD FRIEND." RABBI YOSI SAYS: "A BAD NEIGHBOR." RABBI SHIMON SAYS: "ONE WHO BORROWS BUT DOES NOT REPAY. BORROWING FROM A PERSON IS LIKE BORROWING FROM THE OMNIPRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, AS IT SAYS (PSALMS 37:21) 'THE WICKED BORROW AND DO NOT REPAY, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ONE GIVES GRACIOUSLY.'" RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: "A BAD HEART." HE SAID TO THEM: "I SEE THE WORDS OF RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH [AS BETTER THAN] ALL OF YOURS, FOR YOUR WORDS ARE INCLUDED IN HIS."

Rabbi Eliezer says a "good eye." Maimonides explains this as the ability to be satisfied. The Vilna Gaon spoke much about this trait. In his travels when he was young, the Vilna Gaon once stayed for a few days at the home of a poor blind man. The Vilna Gaon said he never met someone with

that level of satisfaction with life. And he said that he never reached that level himself.

The opposite is an evil eye. This refers to one who disparages what he has and desires more. This is an envious person and he looks at others with an evil (envious) attitude. Whereas the person with a good eye does not look at what others have—he is satisfied.

RABBI YOSI SAYS: “A GOOD NEIGHBOR.”

Rashi says that this is better than a good friend (Rabbi Yehoshua’s view), since a neighbor lives nearby, and seeing him regularly enables one to learn from his good actions. Thus, Rabbi Yosi says as a response to his teacher Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai, a role model is the proper path for man to overpower his emotions. This explains the prayer we recite, “Distance us from an evil man and an evil friend.” A single change in one’s day is sufficient to cause an upheaval of one’s equilibrium, but a good role model will keep one’s eye on the good path.

How does the objectivity of the role model function? When a person succumbs to his emotions, there is a certain dynamic at work; his emotions must talk him into doing something harmful. It is not so simple for the emotions to

sway man; they too have a battle on their hands. The emotions work on man to convince him that his desires are the real good. Convincing is always easier when one is alone. But when there is an objective situation, the mind wakes up. Alone, a person can tell himself many things. But when he sees an objective situation [something in reality and not in his imagination, i.e., a friend acting properly] the mind is thrown into play and thereby, the emotions lose their convincing abilities. Privately, the emotions can convince man. But upon seeing the reality of a good neighbor, the mind is engaged [and this appeals as what is “real” versus his emotions]. The mind then helps man maintain himself on the proper path in his battle against his emotions. Eve too was alone when she succumbed to the snake. We read that afterward (Gen. 3:8) Adam and Eve “heard God’s voice in the garden.” This refers to their perception of objective reality. Adam and Eve then hid themselves (ibid.) because recognizing this objective truth that they sinned against God generated their remorse.

[Having explained the good neighbor, let us return to Rabbi Yehoshua’s view of a good friend.] What is the difference between a good friend and a good neighbor in terms of their effects on one’s personality and path toward perfection? The good friend works with you on your emotions [there is interaction, but a good neighbor is a non-interactive model.] That

being the case, it would be difficult to say that a good neighbor is superior in terms of one's path toward perfection.

Perfection requires two things: an in-depth self-analysis, and a sustained effort in battling one's emotions. The first is a qualitative factor, and the second is a quantitative application of that quality. But as long as the emotions are allowed a constant outlet and satisfaction, there is no way they will withdraw from those areas of gratification. To perfect oneself, there must be a break of attachment between the emotions and their objects of satisfaction.

To make this break, one must increase self-knowledge, increase his awareness of the damage caused by the emotions, and maintain a constant surveillance to keep one's emotions barred from satisfaction. But if the emotions find satisfaction due to a failure to properly guard them, one forfeits his perfection.

This explains why Rashi says a good neighbor is superior; one sees this objective role model behavior day and night, unlike a good friend who might not be in close proximity. The quality of having this model sustained at all times is the degree of attention to one's behavior that is crucial for perfection. This is similar to learning, as Maimonides says, "It is clear and manifest that the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, cannot be bound up in the heart of man, unless he is constantly and duly absorbed" (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:10). A

sustained involvement is a different quality; it is not merely a quantitative degree. Rabbi Yehoshua held that the analysis enjoyed with a good friend is superior. Rabbi Yosi held that it is insufficient, and a sustained effort offered by a 24/7 good neighbor role model is superior.

What is that initial impetus that moves man to attain the good for himself? Everyone desires what is good and what makes them happy. But what is the first move one makes, and what is responsible for that move? I understand that once one is on the proper path, he will search out good friends and knowledge. But what is the first step to commence on this path? It is this precise question that our mishna addresses. If the mishna questioned what the good is, one needs all that Pirkei Avos addresses. But our mishna addresses the first step necessary to commence on the proper path.

How does Rabbi Eliezer's philosophy of satisfaction help one commence on this path? He means that one must not have his energies directed toward his desires; he must be satisfied. He has learned behaviors where he is not chasing his urges and he is content with proper self-control. This is necessary if one is to divert his energies toward perfection. But as long as one's energies are not satisfied, he will pursue instinctual gratification and he cannot perfect himself.

Everyone needs satisfaction. What we discuss here is one who is so involved in chasing his urges that he cannot com-

mence on the path toward perfection. One whose energies are directed towards the emotions, does not have those energies available for perfection. Therefore, Rabbi Eliezer says that the crucial element to commencing one's path toward perfection is free energy. This is found in the satisfied personality.

RABBI SHIMON SAYS: "SEEING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ONE'S ACTIONS."

Maimonides says that one should not think that this type of person is a great scholar; it describes an intellectual perfection. This mishna discusses an emotional base from which one can commence his path. Maimonides says the character of understanding the outcome of one's actions is the capacity to disengage from the desires. Such a person can anticipate the outcome. An example is one who borrows money, and from the moment he borrows it, he does not think about the reality of his obligation to repay the loan. [Had he anticipated this reality, he might not have borrowed the money.] He did not assess how his emotions would operate later. To have an objective picture of oneself means a person sees the full spectrum of time and all that it includes. One may be so needy for a loan that his intellect is not free to explore the outcome of his actions. One must be able to detach his mind from the present emotion.

## RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: "A GOOD HEART."

Maimonides says this refers to processing all proper character traits; one who travels on the middle road, the Golden Mean. This person has no compulsions, and therefore his energies are free and not absorbed in any given emotion. The healthy person enjoys a wide variety of involvements, something the obsessive and compulsive personality cannot enjoy because he is too absorbed in certain areas. Since the healthy personality has a wide scope of involvements, he does not engage any one emotion to its extreme. He also derives a healthy satisfaction from his involvements. Over-indulgence indicates that one does not gain satisfaction in the natural measure [as God designed man to do]. His personality is unhealthy.

Rabbi Elazar said that the normal person who is not compulsive is on the path toward perfection. Man's nature is to be attracted to the good. It is a personality flaw that derails man from following the good.

How does one decide which of these five opinions is most important? To attain perfection, all of these methods are necessary: one must have available energies to apply to perfection, one needs a friend to observe and share his shortcomings, one needs a role model, one must have a reality principle, and one must have a normal make up without

compulsions.

Judaism does not agree with the creed of psychoanalysts who maintain that once one has a normal psyche, one has reached the end of the line and no further work is required on oneself. Judaism says there is no such state. This is because even a psychologically healthy person is constantly bombarded by conflicts. True happiness is attained only through philosophical perfection. As stated, all the methods are required.

Rabbeinu Yona says that in one's striving for perfection, a person should not spread himself too thin. This is Chazal's principle. One should work on perfecting himself in one area and not tackle all character traits at once. Once one perfects himself in one area, he can move on to other areas. Rabbeinu Yona says this is the message of our mishna: select one area. But what is his reasoning? When one focuses on one area, there is a qualitatively greater effort than when focusing on many areas. All man's thoughts are thereby directed toward this one area and he can obtain the greatest improvement. But if one must shift his attention between multiple parts of his personality, the quality of his attention given to each area is reduced and his headway is compromised.

Therefore, the dispute concerns where one should make his initial inroad toward perfection: what must be the first breakthrough? Our mishna says there is a five-way argu-

ment. Rabbeinu Yona says that man is better off perfecting one character trait than working on all of his traits and not perfecting a single one.

RAV YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI SAID, “I SEE THE WORDS OF RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH [AS BETTER THAN] ALL OF YOURS, BECAUSE YOUR WORDS ARE INCLUDED IN HIS.”

Maimonides explains Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh’s view—“good heart”—as referring to the Golden Mean, i.e., living equidistant between the two poles of every emotional spectrum: not miserly or too generous, but moderate; not angry or shy, but calm and confident. How does Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh’s view of this even-keeled personality type include the opinions of the other four? For example, how does an even-keeled personality type include the position of Rav Shimon, who says the best quality is to anticipate the outcome?

The reason one cannot anticipate the outcome is due to having too much energy flowing toward a given emotion. This overpowers the mind to the point that one cannot think about repercussions. [A person who is not compulsive would have energy available to apply to other areas, such as anticipating the repercussions of his actions. But the compulsive

personality does not have those energies available.]

How does the even-keeled personality type include Rabbi Eliezer's "good eye," a satisfied personality? When a person is even keeled, he is not driven to indulge; he is satisfied. This does not mean he does not have desires. But in principle, an even-keeled nature is synonymous with a satisfied personality.

How does the even-keeled nature include the views of a good friend and a good neighbor? And we must mention that Rabbeinu Yona has a problem with these last two paths. He says the explanation given for these two paths is incorrect, since they (friends and neighbors) are external phenomena and not internal phenomena [matters concerning one's own personality]. As we are discussing perfection of one's own internal makeup, external phenomena do not play a role, and therefore, Rabbeinu Yona rejects these explanations. Instead, Rabbeinu Yona explains a "good friend" and a "good neighbor" not as others with whom you should associate, but as referring to you: you should be the good friend and the good neighbor.

Before explaining Rabbeinu Yona's view, we might question his problem with external phenomena. Do they not play a role as well in one's improvement? A person works on two levels: internally on his character, and with external factors. However, these two levels are incomparable, as internal fac-

tors have far greater impact on one's perfection than external matters do. Therefore, while good friends and neighbors are important, Rabbeinu Yona does not accept that relying on such external factors is a proper method to attain perfection; it is incorrect to classify external factors in the same category as internal factors. The internal struggle of perfecting one's personality is unrelated to the external association with people.

Therefore, Rabbeinu Yona explains a good friend as one who tries to perfect himself by being the good friend to another individual of his choice. One should perfect himself to the point where this other person becomes a close friend. This requires a complete overhaul of one's personality. One will need to use wisdom and restrain any emotions and actions in this relationship. And he will have to overlook certain things [and not respond emotionally].

Rabbeinu Yona was a chief psychologist. His position on perfection is that it is achieved through interpersonal relationships because it is here that man's petty emotions surface. In such a relationship, one can address those emotions and perfect himself. This is his explanation of a "good friend."

How does Rabbeinu Yona explain a good neighbor? He says that unlike the one-on-one close relationship of a good friend, the good neighbor relates to not one, but to many

individuals in more casual relationships. The good neighbor is a different concept. One views others in an objective manner. The good friend offers the benefit of friendship; one person becomes close with another. But a good neighbor relationship does not offer this emotional exchange.

How is perfection obtained through a good neighbor? One must deal with people on a non-emotional plane. Doing so, one reaches a level where he has love for all people; he views everyone objectively as God's creatures. Each person is a Tzelem Elohim, and he relates to each person without personal exchanges but because they exist as God's will. This is a different approach from the good friend. Thus, according to Rabbeinu Yona, a good friend and a good neighbor refer to the person himself and how he relates to others in these two capacities. Therefore, this fits into Rabbeinu Yona's view that perfection is relegated to only internal matters; acting as a good friend and as a good neighbor are internal matters.

How can we defend from Rabbeinu Yona's critique the views of a good friend and a good neighbor as referring to others—an external matter? These rabbis answer that the good friend is only a means; he is required in order to partake of the quality of objectivity. But the perfection stems from one's internal connection with that friend [which is in agreement with Rabbeinu Yona's principle that perfection

is relegated solely to internal matters]. This relationship enables one to monitor and perfect his interpersonal character traits. The same applies to a good neighbor—in one’s mind the neighbor represents an ideal. He embodies the character traits of a good neighbor and relates to his neighbors with that part of his personality. This will drive him toward perfection.

We can now answer why Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai agreed with Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, saying that Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh’s view of a good heart (even-keeled) includes the other rabbis’ views. Since one achieves the perfect personality where he is even-keeled with no emotional compulsion, and he achieves objective thought, he will naturally look up to perfected individuals who personify perfection, and he will become attached to them and mold his personality to simulate their values and characters. [Instead of engaging in relationships with good neighbors and good friends, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh says the person with a good heart, who is not ruled by any emotion, will study perfected people and follow their perfections naturally. He need not acquire good friends and neighbors practically, since conceptually, the man with the good heart adopts the perfect interpersonal traits through wisdom.]

How does Rabbeinu Yona explain a “good heart?” He will have a problem explaining this as others have explained it,

i.e., even-keeled in “all” traits, for he says one must work to improve only a single trait. And if Rabbeinu Yona explains this to mean one should be blessed with a normal personality, this is outside of the person’s control [and cannot be legislated]. Therefore, Rabbeinu Yona explains the “good heart” as a tolerant personality. This is a person who yields to reality, while others who are angry try to change reality. Anger is the expression of the intolerant person.

According to Rabbeinu Yona’s view of Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, why is tolerance the most important character trait? The gemara says one must stand up before an old person, even a Gentile. The gemara cites a case when one person saw a very old person, and he exclaimed, “How many experiences did this person have.” Old age is God’s blessing, for experiences are what perfect man. Through one’s experiences, one gains knowledge. We stand up for a *talmid chocham* to show respect for his perfection, and we stand up to show respect for an old person who represents a life of experiences, which is the means for perfection. If one yields to what his experiences teach him, and he overcomes his egocentricity and nonsensical ideas, he will obtain perfection. But one who fights reality—an angry person—will not perfect himself. The gemara says that when a *talmid chocham* gets older he grows calmer, but the ignorant person grows more nervous with age. This is because the *talmid chocham*

yields more and accepts reality more. But the ignorant person fights reality.

Rabbeinu Yona also differs on the view of a “good eye.” He says this refers to a person who is generous and is “on the border of possessing all good character traits.” The gemara says that Iyov never took change after paying for his groceries. He had a broad spirit and was not miserly, but generous. Rabbeinu Yona also says that a generous person gives money to the poor with a pleasant demeanor: “The poor man finds favor in his eyes and the generous man gives his money in a pleasant way.” Talmud Baba Basra says that the manner in which one gives charity is more important than the amount he gives.

Generosity is so important because it enables one to overcome pettiness. If a person’s grocery bill is \$9.99 and after giving a \$10 bill he demands that one cent in return, he demonstrates a small-mindedness about meaningless matters. The small-minded person is not ready for perfection. On the “good eye,” Rabbeinu Yona says that through one’s generosity, one exits the world of his subjective and small-minded emotions, enabling him to approach the larger world of perfection with its greater ideals. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter cited people who pay for items using the most worn-out dollar bills. This carries pettiness to its heights.

GO OUT AND SEE THE EVIL PATH FROM WHICH A PERSON SHOULD DISTANCE HIMSELF. RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "A BAD EYE." RABBI YEHOShUA SAYS: "A BAD FRIEND." RABBI YOSI SAYS: "A BAD NEIGHBOR." RABBI SHIMON SAYS: "ONE WHO BORROWS BUT DOES NOT REPAY. BORROWING FROM A PERSON IS LIKE BORROWING FROM THE OMNIPRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, AS IT SAYS (PSALMS 37:21) 'THE WICKED BORROW AND DO NOT REPAY, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ONE GIVES GRACIOUSLY.'" RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: "A BAD HEART." HE SAID TO THEM: "I SEE THE WORDS OF RABBI ELAZAR BEN ARAKH [AS BETTER THAN] ALL OF YOURS, FOR YOUR WORDS ARE INCLUDED IN HIS."

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai then asked his students what they considered to be the most damaging path.

RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "A BAD EYE."

Rabbi Eliezer said the worst trait is a bad [evil] eye. Maimonides says this refers to dissatisfaction. Rabbeinu Yona explains an evil eye as stinginess. And Rabbi Yehoshua said the worst path is a bad friend. The good friend works with you to develop proper traits, while the bad friend will encourage you to foster an emotional and instinctual lifestyle. This is the opposite of the good friend. However, the opposite of a good trait is not always evil.

Rabbeinu Yona asks why Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai needed to ask this question. After all, once a good trait is identified [in the beginning of the mishna], must not the opposite trait be evil? Rabbeinu Yona says this is not always so. For example, the best car is the most luxurious. But the worst car does not equate with being the least luxurious; it can be a luxurious car that has no engine. The only case when the opposite of a good trait or a good path is evil, is when we deal with an essential element. [Luxury is not essential to “car,” an engine is.] The good friend helps one value objective truths. This is an essential matter. Thus, the bad friend strengthens man’s subjective and emotional component, driving one away from the world of truth. And, as man’s objectivity is very limited and frail, if an external reality [the bad friend] lends support for one’s subjective and instinctual drives, it will be hopeless for such a person to follow the objective truth. Man prefers a subjective lifestyle, and the bad friend provides this reality [a justification] to remain living instinctually. Unfortunately, today’s definition of a good friend is one who treats your fantasies as reality—the very opposite of a truly good friend.

RABBI YOSI SAYS: "A BAD NEIGHBOR."

*Then Moshe and the Israelites sang this song to God. They said: "I will sing to God, for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and driver He has hurled into the sea." (Exod. 15:1)*

Why does God become great when the horse and its driver are hurled into the sea? Rashi says that when God metes out justice to the wicked, His name becomes great. The opposite is also true: when people witness the success of the wicked, it justifies their evil lifestyles. The evil person strives to display his success. One who lives near search a bad neighbor will witness his display, thereby reinforcing one's evil values. Our instincts find support in our evil neighbor's success and sway us from the proper lifestyle. The rule is that man tends to follow the lifestyle of others. Therefore, the bad neighbor has the opposite effect of the good neighbor.

RABBI SHIMON SAYS: "ONE WHO BORROWS BUT DOES NOT REPAY."

Rabbi Shimon said that the best path for one to follow is to anticipate the outcome. This refers to one's ability to step

outside his emotions and assess his future state. This means that his personality is constant and not in flux, since an assessment of one's future situation is based on one's present personality. What harms man most in his strides toward perfection is a personality that constantly changes: one day he thinks one-way [borrowing with the thought of repayment] and later he changes his feelings about repayment. As his personality changes, there is no identifiable person with which to work toward perfection. Rabbi Shimon's says the worst path to be on is the borrower who does not repay. This follows his principle that grasping reality is the most important trait. One who does not repay displays a change in mind from the time of the loan. He has no grasp on reality. We learn from the Neilah prayer "...that we might abandon the greed of our hands," that money is a major thrust within the human personality. Thus, the one who borrows and does not pay has no knowledge of his own personality.

The verse that is quoted is very interesting:

*The wicked man borrows and does not repay; the righteous is generous and gives for free (Psalms 37:21).*

Maimonides explains as follows:

*The "righteous" in this verse refers to the "righteous one of this world," i.e., God, as*

*it is stated, "righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4). This means God is the one who gives freely to the man who loans to his friend and does not repay. Therefore, God pays him back because of his work, that he was kind to others in offering a loan until he could obtain his needs. And when he does obtain funds but does not repay them, God will repay the loan.*

Rashi reiterates this idea. However, why did Maimonides and Rashi not understand the verse in its simple sense, that "righteous" refers to a person, and not to God? Secondly, how do we understand their explanation of God repaying man's loan? If they mean that God is just, we do not need this verse, for we know [from other verses] that God is just. If a person was robbed and did not deserve that loss, God will somehow return those funds. Could we not learn this verse to mean that a wicked person does not repay, while a righteous person gives money freely, even outside of a loan? Therefore, we wonder what is the new idea expressed in this verse.

Maimonides and Rashi understood the verse as referring to God, as they did not consider man capable of freely giving of his wealth. Regarding the verse describing the dove that returned to Noah with the olive leaf in its beak (Gen. 8:11), Chazal said that the dove said, "Better something bit-

ter [olive leaves] from God, than sweetness from man; this is Noah.” Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz offered a fine explanation of “This is Noah”:

*Why does it need to say, “This is Noah”? This appears obvious. Due to his need to attend to all of the animals, Noah slept very little on the ark. He was dedicated to an important mission. “This is Noah” means that the dove rejected even a perfected individual like Noah who could give freely, saying that God’s bitterness was preferable over man’s sweetness.*

Birkas Hamazon also echoes this with the words, “Let us not need man’s gifts.” The reason man cannot be one who gives freely is because his nature is such that he always needs something in return. This explains why Maimonides and Rashi explain the term “righteous” as referring to God, and why the dove preferred God’s kindness, Who never expects anything in return. For it is God’s nature to give freely.

So, we must answer, if God corrects injustices, what is added here by saying he also repays loans? As Maimonides said, “It is a repayment because the person performed a good for someone else to help attain his needs.”

The answer is that a person who performs this kindness of making a loan partakes of God’s trait of giving freely to the degree that is humanly possible. Thereby he comes under

God's providence and God repays him. As Maimonides said, "The performance is genuine kindness where he truly appreciated the needy person's situation." Our mishna teaches that for such an act, there is a special providence. This is different from a person who comes under providence to a certain degree, while remaining without providence in some measure.

Why is the term "righteous" employed here? And why is this righteous person under God's special providence? This term "righteous" explains why this person benefits from God's providence: he emulates the ultimate righteous Being, and therefore God relates to him.

RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: "A BAD HEART."

Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh said that the best trait is a good heart, which Maimonides defines as perfection of character; one who is even-keeled. The worst situation is not to be even-keeled. The even-keeled personality lives moderately, where he enjoys many satisfactions and does not obsess over any single area; he experiences no extremes. The opposite personality goes awry. This would be the worst state for man. Rabbeinu Yona explains a good heart as one who submits to reality. The worst situation is one who fights reality. This too is an essential phenomenon, explaining why the opposite of accepting reality must be the worst for man.

## 2:10 THE RABBIS' FOCUS

THEY SAID THREE THINGS. RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "THE HONOR OF YOUR FRIEND SHOULD BE AS DEAR TO YOU AS YOUR OWN, AND DO NOT BE EASY TO ANGER, AND REPENT ONE DAY BEFORE YOUR DEATH. AND WARM YOURSELF BY THE FIRE OF THE SAGES, BUT BE CAUTIOUS AROUND THEIR COALS THAT YOU SHOULD NOT BE BURNED, FOR THEIR BITE IS THE BITE OF A FOX, AND THEIR STING IS THE STING OF A SCORPION, AND THEIR HISS IS THE HISS OF A SERAPH, AND ALL OF THEIR WORDS ARE LIKE BURNING COALS."

Rabbeinu Yona said that Chazal had many ideas; why then isolate only three? Rabbeinu Yona answered as follows. Each of Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai's five students repeated three principles daily, like the saying, "Rav had a pearl in his mouth." This means that Rav regularly cited a precious principle relating to matters requiring regular attention.

We derive from this mishna that Chazal had a certain psychological and philosophical outlook. Chazal felt that there were certain ideas regarding which people require constant awareness. This means that perfection demands one to regularly focus on certain ideas; one attains perfection only when certain ideas become part of one's nature.

RABBI ELIEZER SAYS: "THE HONOR OF YOUR FRIEND SHOULD BE AS DEAR TO YOU AS YOUR OWN."

Rabbeinu Yona commented:

*One should run after his friend's honor as if it were his own. One should wish that others honor his friend just as he desires honor for himself.*

The problem is that by definition, honor is exclusive: it elevates one member of a group over all others. Therefore, how can one seek his friend's honor as his own if this will mutually exclude him from his own honor?

The resolution is that there are two types of honor. The honor that most people seek is self-glorification. But there is a second type of honor, which we can refer to as objective honor or kavod habriyos. This honor pushes aside positive commands. What is kavod habriyos? It is when one recognizes that a person is God's creation and that person possesses intelligence that warrants respect. When an individual receives an honor, it should be viewed not only as honor for the individual, but honor for the human species.

Thus, Chazal teach that one must view honor not in the typical manner that praises the individual, but in a manner where one praises God's species, for this species can ob-

tain praiseworthy heights of achievement. Thereby, when one views honor in this light, he will seek his friend's honor with the same vigor with which he seeks his own honor. Ultimately, honoring man's achievements is an honor to God, who gave man that capacity.

Albert Einstein said that honor for a discovery is not fitting, as the discovery itself is the reward. But Chazal disagreed and said honor is fitting, but it is the honor of the species and not of the individual.

The opposite is equally true. One who is punished by stoning is then hanged. But he must be cut down immediately, "For it is a curse to God, all who are hanged" (Deut. 21:23). What is the curse? Since this human being who possessed a Tzelem Elohim (intellect) distorted his purpose through a sin worthy of stoning, he reflects poorly on his Creator, that such a crime is the possibility of God's creation. However, to avoid hanging him would suggest that his sin wasn't a crime. So, we must hang him, but we cannot degrade God by keeping him hanged. Therefore, he is hanged and then taken down.

A side question was raised. Chazal teach, "The thought of sin is worse than sin itself" (Kli Yakar on Exodus 28:39:2). But, at the same time, how can they also teach, "God does not view a thought as an action" (Kiddushin 39b)?

The latter statement is inapplicable to the Jew; he has a

complete system of perfection that can battle his thoughts to commit sin. But the first statement—that the thought of sin is worse than sin—refers to one who in fact sinned, and did so in a premeditated fashion. Here, one corrupts his mind with his plan to sin. [This is in contrast to one who sinned due to a sudden overwhelming urge, with no premeditation. This latter personality did not engage his mind to plan something evil, but merely caved to an urge. Therefore, we define the greater evil as one who corrupts his greater part, namely, his soul, and this occurs in the premeditation to sin].

Regarding a Gentile, God views his thoughts as action; his thought of sin equates to real sinful activity. Why is this so? The Gentile's thought represents the sum total of his nature, as he has no system that can battle his thought to sin. Thus, his thoughts of sin will inevitably lead to the action.

... AND DO NOT BE EASY TO ANGER.

Rabbi Eliezer identified a second attitude upon which he focused daily: anger. Maimonides says that anger is equated to idolatry. King David joins these two sins in one verse:

*You shall have no foreign god, and you shall not bow to an alien god (Psalms 81:10).*

All idolatry shares one common attitude: the distortion of reality to satisfy one's emotions. Idolaters project their emotions onto reality. It is an egocentric worship, and this primitive idolatrous personality exists today. Although technologically advanced, man remains psychologically primitive. In his Guide (book III, chap. XXIX), Maimonides taught that if one studied primitive man, he would gain a better understanding of the Torah. [The meaning is that man's nature is changeless; thus, the Torah is timeless, and the primitive human element addressed by the Torah in ancient times is 100 percent applicable/needed today.]

Through idolatry, primitive man sought protection; he was insecure, he feared lightning [as indicating godly rejection], and he worried about the growth of his crops. His insecurities drove him to develop an elaborate system of idol worship. [Primitive man imagined that through certain actions he would secure success, or appease the god of rain or other imagined forces.] His system was a self-seeking one; there was no appreciation for something greater than the system itself. In contrast, Judaism focuses on the appreciation of the reality of God, His wisdom, and His universe, where man becomes quite small—the opposite of self-seeking idolaters. In Judaism, the highest level is humility, expressed par excellence by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Chazal equated anger to idolatry. This is because anger is

the expression of frustration and the intolerance of reality. Anger is the attempt to change reality to conform to one's emotional desires, exactly like idolatry. Frustration can take one of two paths: adjusting to reality, or lashing out against reality. Anger, then, is a vain attempt to change reality.

One must not misunderstand the ridicule of anger/idolatry, the attempt to conform reality to one's wishes. I do not mean one should be passive and not exert oneself to accomplish. Torah endorses conquering Israel, building the Temple, work, and all proactive positive actions. Engaging in a rational plan is praiseworthy. What Chazal condemn is anger against unchangeable circumstances. The acceptance of reality is a vital component in accepting God, *kabbalas ol malchus shamayim*, accepting the yoke of Heaven. An angry person denies God, for he rejects the reality before him, which God willed to exist.

Chazal state that man expresses his nature “b’kaaso, b’kisso, u-b’koso; through anger, with his money, and in his drinking” [inebriation]. But this does not mean anger is the definition of a person. Chazal state that one should wait three days to appease an offended friend. [This means that the friend’s anger is not truly the definition of who he is, as he returns to his true self after the anger abates. Anger and the true person are two separate things.] Anger is a defense and therefore a negation; what is negative cannot be part of the personality, which is a positive thing.

... AND REPENT ONE DAY BEFORE YOUR DEATH.

The soul is judged by its state immediately preceding death. Thus, one whose soul loves and desires Torah, survives physical death. This is because as the next world is solely an experience of wisdom, the soul partakes of that experience. But if the soul's desire is for physical pleasure it cannot endure in the World to Come. This is not a punishment, but merely a natural result. Tosfos maintain that a soul can be a compound element: one part that loves the good and one part that does not. God purifies this type of soul through a painful process of separating its elements. As part of this specific soul is attached to the physical desires, this soul cannot yet partake of the World to Come, for it is not in a pure state. The concept of Gehenam (hell) is this very purification process. But the purification can only detach the pure part of the soul from the corrupted part. However, it cannot increase the pure part's attachment to the good; life is over and mitzvos do not exist in the World to Come. Therefore, there is no opportunity to improve the soul in the future world. The only time that we have control over the structure of our inner nature is on Earth. Great minds including the Gra said this. The gemara too equates this life and the World to Come to Friday and Shabbos respectively:

*He who took trouble [to prepare] on the eve of Shabbos can eat on Shabbos, but he who has not troubled on the eve of Shabbos, what shall he eat on Shabbos? (Avoda Zara 3a).*

[The talmud equates preparing for Shabbos to preparing for the World to Come: all preparations exist on Earth alone.]

Maimonides did not accept that such a purification process exists. What we see is that Klal Yisrael accepted Tosfos' approach of purification after death. This is embodied in the eleven-month recital of the Kaddish. [This indicates a hope for improvement of the deceased's soul.] There are also many gemaras that side with Tosfos. One source states that although Elisha ben Avuya denied the essence of Torah, he had a share in the World to Come. This is because he was in Gehenam for a period of time and this removed his defects. I would hope that Tosfos are correct, as this offers man a chance to attain the World to Come. But if Maimonides is correct, we have no chance [if one sinned to that degree].

But let us return to the original question as to what comprises one's true personality: is it the personality of anger, or the personality that did not exist at the time of anger?

There exist two underlying personalities. One is the yetzer hara, the instincts. This part contains defenses used to conceal the instincts. When one gets angry, the defens-

es are dropped and the instincts are revealed in their true, raw form. One's internal structure is revealed. But the Torah does not lose hope for man. The instincts are but one part of man; there is yet a deeper part. This is the part that seeks what is good and partakes of wisdom; it is the soul, the Tzelem Elohim.

Thus, when one is angry, he reveals his instinctual structure. But Judaism does not judge man solely by this part, for moments of instinctual flare-ups do not define man. Man possesses two parts to his personality and only his freewill will determine which part will prevail. The perfected person is aware of his instincts and of his defenses. He controls his instincts, but simultaneously does not fool himself into thinking he is as righteous as he presents himself to others.

It is important to distinguish the instinctual man who hides his raw emotions from others, to gain from them and not turn them off with crudeness, from the perfected man who appears similar, as he too contains his instincts. The latter displays an instinctual control based on his love of the good, while the former manipulates others to achieve selfish desires.

It is appropriate to mention another important point. Although emotionally sophisticated, the idea of evil is a human construct that doesn't exist as perceived. When we think of evil, it arouses a certain feeling—we conjure images of an

“evil man.” This emotion of evil, strictly speaking, is not derived from reality—it does not exist outside of our imagination. This feeling of evil is derived from our own feelings regarding our desires, from feelings about ourselves. Evil is a misguided attempt to achieve the good, as the attainment of what is “good” is what drives us all. Therefore, the idea of “evil” that we project onto others is false. When Samuel killed Agag he did not torture him as one might do based on an “evil” view of that king. Samuel simply slew him without any viciousness. It was not an emotional reaction. Samuel viewed Agag’s choices as an unfortunate distortion of his attempt to obtain “his” idea of a good.

If a person can live as Samuel, he will raise the level of his ideas and performances between himself and others. For if one realizes his friend is searching for the good just as he is, this attitude will help correct any of his anger or his hate toward his friend. If one internalizes Samuel’s lesson, he will be more forgiving of others’ shortcomings, which will foster greater love. He will appreciate that his friend struggles with the same conflicts as he does.

The emotions or anger one expresses toward his friend for his friend’s shortcomings are in fact projections of the person’s own failures. [A person finds fault with his friend only for specific character flaws, while accepting others because those scrutinized traits are possessed by the person himself.

Since self-blame is difficult, one attacks another who shares his very flaws for he needs to express his disapproval somehow. This is a form of projection.]

If one can appreciate that his friend struggles with the same conflicts that he faces, it will alleviate friction and hostility and mend breaches of identification. It will break down one's air of superiority and engender his tolerance and appreciation for others. This awareness and acceptance of others will reduce tension and stress among peers. Thereby, one attains a more peaceful life.

The quote, "Repent one day before your death" is based on a philosophical principle: One's actions [throughout life] really do not matter. What matters is the soul's state the moment before it departs from this world. Repentance works both ways. If one regrets all his mitzvos, feeling that all that time could have been spent in physical enjoyments, he forfeits all his mitzvos as if they were never performed. [At the end of this sorrowful person's life, his soul was not attached to the good.]

It turns out that the objective of people's entire lives is that the soul is in a certain state just before death. This is quite a strange outlook on life. All the commentators agree: "Repent one day before your death. But as one does not know whether he will die today or tomorrow, he will spend all of his days in repentance." But is this truly Judaism's philosophy?

The main [divine] providence is to assist man in perfection: “Anyone who comes to purify himself is assisted” (Shabbos 104a). This is the essence of providence. But what type of advice is this, to repent a day before one’s death? Furthermore, what type of repentance would this be? We cannot say it is a high level of repentance. Maimonides agrees (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:1). Repentance from the fright of one’s imminent death is not performed for the best reasons.

This is difficult advice. Is one supposed to live each day with the gloom of death hanging over his head? And what of the essence of the World to Come—Torah study? One cannot obtain that in one day; it takes a lifetime to become a Torah scholar. How can we say that all of life is lived only so that one repents the day before death?

The answer is that perfection comprises two matters. One matter is positive attachments. The idea of what is good in life differs between people who are perfect and people who are imperfect. The perfect person has a different value system from others, where Torah study is at the core. Through wisdom, the soul realizes principles and values that are truly good. The soul is then attracted to this good. But as man is a combination of both intellect and instincts simultaneously, there is another attraction to instinctual gratification. Man is torn in two directions. In his Guide, Maimonides says, “The moment before this wise man dies he reaches the high-

est level of perfection.” Why is this perfection limited to this moment? This is because there is only one time in life when the emotions lose their attraction, and that is on the day of death. This explains why the mishna says, “Repent a day before your death.” People think in terms of the “day” of death. There is a great difference [in the state of mind] between one whose execution is today and another person who is executed tomorrow.

As Maimonides says, the wise man reaches his highest level on the day of his death. At that moment, he becomes a unified being [his instincts cease to operate as he is wholly driven toward what is truly good.] Chazal say that what prevents one from accepting one’s day of death is his fantasy of immortality. Without this fantasy, one could have the realization that he might die soon. This very possibility of death can loosen one’s hold on the drive toward instinctual gratification. In that state, one would live his days in perfection because the good that his intellect identifies attracts the soul and he would not chase the instincts. [By removing the immortality fantasy, one can attain the state of mind as if he is living his last day. This realization perfects man.] Maintaining this state of mind, man would then live as a more complete person his entire life.

“Repent one day before your death” does not refer literally to one day. It means that man should have this perspective

every day, that he should always live without a fantasy of immortality, and he should abandon the pursuit of instinctual gratification. By instinctual gratification (taivah) we refer not only to the gross and base drives, but to everything other than knowledge of God. As Maimonides says, “Nothing lasts forever except the knowledge of the Creator” (Hilchos Mezuzah 6:13). Knowledge of God is the only thing that possesses real existence. Therefore, even one who spent his life developing an invention is considered as having followed his instincts and not studying God. For the development of an invention can be just another emotional drive seeking fame or success. [It is not a search for the knowledge of God, which is the purpose of creation and human existence.]

Taivah has many forms aside from eating, drinking, and intercourse. Even wisdom can be subsumed under the heading of taivah, if, for example, one studies astronomy to achieve a high grade and not to realize truths about God’s universe.

#### RABBI ELIEZER’S THREE PRINCIPLES: A RELATIONSHIP?

Now that we have explained Rabbi Eliezer’s three principles, can we determine a relationship between them? To reiterate, one must love his friend’s honor as much as his

own, one must not be quick to anger, and one must repent a day before his death.

Every person must work within his own subjective nature; one must focus on certain principles and ideals relevant to his own perfection. One will not follow these three principles due to an emotional block. With his three principles, Rabbi Eliezer unveils three emotional blocks, which, if conquered, can enable one's progress toward perfection.

We previously stated that honor is not for the individual, but for the species. Valuing God's human species that can reach heights of intelligence, one will view others as worthy of honor, equal to oneself. [In this manner, egotistical honor is not the focus, rather honor for the creature possessing intelligence, an honor truly for the Creator. Therefore, there is no competition, and harmony is fostered.]

The principle of loving your friend's honor like your own seeks to correct the infantile desire to be the "favorite." This emotion is expressed in many ways. After experiencing a heart attack, one actor said, "I thought I was one of nature's favorites." [He felt privileged and thought he would be immune to health problems.] This need to be the favorite is the childish emotion of sibling rivalry, where one seeks to be the sole object of parental love. It is one of the most powerful emotions.

Another expression of this emotion is the desire for unique

acquisitions. People purchase “limited edition” merchandise that caters to an exclusive and “favorite” feeling about oneself. Many of man’s actions are driven by this fantasy to be the favorite.

People also feel that they are God’s favorite; this is a powerful force and has many different manifestations. Most people are driven toward success not for material objectives such as wealth, rather, they seek wealth and acquisitions to substantiate their feeling that they are the favorite. This is man’s primary motivation, explaining why the drive for success is endless. If people chased success solely for financial security, a certain amount of wealth is all that’s needed, and then one should cease working. But as the drive for success is in fact the drive to be the favorite, there is no end: “I am not yet sufficiently favored.” “I must rise above others to remain the favorite.” [Such concerns do not allow one to rest.] The quest for success, i.e., becoming the favorite, is endless.

There is yet another expression of this need to be the favorite and it is quite powerful: anti-Semitism. What about the Jew do others hate? It is his “chosen” status. [God selected the Jews and no others to receive his Torah.] The worst nightmare for one seeking God’s favoritism is when someone else is made the favorite. Therefore, whenever favoritism is detected, people are filled with rage and hatred. And the Jews have reaped the worst animosity. One psychologist

said, “Three thousand years ago, the Jews proclaimed themselves as the Chosen People, and ever since then, the world has acted with complete belief.” I believe this to be the root of anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, the Jew sometimes fans the flames of hatred toward himself. The Jew may be blameless for the level of the effects of anti-Semitism, as justice does not warrant the severity of anti-Semitism’s wrath. But he is not blameless for inciting the emotion in others. This does not mean that if the Jew was uninvolved, that anti-Semitism would subside. It means the Jew sometimes causes flare-ups; he is ostentatious and expresses a false sense of superiority. This explains the formation of exclusive clubs where “No Jews are allowed.” This exclusivity is a direct response to the Jews’ chosen status: “We are the favorites in this club; the Jew is not.”

Chazal state that “Sinai” derives its name from the Hebrew “sina,” meaning “hatred.” It was God’s selection of the Jews at Mount Sinai, where he gave his Torah to the Jews, that anti-Semitism found its roots. If it weren’t for the Jew receiving the Torah, anti-Semitism wouldn’t prevail, or at least to the level in which it is expressed.

The Torah is the problem as it ties the Jews directly to God, and it is a realistic system of wisdom. [Other people sense its value.] What is worse is the Jews’ conviction in the Torah. The most disturbing aspect for the Gentile is the Jews’

conviction that he is the favorite. This impregnability about his status as favorite is unbearable for the Gentile. Failed attempts to missionize Jews toward Christianity intensified anti-Semitism because Gentiles sensed the Jews' inner conviction in Torah. The Gentiles' need to be the favorite found no success when confronting the Jew, and this fueled anti-Semitism from Sinai and throughout the ages.

Again, the Jew should not be ostentatious, but instead, reiterate Abraham's sentiment, "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). The story of Joseph and his brothers depicts quite well the dynamics of favoritism. Once Joseph was favored by his father Jacob, the brothers' sibling rivalry was kindled, just as the Jews receipt of the Torah kindled Gentile hatred.

This explains Rabbi Eliezer's first principle of loving your friend's honor like your own. He wished to expose this fantasy of favoritism, which prevents such love.

#### DO NOT BE QUICK TO ANGER.

This addresses the infantile emotion that reality must conform to one's personal desires. Children throw temper tantrums and fits, and adults express this frustration with anger. [The solution is not to vent anger, but to accept that reality does not operate for "you."]

# REPENT ONE DAY BEFORE YOUR DEATH.

The third emotion one must control is the fantasy of immortality.

These three principles summarize most of man's desires. Anger is the demand to fulfill one's wishes. Favoritism is another core desire; it is the ego expressed in relation to others. The third is the feeling of permanence—immortality. This is not a relative emotion, but an ego expression regarding the self, irrelevant to others. It is important to understand that shattering the immortality fantasy is beneficial only in the context of one's attachment to the good. If one lives in reality, then it is beneficial to "repent one day before one's death." But otherwise, shattering this fantasy can lead to depression. The perfected person has a direction toward which he can channel his energies. But otherwise, if the fantasy of immortality is shattered, one has no direction for his energies and this will depress him.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Now that we understand Rabbi Eliezer's prescription for perfection, how do we implement these principles? One way is through recognizing their reality through wisdom. Wis-

dom has an effect on a person. Previously, we cited astronomers as an example; they think little of themselves. The reality of the cosmos causes the astronomer to view himself as minute by comparison. We can identify this method of implementation as external phenomena. Studying reality causes one's childish emotions to lose significance. This is an important step toward perfection. Knowledge helps one devalue his infantile emotions. [Reality registers with a person as far more valuable than emotional desires.]

In contrast, the rasha feels convinced that his emotions dictate reality. This certitude is expressed in the personality of the gambler. He's convinced that his feeling that he will win will actually dictate reality to favor him. When Hitler, may his name be blotted out, started losing battles, he imagined he was on the brink of victory. But when a person increases his wisdom and perfection, these types of emotional conditions based on personal fantasies begin to fade. [And when this occurs and one sees that what he valued is now exposed as fallacy, his convictions in other emotions benefit, as he questions their validity too. Ultimately, one by one, he stops following those fantasies as well.]

The second method of implementation is internal: introspection and honesty. Once one gains knowledge that his emotional attachments are false and harmful, he will abandon those emotions. He can either plow forward or he can

study that emotion and all its ramifications, including details of how it operated within his personality. This takes courage and is not easy. Not too many mortals have been able to accomplish this to a great degree.

These are the methods through which one can improve himself. If one wishes to feel he is “bigger” than the emotion, he will take a flight once he abandons the emotion [feeling satisfied in this small step toward perfection.] But if one wishes to make a real change himself, he will study in-depth the irrational part of his nature, understanding that knowledge of this emotion is just the beginning. If he is successful, he will echo King David’s words, “I am a worm and not a man” (Psalms 22:7). The writhing of the worm is dictated by instinctual law. He will equate his actions to the worm’s writhing; he too acted instinctually. His emotions will lose their grip and he will achieve greater perfection. The very realization of one’s nature causes the emotions to lose their hold to the greatest degree and he will arrive at a more perfect state. [With introspection, one can make an honest review of a given emotion and all its expressions. The realization of one’s various emotions and their expressions offers man the ability to apply his mind to understand how he operates. Once he identifies his emotions, they will naturally have far less influence and he can then direct his decisions and actions, using his mind to a far greater degree.]

BECOME WARM THROUGH THE FIRE OF THE  
CHOCHAMIM.

This is not one of Rabbi Eliezer's three principles, but Chazal included it as part of his worthy advice. The metaphor is that the chochamim are equated to fire. One wishes to approach a chocham to benefit from his wisdom, just as one wishes to gain warmth from a fire. But Rabbi Eliezer warns us that one who draws too close will burn.

Maimonides comments:

*One should not behave with chochamim with the same levity that one behaves with his friends. One should not be haughty with the chochamim by placing himself on par with them. And do not get too close to them, but your proximity should only be up to the point that they draw you close and stop your approach to them at the boundary that they stop you so they do not lose their impression of you, and their love will be converted to hate. And you will not obtain the benefit from them that you sought. This is similar to one who warms himself by the fire: If he remains at a distance, he enjoys the warmth. But if he is careless and draws too close, he is burned and the benefit becomes a damage.*

One who understands the chocham's personality will un-

derstand this statement. Unlike Moshe Rabbeinu, who was purely engaged in wisdom, other chochamim partake of the same personality traits as all people: they joke, they are friendly, and they are regular people with whom you can converse.

However, the chocham partakes of these traits to a limited degree. The core of the chocham is attached to a different area and is unseen by the average person. The chocham knows that others do not relate to his primary interests and therefore he keeps them to himself, explaining why others do not see this. And when a chocham relates to others he does so on their emotional level. However, this is merely a surface relationship and does not represent the chocham's true personality or true interest. Thus, as one sees the chocham partaking in his own interests and he sees he shares his personality, he can err by equating himself to the chocham. He will then attempt to forge a close relationship with the chocham. But since the chocham is not interested in the matters that most others engage in, and is intolerant of mundane talk and friendships, the person's attempts to draw close to the chocham will result in the chocham's abandonment of him. The initial casual friendship will turn into a disdain for the person. These are Maimonides' words, "He should stop at the boundary that the chocham sets for him." Since one doesn't know the chocham, he cannot determine

the nature of the relationship and must defer to the chocham to set the limits.

If, however, the person crosses the line and the chocham throws him out, it is not due to hatred of that person. The chocham throws one out [of the relationship] since his space was invaded. Such a mundane relationship forfeits the chocham's time with which he could engage in his love for wisdom. [The chocham's value to remain engaged in Torah forces him to terminate the mundane relationship.] The chocham is attached to the real good (Torah) and is obligated to spend his time in that good. He is never to sacrifice this good for anybody. Torah is the good for the chocham and for the world, for he teaches them only due to his dedication to his own study. To sacrifice Torah would be criminal. Therefore, the chocham has no choice but to evict one from his private life. This explains why the metaphor is fire: one is attracted to it, but one must set a boundary to avert harm.

What draws a person to the chocham is his wisdom, but one also desires to share a relationship with him, as he assumes he shares the same personality as the chocham, which is an arrogant notion. As this is false, the chocham will not tolerate such a relationship. One must realize that the chocham has many obligations and therefore one should not abuse his time with him or discuss mundane matters with him. In this manner, the chocham will maintain a relation-

ship with you and you will continue to gain from his wisdom. But if you cross the line and he throws you out, he may never take you back.

Pirkei Avos advises man in all areas of perfection. Therefore, in one's relationship with a chocham, Chazal advise us of the rational behavior. One must know the intelligent manner to be applied when approaching a chocham. Talmud Pesachim states, "If an ignorant person is nice to you, run away from him. And if a chocham is mean to you, stick by him." This is better for the person. [The chocham's ridicule will contain deep constructive criticism. The ignorant person says nothing of value.] All relationships, like all phenomena, must be approached with wisdom.

Maimonides continues:

*Don't think if you overstepped your bounds that you can appease him later, for the chocham does not accept appeasement. (Other translations say, "Don't think you can fool the chocham.")*

There are two reasons that the chocham does not accept appeasement. One reason is based on need: people in general desire relationships and therefore forgive those who have offended them. This does not apply to the chocham, who is typically a very independent person. He is independent

because man's dependencies stem from his distance from reality. If a person were in line with reality, he would be free, secure, and independent.

How does one attempt to achieve independence? First, one caters to the fantasy that X, Y, and Z are required to secure independence. Then, he strives to obtain X, Y, and Z. But a typical person is distorted regarding his true needs, and as he progresses toward obtaining matters that cannot provide independence (i.e., X, Y, and Z), he veers further from achieving his goal of independence. Instead of uprooting that pursuit, his mission to obtain X, Y, and Z reinforces his dependence.

To clarify, if one is insecure about his health, he might start a large family and treat his family members well, so that as he ages he has many loving relatives to care for him. Or he will amass much wealth to pay for the best doctors. But in reality there is no security: one lives alone and dies alone. No one can secure him against this. The more one tries to conquer his insecurities, the more he caters to his emotions. Since the emotions cannot be satisfied in reality, he remains insecure. Therefore, he is always subject to appeasement. Even the greatest king, no matter how independent he thinks he is, relies on his subjects, without whom there is no kingdom.

But the chocham is different—he accepts reality. His

emotions conform to reality and he is very satisfied with his lot in life. His needs are minimal, as Maimonides says, “Air is everywhere and free, water is plentiful, and the necessary foods are more readily found and cheaper than less-needed foods” (Guide, book III, chap. XII). The chocham lives minimally; he doesn’t need to work that much. Thereby, he continues with his studies. He is the definition of a secure person. He is happy. Maimonides explains that he is happy with very little because he is not looking for anything more. His essence is bound up with higher enjoyments. Since he wants nothing more, he cannot be appeased with anything.

Maimonides cites the story of Aram’s general Naaman:

*Naaman was smitten with leprosy. He asked the prophet Elisha for a cure. Elisha told him to immerse himself seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman said Damessek’s waters were better and that this advice was nonsensical. But Naaman’s subject advised him to follow Elisha’s advice, so he did, and he was cured. Naaman thanked Elisha profusely and left his idolatrous lifestyle [seeing that the Jewish God was the true God].*

*Naaman offered Elisha gifts but he refused to accept them. Gehazzi was Elisha’s subordinate, and upon seeing all that Naaman offered, Gehazzi was enticed to obtain those gifts. Gehazzi chased after*

*Naaman and Naaman saw him approaching and stopped. Naaman asked Gehazzi what he sought, and Gehazzi replied that he wished to accept his gifts. Naaman gave Gehazzi the gifts and Gehazzi returned to Elisha. Elisha inquired of Gehazzi where he went. He tried to lie. Elisha said, "Was not my heart there with you when you accepted the gifts?" Gehazzi could not answer. Elisha replied, "You will now be cursed with the leprosy of Naaman."*

Why did Maimonides cite this story? He wished to teach two lessons. First, he taught that Elisha was beyond appeasement. Second, Maimonides taught that Gehazzi could not fool Elisha. The chocham (Elisha) knows the nature of one who is not a chocham (Gehazzi). The chocham views others based on their psychological forces. Therefore, a chocham cannot be fooled. But others can be fooled if they have a need for another person or because they are ignorant of reality, which includes human nature. And man is most susceptible to being fooled if he's being flattered, for one wishes to believe the compliments he receives.

There are two reasons a chocham cannot be appeased: 1) He needs nothing and 2) He has keen knowledge of human nature. It is the chocham's security and knowledge that make him difficult to deal with throughout time, for the chochamim were never subject to appeasement or compromise.

While he was yet an ignorant man, Rabbi Akiva said, “Give me a talmid chocham and I will bite him like a donkey bites” [a donkey’s bite breaks through to the bone]. Rabbi Akiva said this, since a talmid chocham is uncompromising. [This agitates people seeking to get their way.] A talmid chocham’s knowledge prevents him from changing his position without cause.

One must be careful in his relationship with the chocham, for he perceives a different reality than others do. At times, that which one does not deem important, a chocham will view as crucial. Gechazzi saw nothing wrong with accepting Naaman’s gifts. But he lacked an in-depth understanding of psychology. Elisha knew that by accepting any gift from Naaman, Naaman’s energy would have an outlet and he would no longer feel indebted to Elisha. But Elisha desired that Naaman remain with that feeling of indebtedness so that Elisha might use Naaman later for constructive purposes. [Without any feeling of debt, Naaman might not comply.]

Thus, one must not violate a chocham’s words since he perceives reality differently than how others do. Gechazzi’s punishment was due to his failure to respect Elisha’s wisdom. Gechazzi should have determined that and realized that Elisha’s refusal to accept Naaman’s gift was based on sound reasoning and important considerations; Gechazzi should have deferred to Elisha’s wisdom.

FOR THEIR BITE IS THE BITE OF A FOX, AND  
THEIR STING IS THE STING OF A SCORPION,  
AND THEIR HISS IS THE HISS OF A SERPENT.

Maimonides and Rabbeinu Yona agree: there is no way to  
appease the chocham.

... AND ALL OF THEIR WORDS ARE LIKE BURN-  
ING COALS.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Do not argue about their words and say, "I  
[too] have knowledge and I will offer defi-  
nitions [svaros] like the chochamim." But  
[you should be concerned that] wisdom is  
not in your hand, lest you are mistaken in  
your argument. As their words are chosen  
and there is sharpness in the burning wis-  
dom that is inside of them.*

A person might arrive at the same conclusions as the cho-  
cham. But the source of the conclusion differs between the  
average person and the chocham. The average person might  
conclude similar to the chocham; perhaps his emotions are  
in line with that conclusion. Or, he simply might have stum-  
bled upon the correct answer. Thereby, one can fool himself  
into thinking that he is on same level as the chocham.

The phrase "burning wisdom that is inside of them" means

that the chocham's internal world differs from others. The chocham is stubborn regarding the truth. He is dedicated to the truth with a tenacity that keeps him immovably fastened to it. He has a constant burning desire and attachment to objective reality. This quality makes the chocham valuable to people seeking his advice. Unlike the chocham, the person who does not have a constant burning desire for understanding what is absolutely true has a small chance of grasping reality. The average person's thinking is based on emotions and is incomparable to the chocham. The chocham is drawn to the truth and reality for no other reason than the fact that it is reality.

It is a mistake to equate the chocham to oneself based solely on the chocham's advice that might reflect one's own conclusions. The value of the chocham is not due to the external matters [his advice], but it is due to his internal makeup. He may have avoided many possibilities in his fiery exploration and keen analysis and deliberation on a given question. Relying on the chocham's advice, one has the best chance of following what is true and real and what is in line with reality, so as to be successful. However, if one relies on his own thinking and he is not a chocham, he will have a large chance of meeting with failure after failure.

Rashi comments:

*What is the bite of the fox? The fox has deep and thin teeth. Its bite is worse than that of other beasts. The scorpion injects venom from its tail. The snake has fangs in his mouth. All of these metaphors indicate the inevitable harm one suffers by transgressing the chocham's words.*

One way or the other (bite, venom, sting, etc.) one will be harmed. One is ignorant of the ill effects of violating the chocham. These various animals refer to the many possible harms one suffers when violating Chazal. [His violation of the chocham is a neglect of reality. One must suffer harm when not functioning according to the design of human nature and the external world, what we call “objective reality.”]

Rashi continues:

*“All their words are burning coals”: Even the lightest of the lightest of their words, like a person who breaks down Chazal's fences (protective guards), like seclusion with a single woman. For a woman is typically menstrual, but the chochamim decreed one must not seclude himself even with a woman who is pure.*

Rashi makes recourse to the phrase Chazal use especially regarding a decree that is easy to observe, “One who breach-

es a fence, a snake will bite him.” What is the phenomenon of making a breach? It is a quantitatively minor damage. But the true damage is the quality [actuality] of the breach; the quantity is irrelevant. Once the fence has even a minute weakness, it is subject to penetration and collapse.

When evaluating Chazal’s decrees, people are shortsighted. In the framework of the decree, the violation seems negligible. People fail to see the full picture and grasp all ramifications had the decree never been established. The decree was established to “close the gate” and secure the entire system. The breach is not in one insignificant area, but a breach of the entire system of halacha.

Why does Rashi use the case of seclusion with a single woman? And why does he refer to it as the “lightest of the light?” Seclusion is far removed from the sexual prohibitions; it is unrelated to sex with a menstruating woman. But it is a guard against the entire institution of sexual infractions. Once this is violated, all infractions are subject to violation.

Being bitten by a snake refers to an unexpected harm—a snake sneaks up with stealth, bites a person and kills him. One who breaks down Chazal’s fences will be caught by surprise as he violates more severe prohibitions. Thus, when Chazal established decrees, they viewed the entire system of halacha, unlike an average person who does not view the

large picture.

This explains why mitzvos are so important. Even if one excuses himself by saying, “My concentration is not so good, it is difficult to remain focused on davening, so skipping davening is not so bad,” he doesn’t break just one law, but the entire system is now violated and is subject to destruction. A person must be concerned about two matters: the benefit from halacha as an individual, and upholding the complete system. Therefore, in terms of determining whether or not to fulfill a law, one’s personal gain from any given mitzvah is irrelevant. One must perform every mitzvah and every rabbinic decree for the sake of preserving the entire halachic system for himself and for others.

#### ONE WHO VIOLATES THE WORDS OF THE CHOCHAMIM IS WORTHY OF DEATH.

This means that one devalues the chochamim’s words. What is the severity? The greatest crime in Judaism is to have an incorrect opinion of Chazal. This prevents a person from accepting a rebbe for himself, and furthermore, he is completely subject to his emotions. The entire Torah depends on Chazal.

Maimonides says that Chazal did not publicize the reasons behind their decrees. For had they done so, people would reject a decree as inapplicable to themselves. If, for example, Chazal

decreed that a person must recite the Shima before eating “because if he eats first, he’ll get tired and forget to recite the Shima,” someone considering that reasoning might say that he’s different and does not need to follow this decree. Thereby, he would reject this decree. There is no chance the person would accept that he is like everyone else and he will tire and forget to recite the Shima. With his justification of eating before reciting the Shima, this person must devalue Chazal—it is impossible not to do so. The only safeguard are Chazal’s words, “One who violates the words of the chochamim is worthy of death.” Undermining the chochamim is tantamount to denying the Torah. Therefore, this person is worthy of death. Belittling a rabbinic decree is the nucleus of the Conservative movement. Their sentiment is, “It’s only a rabbinic law.” Now they violate even Torah laws and do not observe Shabbos. And it all started with that sentiment.

The Rav clarified the words, “One who violates the words of the chochamim is worthy of death.” He says this does not mean literal death, as is the punishment for a Shabbos violation. It means that since one must devalue Chazal when ignoring their degrees, he is on the path towards that which is punishable with death. The decree of eating before saying Shima or davening is not punishable with death, but if one carries out this emotion to the nth degree, he will reach the state of deserving death.

## 2:11 FRUSTRATIONS

RABBI YEHOShUA SAYS: “THE EVIL EYE, THE EVIL INCLINATION, AND HATRED OF PEOPLE REMOVE A PERSON FROM THE WORLD.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Evil eye refers to one who is not satisfied with his lot. He eyes his friend who is wealthier than himself. He says, “When will I become as rich as him?” and causes evil to himself and to his friend.*

It is interesting that Rabbeinu Yona quotes the scientists of his day and not Chazal. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*This thought destroys his body because it drains his spirit and it abbreviates his life.*

Chazal did not say that all troubles affect one’s longevity, but this trouble does.

Maimonides comments:

*The evil inclination refers to abundant desire.*

Why should much desire shorten man’s life? Chazal say it is not desire per say that shortens man’s life, but it is “abun-

dant” desire. Chazal recognized that a certain degree of desire takes on a new quality.

Rashi comments:

*Hatred of people means baseless hatred.*

This refers to one who hates people for no external reason but because of his internal makeup.

Rabbi Yehoshua reviewed these three ideas daily. Chazal repeated certain ideas to prevent themselves from distorting reality.

Maimonides speaks about hatred, calling it “the soul’s evil”:

*This is the illness of bitterness and blackness, which causes one to despise what he sees; he will hate others and prefers to live with animals alone in the desert and in the woods. And he will select an uninhabited location. And these people do this not due to separation for purposes of perfection, but due to their bad desires and envy of others, and this will kill him for he will become sick and die before his time.*

Here, Maimonides identifies the hermit. The reason one lives this way is because he cannot tolerate identification with others, as it pains him. [Identification is a platform for

comparison.] Seeing that he does not have what others possess is distressing to him. The lifestyle of a hermit helps him to block out others and avoid this stress. But even in his isolation the hermit suffers. He has no escape.

What is significant about these three things that they destroy man? The evil eye personality is disturbed to see someone else obtain what he has not. He feels that God has favored the other person. His entire life is an attempt to become what that favored person is. It is a constant pain without end that gnaws at the hermit at all moments. This is the meaning of “being removed from the world.” He spends his life in this inherent frustration without satisfaction. This destroys man.

#### ABUNDANT DESIRE

There are two elements to desire: 1) the gratification, which is real and which man needs, and 2) the fantasy, which is the element that man seeks but which the object of his desire does not offer. This explains why once man satisfies his urge, he sets out to satisfy himself once again, for he did not find his fantasy in his physical gratification. He imagined the satisfaction would offer [not only the real sensual pleasure, but also] extreme happiness, and when it

does not, he seeks that fantasy in his next pursuit.

As man is a physical and psychological being, there always exists the fantasy part of the desires, along with the real sensual urge. This combination always exists. There is a balance between the fantasy and the reality. If a person functions within a certain range, he can have a good life. However, if one's fantasy becomes the primary drive behind his search for satisfying his desires, this person will endure frustration. The relationship between the realistic satisfaction and fantasy is broken, leading this person to invest extreme amounts of energies into this area. Extreme energies and extreme frustrations create misery. This is the meaning of "abundant desire." A person can tolerate a certain amount of disappointment, pain, and frustration. But at a certain point, as in this case, the level of frustration exceeds tolerable levels and one becomes miserable. This extreme level of seeking too much fantasy is an obsession.

## HATRED

One typically hates others due to a projection onto others of one's own shortcomings, or one can blame others for his problem. Hatred has many causes, but at the root of hatred is one's inability to identify with others on a basic level; he

feels inherently different.

One's present hatred stems from an unconscious hatred from one's past of which he is not in control. It is expressed toward everyone, and there is a pattern in the person's reasons for his hatred of everyone. [The fact that one hates everyone, and for similar reasons, indicates that the person—and not others—is the cause of this hatred.] The person is convinced that his reasons for hating others are grounded in reality. But his hatred is truly due to his inner frustrations and past hatreds, which were never related to reality.

All three of Rabbi Yehoshua's principles refer to attitudes that relate to reality in a distorted fashion. One attitude is an abundant desire where one is obsessive. Then there exists a fantasy hatred, which means the person possesses an inherent hatred that is unrelated to reality [without provocation from those whom he hates.] Therefore, he hates everybody.

Chazal teach that man suffers from three types of frustrations. A person can be frustrated because another person is more fortunate than he is; "God favors him more than me." This is the "evil eye," the dissatisfied personality. One can also be frustrated regarding instinctual gratification; this is expressed through obsession. And the third type of frustration is regarding hatred, which everyone possesses unconsciously. When man's frustrations reach a certain point, he becomes miserable. Chazal teach that there is a quantitative

level of frustration that, when exceeded, leads to a qualitatively different and miserable life. Rabbi Yehoshua isolated the primary frustrations with which people deal.

We notice that Rabbi Yehoshua did not suggest the source of these frustrations, or how to remove them. One clue is that Rabbi Yehoshua would review the truths of these three attitudes daily. He did so as he felt an awareness of these frustrations reduces and removes them. When one recognizes an emotion or frustration, he frees his mind from its control. Chazal teach that when the emotions overtake the mind, the mind and the emotions become one. Then there is no “person” aside from the emotions; there is no thinking being that can choose not to follow the emotional urges. [Man is then akin to an animal, which compulsively follows its instincts, for it has no other faculty determining its behavior.]

Rabbi Yehoshua’s lesson is when one thinks about these emotions on a daily basis he begins to recognize that he possesses another part to his nature—his intellect—that perceives the emotions and understands that they are irrational and do not conform to reality. [Man’s observation of his emotions through his intellect awakens him to a realization that something other than emotion exists inside himself. For man can perceive his emotions only because he possesses another faculty performing this perception; the emotions

cannot perceive themselves. This faculty—the intellect—possesses the ability to perceive, evaluate, make judgments, and change man’s behavior. Perception, evaluation, and judgment are unique to the intellect and are absent in the emotions. Thereby, man learns the greater value of his intellect as compared to his emotions.] Man is equipped to reject his previous opinion that all that exists are his feelings and nothing else. Knowledge of his intellect offers man the possibility to follow that part of his nature to determine his behavior. This frees him from compulsively following his desires. He now has a choice. This step develops the person into a higher level being where he can step away from these emotions. [He and his emotions are now two separate entities, unlike one who is blind to his emotions and is directed by their every impulse.] Thus, the method through which man frees himself from his emotions is through knowledge and wisdom.

Why are these three areas the only frustrations? Psychologists would say that since the child’s conflicts are with his father, he views his father as the fortunate one, thereby developing his evil eye. There is also a certain hatred toward a father, which develops into his hatred toward man. And then there is the innate drive for pleasure. This covers all three areas mentioned in our mishna. I do not suggest this is Rabbi Yehoshua’s thought; I mention this as a side point.

The mishna can be divided into three parts. The yetzer hara represents the animalistic desires. The evil eye exists because such a person doesn't live in the world of reality regarding his desires: His desires are dictated by other people's possessions. And hatred is a frustrated aggression—it is a blame, an unconscious process that is quite harmful. These frustrations can “remove a person from the world.” If any of these attitudes are followed through to their natural conclusions, they will lead to total frustration. These three attitudes are found in everyone, explaining why Rabbi Yehoshua reviewed them every day.

Man is constructed as a creature of frustration. This is man's inherent design. All great thinkers throughout time recognized that man is unhappy and can never achieve his desires. While man gains conviction that a certain pursuit will lead to happiness, it in fact leads to frustration. One philosopher said, “Every enjoyment leads to one of two things: depression or another desire.” Chazal highlight this point here, but show the manifestation of the frustration. The first frustration comes from a person who does not live in the framework of his natural needs. There is a tremendous psychological need to follow the model of what others consider as the good. This drives people to spend their lives pursuing matters unfit for themselves. A person sees others attributing great value to a pricey car that they all purchase,

a car that the person may not even like. Regardless, he will toil to earn enough to purchase it. There is an unconscious standard that is set, even in the area of enjoyments. But this standard is artificial and it is not based on any reality that it provides happiness. One follows the standard (buying the new, pricey car) as he adopts this relative and competitive value system. And all such acquisitions become tools within this system. What guides this person is the competition regarding where he stands relative to others. He is driven to establish his status vis-à-vis the rest of the world. A decorator is another good example. A person should know what he likes and design his home accordingly. The decorator is hired because the person is searching for answers concerning what others like and not to satisfy himself. This comparative lifestyle drives most of humanity.

Then there are the desires that lead to depression or to chasing the next desire [as one did not gain happiness through chasing after his first desire.] And then there is hatred. King Solomon said, “Releasing a gush is the beginning of a quarrel...” (Proverbs 17:14). [With the smallest dam breach of mere drops, powerful destructive waters are unleashed. Man is the same; he possesses tremendous hatred that is released with the smallest justification.] A person will claim a reason for his hatred, but the degree of expressed hatred is incommensurate with the reason. This is because the

hatred is not in proportion to the accused person's actions, but in proportion to one's own frustrations.

Rabbi Yehoshua taught that man follows these three attitudes under the impression that if he could buy that car, satisfy that desire, or express this hatred, he would find satisfaction. Rabbi Yehoshua says that by following these attitudes to their natural conclusions, man will remove himself from the world. This is because frustrations increase as one increases his satisfactions and involvements. Therefore, it is wise to limit one's desires and terminate their satisfaction at a certain point so it does not destroy the person.

#### THE HUMAN DESIGN AND FRUSTRATION

Chazal say that man is a combination of an angel and an animal. Man is capable of becoming great because something happens to his instinctual nature that permits him to convert his instinctual energies into a higher form. Unlike the instincts of an animal, which are constantly developing, man's instincts reach a stage where they are blocked from [flowing toward] their original paths and desired objects, and therefore can be used [redirected] for a higher purpose. Had there been no instinctual blockage, man would remain instinctual. The blockage prevents the instincts from reach-

ing their goal of satisfaction. The instincts start seeking substitute forms of their original objects of desire. Now that the instincts seek substitutes and are no longer traveling in their natural patterns, they will never be satisfied. This is because whatever the instincts find as their new object of satisfaction, the imagination thinks it will enjoy it, for it thinks this is the object it truly seeks. But then the instincts sense dissatisfaction and frustration.

Had man not been constructed in this fashion, he would be purely animalistic, as all his instinctual forces would be satisfied. But because man is in fact designed in such a way where his instincts undergo a block in their satisfaction, man can attain a much higher level. Man can ponder concepts and thoughts and have certain inner experiences. This is because of the blockage of the instincts. But again, he also experiences frustration. The *talmid chocham* is the person who converts all his energies toward this higher level in his pursuit of wisdom. The average person who cannot direct all his energies to wisdom will always live a life of frustration. There is no other possibility.

Therefore, we question why God created man in this way, where most people will live a frustrating life. The only answer we have is what Maimonides said: God created the human species for that one person who reaches that level of wisdom and enjoys life fully. Thus, all of humanity is struc-

tured so that one [type of] person should appreciate God's wisdom.

But this view is not as dismal as it sounds. This view does not say that there is no hope for others, for the Torah says, "All of Israel has a share in the World to Come" (Sanhedrin 90a). In so far as the person perceives wisdom, he partakes of what is eternal. And in so far as one partakes of what is eternal, i.e., wisdom, his existence is eternal. Why then didn't Maimonides say that man was created in this design so we can all enjoy eternity, instead of saying man's design is for that one person? Maimonides means that God would not have created the human species had no member possessed the potential to achieve a totally fulfilling existence. God would not create man where every member experienced frustration, and where not one member could be fully satisfied. As God's actions are perfect, He creates only that which can achieve perfection and total bliss. The world was created for that person. Upon seeing the great joyous celebration during Succos at the Simchas Beis Hashoevah, Ben Zoma remarked, "All this is created for me." He knew himself, that he always possessed an inner joy, while all others did not. He knew that he was the one person living as God desired. [This was not an arrogant statement, but an intelligent observation and appreciation. Ben Zoma understood God's plan is for a person to achieve complete fulfillment

and happiness. He saw this in himself and not in others. His observation of God's plan in this case was no different from observing God's plan in any other area.]

This answers the question regarding why God created the human species: without this species' potential that a member could live in total bliss, the species would not be justified. But now that this species exists, other members can share in the World to Come. "All of Israel has a share in the World to Come." However, for all Israel, God would not create man; this warrants that someone doesn't simply earn the World to Come, but his life must be one of complete satisfaction, like Ben Zoma. Of course, Maimonides' answer is difficult as it tells most people that they are not that one individual who justified God's creation of the human species.

One philosopher wrote very beautifully about bitterness, envy, and egocentricity. He said, "If a person knew the enjoyment of perfection for even a few moments, he would abandon all his pettiness and envy. These matters would appear to him as futile." Ben Zoma perceived perfection and just how great human life could be. Maimonides quoted the prophets, that all of the prophets prophesied only about the Messianic Era, but regarding the World to Come, "No eye has seen it, O God, except for You alone" (Isaiah 64:3). This means that the great level of wisdom experienced in the World to Come is unfathomable. And even on Earth, people

do not have a perception of how great wisdom is. If a person possessed this understanding, all else would appear nonsensical. Maimonides said that as wisdom is the most blissful life, certainly a person would enjoy the World to Come. The life of wisdom exists within a psychological framework. But in the World to Come, when the soul is separated from the body, that enjoyment of wisdom is of a different nature.

The Jew has an important obligation to remove Gentiles from following fallacy. For the Jew who profanes God's name (*chillul Hashem*) by somehow disparaging the Torah or God, thereby turning Gentiles away from their chance to achieve perfection, it is as if he "destroyed worlds" (Chazal). The profanation of God is tantamount to destroying God's creatures, as all their lives are lost. After the Jews sinned by creating the Golden Calf and God threatened annihilation, Moshe pleaded with God on this very issue, "Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the Earth'" (Exod. 32:12). Moshe told God that if He were to kill the Jews for their sin, Egypt would gain a corrupt view of God's will. Moshe was concerned that all humanity achieve perfection, and false ideas about God would eliminate Egypt's chance for perfection. Had God killed the Jews, Moshe felt that Pharaoh would find support for his view that a religion so far from primitiv-

ism, which sublimates its instincts, cannot succeed. Moshe was concerned that Egypt too obtain the correct ideas. God intends that all people obtain the truth:

*See, I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the Lord my God has commanded me, for you to abide by in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people." For what great nation is there that has God so close at hand as is the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him? And what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this teaching that I set before you on this day? (Deut. 4:5-8)*

Abraham prayed to God to save Sodom if there were a certain number of righteous residents. A society that can tolerate ten righteous people is a different type of society, and it is worth saving. As Lot was saved, Abraham did not pray to save the righteous people, but to save the entire society. Abraham understood that there is a relationship between the society and the people who make up that society. Moshe and Bnei Yisrael also formed one group. When Moshe was raised to a higher level, all of Israel was saved.

In summary, Rabbi Yehoshua taught that each day one re-

quires an awareness of these inherent expressions of human frustration. This awareness guards these frustrations from getting out of control. Up to a point, satisfaction is attainable. But beyond that point there is an abyss where one can get too absorbed and it can destroy his personality.

## 2:12 JUSTICE, CHARACTER, AND MOTIVATION

RABBI YOSI SAYS: “THE MONEY OF YOUR FRIEND SHOULD BE AS DEAR TO YOU AS YOUR OWN. PREPARE YOURSELF TO STUDY TORAH, FOR IT IS NOT AN INHERITANCE FOR YOU. ALL OF YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN.”

On the words, “The money of your friend should be as dear to you as your own,” Rabbeinu Yona comments, “To fulfill the commands [instructions] of its owner.” What does Rabbeinu Yona add with his comment? And how can one care about his friend’s property in the same measure in which he cares about his own? It is uncommon for people to treat their friend’s property just like their own.

One's care for his friend's property must be in line with any particular emotional specification that his friend sets. The friend may express a particular capriciousness regarding his directions for your care of his possessions. Therefore, your treatment must conform to his caprice.

This statement highlights the recognition of justice. After a full analysis, we arrive at the concept that there is no justice without recognizing God. Justice dictates that people be treated equally. This demands that one care for his friend's property with the same care that he shows for his own property. Governmental justice is a system of mutual interest: one does not steal from another because it is practical not to retaliate and steal from someone. Even the constitutional "right" refers to a practical treatment of others, but it cannot determine if man has inherent rights. Governments do not dictate philosophies, they are relegated solely to legalities. But if there is a system where a person has inherent rights, one cannot mistreat another in any way. This is Judaism, which, in addition to legalities, is also a philosophical system that defines God-given human rights. Man's rights are as real as all other existences. As creator, God alone determines this. And if one does not treat his friend's possessions equal to his own, he denies God's will of human equality.

The only true justice must include God as the source of that system. If, however, one denies God, there is no possi-

bility for justice. Without God, any system of law or rights is completely arbitrary. Thus, Rabbi Yosi taught that one must reach the level of true justice.

Rabbeinu Yona's words "To fulfill the commands [instructions] of its owner" mean that since God gave every person rights to do with his possessions anything he wishes, when this person lends you his property, you must abide by his every detail. And if you do abide according to his every detail, this would show full respect and an adherence to God's will. Ethics do not exist without God.

#### PREPARE YOURSELF TO STUDY TORAH.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Prepare yourself with good character traits in order to learn Torah and attain the level of piety (chassidus).*

Perfection is a combination of intelligence and character. Rabbeinu Yona quotes Proverbs:

*"Wisdom is too lofty for a fool; he does not open his mouth in the gate. He who lays plans to do harm is called a schemer" (Prov. 24:7,8).*

Wisdom is unattainable for a fool. During intellectual debates, he will not open his mouth. “He does not open his mouth in the gate” means that in Torah, he is a fool. He cannot open his mouth as he never invested his energies in Torah study. The chocham may not have much innate intelligence, but his energies are always invested in wisdom.

Rabbeinu Yona says the second verse, “He who lays plans to do harm is called a schemer,” conveys that this fool is not stupid, rather he is sly. But his lack of interest in Torah causes him to become a fool. And this interest requires that at first one perfects his character. Character perfection is the only path leading to a true appreciation of wisdom. This is the meaning of “Prepare yourself to study Torah.”

A study found that extremely wealthy people possess certain character traits. The study discovered that this population spends many hours in their pursuits. But it is not, as they say, that the quantity of invested time is what results in wealth. In truth, the time invested reveals a high degree of dedication. These wealthy people don’t take time off or go on vacations. The average person seeking wealth is caught in a dilemma: he doesn’t care much for the pursuit of wealth but desires the results: vacations and luxurious living. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve that wealth. The wealthy person doesn’t desire the wealth, but rather he enjoys the activity of acquisition. This explains why he does not let up 24/7. It is a

strange phenomenon: those without wealth desire it and cannot acquire it, and those that have the wealth do not really care for it. Apparently, nobody enjoys money.

Regarding the person whose interests lie in a certain area and labors day and night, when an opportunity presents itself, he moves in and makes a killing. This success is a natural result of his interest and involvement. Similarly, this applies to Torah study. A person who is interested in perfection and treasures the pursuit of wisdom and ideas, is engaged in Torah day and night. It is a natural interest. There is no comparison of this type of person to one who must force himself to learn. The one who loves wisdom is always searching and he will therefore discover new ideas. [His mind is always exploring and, thus, he is open to recognizing new questions and answers. But without the mind's eye trained on this search, one cannot perceive the ideas that exist. If you don't look for something, you cannot find it.] Einstein said, "It is not that I am smarter, but that I stay with a problem longer."

The mishna teaches that if one is wise, he won't just sit down and open a gemara because he will not achieve that much. To truly gain wisdom, one must change his nature and improve his character. Then one will naturally desire wisdom and he will propel himself to the greatest heights of wisdom within his abilities. The Torah giants did not need

to set aside time to learn for they were always naturally engaged in it.

Perfection of character leads a person to recognize wisdom as the greatest interest and enjoyment humanly possible. What keeps one distant from Torah study are his flawed character traits and poor values. Once he is perfected, man naturally finds wisdom as the most rewarding activity. [As stated in an earlier mishna, poor character hurts one's perfection and Torah study, as such a person's energies are siphoned away from Torah toward nonsense. Thereby, less energies are available for perfection.]

The ba'alei mussar used to say, "If one has thirty minutes of free time each day, he should spend that time correcting his character (studying mussar). For then he will find he has more than thirty minutes." [People make excuses when it comes to addressing any difficulties in life. In the difficult process of perfecting oneself, one will discover his flaws include an aversion to improving his character and studying Torah, and this is the cause of his erroneous estimate of just thirty free minutes a day. Once perfected, that excuse of having very little time falls away and he finds he has many free hours.] Rabbeinu Yona takes this approach, as he says one must take time to correct his character. How can one perfect himself without taking off time to do so?

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*Also included in the preparation to learn Torah is the reduction of enjoyments, so one can learn much Torah.*

The enjoyments draw in a person, which removes his energies from Torah study. Thus, Rabbeinu Yona says that success in Torah requires character perfection. This is the perfection of the “machinery.” Then one must prepare his “conditions.” By minimizing one’s pleasures, he makes greater energy available for Torah.

Maimonides comments on “Prepare yourself to study Torah”:

*It is impossible that one is born with good qualities or bad qualities, just as it is impossible that one is born as a certain craftsman from any of the forms of work. However, a person can be born with certain traits that lend themselves to certain skills (Eight Chapters, chap. 8).*

For example, one can be born with good dexterity and this will lend itself to the person’s excellence at carpentry. The trait is natural, but he must learn the skill.

Reading Maimonides’ words, one can overlook a very important idea. Maimonides had a different idea than others of a high-level individual (ba’al ma’aleh). Others viewed this character as one who is naturally kind or naturally good. But

Maimonides' view is that a high-level individual, or a person who is lacking, depends on his wisdom. This explains his words, "One is not born with a good or bad quality."

What is a high-level person? This refers to a skilled individual, one adept at directing his soul in the proper manner. According to Maimonides, a person may have been born with certain character traits, but he is not born as a high-level person; the latter is an achievement, the former is a natural tendency. Herein lays the difference in the definition of a tzaddik. Others suggest he is naturally inclined toward perfection, while Maimonides says that traits are naturally inborn, while the decisions of how to direct one's traits and energies are learned. This is perfection, which is an accomplishment and not a trait. Perfection is defined as one who directs the raw materials of his nature towards what is best for man.

Once a person is perfect, he will not recognize his original plans with which he started out on his path toward perfection. As Maimonides says, the perfected man is not the same man he was. The prophet also says this regarding people when they prophesied: "...And he prophesied with them and became a different man" (I Samuel 10:6). Why is a prophet a different person? It is because when one reaches that level, every natural emotion and feeling he once had—even regarding what perfection is—leaves him completely. He now

sees everything in a totally different light, in a manner that he himself at the commencement of his goal never imagined. Thus, perfection is an accomplishment [and not an in-born trait.]

Rabbeinu Yona explains that one must not think that if he comes from a family of Torah scholars, that he too will become one without any effort. Money can be inherited but Torah cannot. Rabbeinu Yona means that Torah requires an attitude of submission and prostration before the world of wisdom. Without this prerequisite, one can never acquire wisdom. Chazal say that wisdom is not simple and that it is the most valuable matter. They gave all this advice because they knew that acquiring wisdom is not simple. This idea that wisdom cannot be inherited means that there is a required attitude; one must feel he is absolutely nothing. The person who came from a family of Torah scholars should not look at himself as any more privileged than others. If a person feels he has inherited some advantage, he will fail at Torah. [Feeling privileged, one will not exert the toil that is crucial in becoming a talmid chocham.] One of the wise Gentiles said there once was a king who desired to learn mathematics. He hired a scholar who started teaching the king: “This is a point, this is a line, etc.” The king interrupted impatiently, “I am paying you good money, I am a busy man and have things to do; you have to start moving

along here.” The scholar replied, “Your majesty, there are two types of roads in your kingdom: a road for the common folk and a royal road for yourself. But there is no royal road in knowledge.” This wise Gentile echoed the principle from our mishna that Torah is not an inheritance.

AND ALL OF YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE [PERFORMED] FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Even optional things like eating, drinking, sitting, getting up, walking, lying down, sexual relations, speech, and all the needs of your body should all be for the service of your Creator or for something that leads to His service.*

*How is it [with] eating and drinking? There is no need to say that he does not eat forbidden things; [but] even if he ate and drank permissible things because he was hungry or thirsty, if he did this for the pleasure of his body, it is not praiseworthy unless he intended to fulfill the needs of his body and to eat in order to live to serve his Creator. Gluttonous eating will also do great evil, as the wise men of science have said that most illnesses are caused as the result of too much food and [that] a man*

*should only eat to remove his hunger. And through this, he will guard his soul from distress and cause his body to be [in good] health. But he should not eat every time it is sweet to his palate, as the palate always desires to eat until the stomach is full, according to what a man can fill it. And through this, he will have every illness and ailment, and this is that which is stated (Proverbs 13:25), "The righteous man eats to satisfaction, but the belly of the wicked is lacking." As the stomach is only able to digest what it can hold, and when one eats and fills it until the palate no [longer] desires to eat, he makes the belly lack and destroys it, as the destruction of the belly is its lack. But the righteous person who eats to the satisfaction of his soul and only to remove his hunger, sustains the body that the soul loves [in order] "to do the good and the straight in the eyes of the Lord." And the enlightened ones will understand.*

*How is it [with] sitting, getting up, and walking? There is no need to say that "He should not sit in a gathering of scorners and not stand in a place of sinners and not walk in the counsel of evildoers," [but] even to sit in the council of the straight and to stand in the path of the righteous and to walk in the path of the innocent, if he did it for his own benefit and to fulfill the wants of his body and its desires, it is not praiseworthy, but [rather]*

*only if he did [it] for the sake of Heaven.*

*How is it [with] lying down? There is no need to say that at a time that he can be involved in Torah [study] and in the commandments and [instead] arouse himself to sleep to enjoy himself, that it is not fit to do so. But even at a time when he is weary and needs to sleep in order to rest from his weariness, if he does it for the benefit of his body, it is not praiseworthy, but [rather] only if it is to fulfill the needs of his body in order that he be able to serve his Creator and to give sleep to his eyes and rest to his body, for the needs of health, and that his mind not break down in Torah [study] from the weariness.*

*With sexual relations, there is no need to say that he not commit a sin. But even at the appointed time stated in the Torah, if he does [it] for the sake of the benefit to his body or to achieve his desire, behold, this is disgraceful. But even if he intended [it] so that he have sons that will serve him and fill his place, it is not praiseworthy; but rather only if it is that he have sons to serve God, may He be blessed, or that he intended to have sexual relations to fulfill the appointed time stated in the Torah, like who one pays off a debt to his creditor.*

One difference between the sexual drive as opposed to

all other instinctual drives is found in its effects. All other drives lessen their intensity when satisfied, while the sexual urge increases with satisfaction. A second difference lies in activity. The activity of intercourse is purely for pleasure, while eating, drinking, and sleeping offer man some real benefit, as in nourishing, removing hunger, or providing rest to one's weariness. Thus, the term "disgraceful" (*miguneh*) is reserved for acts of pure pleasure. But regarding gluttonous eating, even though a poor trait, since it provides some true benefit, the term disgraceful is not used; rather, the phrase applied is "not praiseworthy" (*aino meshubach*).

The yetzer hara resides primarily in the sexual drive: "Rabbi Yehoshua said to them , 'No man is beyond sexual temptation'" (Ketub. 13b). All other drives are offshoots. Except for the sexual drive, one does not view his actions as pure satisfaction of an instinctual urge. Man tells himself that eating is crucial for survival. This argument is inapplicable regarding the sexual drive. During intercourse, one must admit to his intent for pleasure. This alters his personality; sensual gratification (*taivah*) becomes his philosophy: "Rav Huna said that Rav said, 'Once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him'" (Yoma 87a). Rabbeinu Yona said that if one desires intercourse in order to have children to serve him and fill his place, this is no longer "disgraceful" but "not praiseworthy."

For in this case, intercourse is not solely for pleasure but there is some intended additional value.

If one enjoys himself for the purpose of being in the proper state of mind so he can best involve himself in the true good, this is proper. Oneg Shabbos (the command to engage in physical pleasures on Shabbos) includes eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse. And as the essence of Shabbos is Torah study, the pleasures of Shabbos come under the heading of that perfection. [Thus, eating, drinking, and intercourse are proper when performed to enable the mindset for Torah study.] As the Rav said, “[By] learning Torah on Shabbos, one fulfills two mitzvos: Torah study and observing Shabbos.” Thus, the one partaking of pleasures to attain a proper frame of mind for serving God operates at the highest level. Chazal did not believe in asceticism. Many gemaras share how Chazal enjoyed the pleasures. They did so to be better disposed toward Torah study. The greatness of Chazal was their perspective: everything has its place. [See Koheles, chap. 3.] What is wrong is compulsion, which removes man from his true nature. The right balance is where perfection lies; this is Maimonides’ Golden Mean.

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*How is it [with] speaking? There is no need to say [not] to recount evil speech and foulness of the mouth and similarly*

*to them. But even in recounting words of wisdom, his intention needs to be for the service of his Creator or for something that will bring him to His service.*

Regarding speech, Rabbeinu Yona says that even regarding talking in wisdom, one must intend for the service of his Creator. Talmud Berachos 63a cites the verse, “A time to do for God, they have violated your Torah” (Psalms 119:126). The gemara says that sometimes a person should retract and sometimes he should expand. This means if one lives in the generation where Torah scholars increase Torah, the gemara says “Don’t say anything” [don’t teach Torah]. One is not needed, so one should keep to himself. But if your generation does not spread Torah, the gemara says “Spread Torah yourself.” The gemara continues, “If in your town another talmid chocham already teaches Torah, you should not teach.... This is obvious if he is a greater talmid chocham [than you are]. The gemara concludes, “You should not teach even you are of equal status.” The lesson is that even regarding teaching wisdom, it is valuable only if the purpose is proper. But if one engages in words of wisdom to satisfy his emotions, he should be quiet. This is referred to as “not praiseworthy.” “A time to do for God, they have violated your Torah” (ibid.) refers to remaining quiet when others are teaching. [For in this case, if one desires to teach, one’s in-

tent is questionable; perhaps he has egotistical motives.]

Rabbeinu Yona teaches that “All of your actions should be [performed] for the sake of Heaven” is a very subtle matter: do not assess a matter based on how it appears. One who joins with the chochamim gives an admirable appearance [but might join them for egotistical goals]. Upon visiting others, Rav Chaim did not talk Torah. This accords with the medrash that one should not treat Torah like an older [single] daughter that one pushes to the front of his guests [in an effort to finally marry her off]. One should not treat the Torah as a peddled item. In Tels, the yeshiva asked Rav Chaim to speak , but Rav Chaim said he was old and forgot his Torah. This shares the same point as Rabbeinu Yona’s: Torah must not become an instrument of a person’s gratification. This is the idea of “And all your actions should be [performed] for the sake of Heaven.”

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*The principle of the matter is that a person is obligated to put his eyes and his heart to his ways , and to weigh all of his deeds on the scales of his mind. And when he sees that something brings him to the service of his Creator, may He be blessed, do it; and if not, he should separate from it. And so wrote Maimonides, may his memory be blessed.*

Thus, if one acts spontaneously, he does not weigh his actions with wisdom. One must experience a sense of desire to act, but sometimes upon consideration, he retracts. If one undergoes such an experience, he may be acting for the sake of Heaven. If, however, one does not undergo such experiences, but acts for the sake of Heaven naturally, he should know he is not following this mishna. If one does not go through the process of evaluation, he is not involved in perfection. He must “weigh all of his deeds on the scales of his mind.”

AND ALL OF YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE [PERFORMED] FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN.

Maimonides comments that he explained this in his Eight Chapters, chapter 5:

*As we have explained in the preceding chapter, it is the duty of man to subordinate all the faculties of his soul to his reason. He must keep his mind's eye constantly fixed upon one goal, namely, the attainment of the knowledge of God (may He be blessed), as far as it is possible for mortal man to know Him. Consequently, one must adjust all his actions, his whole conduct, and even his very words, that they lead to this goal, in order that none of his deeds be aimless,*

*and thus retard the attainment of that end.*

*So, his only design in eating, drinking, co-habiting, sleeping, waking, moving about, and resting should be the preservation of bodily health, while, in turn, the reason for the latter is that the soul and its agencies may be in sound and perfect condition, so that he may readily acquire wisdom, and gain moral and intellectual virtues, all to the end that man may reach the highest goal of his endeavors. Accordingly, man will not direct his attention merely to obtain bodily enjoyment, choosing of food and drink and the other things of life, only the agreeable, but he will seek out the most useful, being indifferent whether it be agreeable or not. There are indeed times when the agreeable may be used from a curative point of view, as, for instance, when one suffers from loss of appetite, it may be stirred up by highly seasoned delicacies and agreeable, palatable food.*

*Similarly, one who suffers from melancholia may rid himself of it by listening to singing and all kinds of instrumental music, by strolling through beautiful gardens and splendid buildings, by gazing upon beautiful pictures, and other things that enliven the mind and dissipate gloomy moods. The purpose of all this is to restore the healthful condition of the body, but the real object in maintaining the*

*body in good health is to acquire wisdom.*

*Likewise, in the pursuit of wealth, the main design in its acquisition should be to expend it for noble purposes, and to employ it for the maintenance of the body and the preservation of life, so that its owner may obtain a knowledge of God in so far as that is vouchsafed to man.*

*From this point of view, the study of medicine has a very great influence upon the acquisition of the virtues and of the knowledge of God, as well as upon the attainment of true, spiritual happiness. Therefore, its study and acquisition are preeminently important religious activities, and must not be ranked in the same class with the art of weaving or the science of architecture, for by it one learns to weigh one's deeds, and thereby human activities are rendered true virtues. The man who insists upon indulging in savory, sweet-smelling, and palatable food, although it be injurious, and possibly may lead to serious illness or sudden death, ought, in my opinion, to be classed with the beasts. His conduct is not that of a man in so far as he is a being endowed with understanding, but it is rather the action of a man in so far as he is a member of the animal kingdom, and so (Psalms 49:21), "He is like the beasts who perish." Man acts like a human being only when he eats that which is wholesome, at times avoiding the agreeable and partaking of*

*the disagreeable in his search for the beneficial. Such conduct is in accordance with the dictates of reason, and by these acts man is distinguished from all other beings.*

*Similarly, if a man satisfies his sexual passions whenever he has the desire, regardless of good or ill effects, he acts as a brute and not as a man. It is possible, however, for one to shape one's conduct entirely from the point of view of utility, as we have stated, with no aim beyond that of maintaining the health of the body or guarding against disease. Such a one does not deserve to be called virtuous, for, just as he strives for the enjoyment of good health, another like him may have as his aim the gratification of eating, or of sexual intercourse, none of which leads to the true goal.*

Those who critique others for not caring for their health by following every instinctual urge, are in a contradiction. They say health is more important than pleasures (overeating, too much sex), but they value health only so that they can indulge pleasures to a greater degree, since a healthy person lives longer! Such health-conscious people critique the hedonist on ethical grounds, which is their contradiction. Had they limited their critique to health concerns alone, they would be correct.

Maimonides says that if health is sought as an end and

not to enable a greater life of pursuing God's wisdom, the healthy person is no better than the hedonist. In this case, the healthy person's desire is health, while the hedonist also chases his desires. They both seek their desires as an end and do not pursue God.

People feel their predilections are more correct than those of others; this is purely subjective thinking. King Solomon says peoples' likes and dislikes are their greatest passions and what they value most:

*Since the living know they will die but the dead know nothing, they have no more recompense, for even the memory of them has died. Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished; and they have no more share until the end of time in all that goes on under the sun" (Kobeles 9:6).*

Maimonides continues:

*The real duty of man is that in adopting whatever measures he may for his well-being and the preservation of his existence in good health, he should do so with the object of maintaining a perfect condition of the instruments of the soul, which are the limbs of the body, so that his soul may be unhampered, and he may busy himself in acquiring the moral and mental virtues. So it is with all the*

*sciences and knowledge man may learn.*

*Concerning those that lead directly to this goal, there is naturally no question; but such subjects as mathematics, the study of conic sections, mechanics, the various problems of geometry, hydraulics, and many others of a similar nature, which do not tend directly toward that goal, should be studied for the purpose of sharpening the mind, and training the mental faculties by scientific investigations, so that man may acquire intellectual ability to distinguish demonstrative proofs from others, whereby he will be enabled to comprehend the essence of God.*

The problem we have is that Maimonides endorses scientific knowledge. Many people reading his writings—especially in his Guide—assume a physics professor is Maimonides' ideal perfected man.

The difference between Judaism's approach to knowledge and the scientific world's approach to knowledge is in one crucial matter that separates the scientist from the perfected man. The perfect man of Judaism studies science with one objective: knowledge of God. Scientists study science for scientific knowledge per se. This has no relationship to human perfection. The perfected man studies all areas with the one goal of learning more about God.

In the beginning of his laws of Torah Fundamentals (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah), Maimonides says that the study of halacha must precede the study of philosophy as it helps man gain ethical perfection. He learns what is permitted and what is prohibited, what perfects his life and it also teaches man the true manner of thought. The latter permits man to pursue God's wisdom to the greatest degree. Rashba made a decree against studying philosophy until the age of twenty-five. Until this age, one must gain a mastery of halacha, without which, one can veer in all different [incorrect] directions.

Maimonides continues:

*Similarly, in regard to man's conversation, he should speak only of those things that will be conducive to the true welfare of his soul and body, or that will tend to avert injury from them, whether his words concern themselves with science, or virtue, or praise of virtue, or of a virtuous man, or with censure of vice or of a vicious person; for to express contempt for those who are loaded with vice, or to depict their deeds as contemptible if done for the purpose of disparaging them in the eyes of other men who may avoid them, and not do as they do, is indeed a virtuous duty. Does not Scripture say, (Leviticus 18:3) "After the doings of the land of Egypt you should not do, and after the doings of the land of*

*Canaan?" Also, the story of the Sodomites and all the passages occurring in Scripture that censure those laden with vice and represent their doings as disgraceful, and those passages that praise and hold the good in high esteem, endeavor, as I have said, to induce man to follow the paths of the righteous, and to shun the ways of the wicked.*

*If man has this as his ideal, he will dispense with many of his customary deeds and refrain from a great deal of ordinary conversation. He who follows this line of conduct will not trouble himself with adorning his walls with golden ornaments, nor with decorating his garments with golden fringe, unless it be for the purpose of enlivening his soul, and thus restoring it to health, or of banishing sickness from it, so that it shall become clear and pure, and thus be in the proper condition to acquire wisdom. Therefore, our Rabbis of blessed memory say, (Shabbat 25b) "It is becoming that a sage should have a pleasant dwelling, a beautiful wife, and domestic comfort," for one becomes weary, and one's mind becomes dulled by continued mental concentration upon difficult problems. Thus, just as the body becomes exhausted from hard labor, and then by rest and refreshment recovers, so is it necessary for the mind to have relaxation by gazing upon pictures and other beautiful objects, that its weariness may be dispelled. Accordingly, it is related (Shabbat*

*30b) that when Chazal became exhausted from study, they were accustomed to engage in entertaining conversation (in order to refresh themselves). From this point of view, therefore, the use of pictures and embroideries for beautifying the house, the furniture, and the clothes is not to be considered immoral, nor unnecessary.*

There is a difference between the average person and the man of perfection regarding his material involvements. The difference is evident from the degree of the intensity in one's involvements. A person seeking material goods for their own sake displays an excitement and a preoccupation. [But the perfect person involves himself with such goods—like a nice home and nice utensils—for the psychological equilibrium they provide. The perfected man desires these matters as they assist in his pursuit of wisdom, and not for these items themselves. Regarding a wife, God said that man is not complete without a wife (Gen. 2:18), and King Solomon says, “He who finds a wife has found happiness and has won the favor of the Lord” (Prov. 18:22).]

The chocham displays no compulsiveness when involving himself in material pleasures. If he does not have these material objects or if he loses an object, he will not be phased. But the person seeking material goods as an end will be troubled by their loss. The chocham's approach to materi-

alism is like taking medicine: he takes it to feel better and without any excitement. The world could never perceive such a relationship to materialism: people are either completely hedonistic, or they are in denial, demonstrated by ascetic monks and saints. Both lifestyles are improper. Chazal laid out the proper way for man to live, “a nice home, nice utensils, etc.” And since the chocham is not passionately engaged in materialism, he is a free person, as Maimonides writes, “...He will dispense with many of his customary deeds, and refrain from a great deal of ordinary conversation. He who follows this line of conduct will not trouble himself with adorning his walls with golden ornaments, nor with decorating his garments with golden fringe...” His energies are not preoccupied with the physical pleasures, thereby creating this sense of freedom. With this free energy, he enjoys a different state of mind than others. But one who must have material items is chained to them. He senses that he is overpowered by materialism. But the perfect man is in control of his energies and directs them like a general directing his troops.

Maimonides continues:

*Know that to live according to this standard is to arrive at a very high degree of perfection, which, in consequence of the difficulty of attainment, only a few, after long and continuous perseverance on the paths of virtue, have succeeded in reaching. If there*

*be found a man who has accomplished this, who exerts all the faculties of his soul, and directs them toward the sole ideal of comprehending God, using all his powers of mind and body, be they great or small, for the attainment of that which leads directly or indirectly to virtue, I would place him in a rank not lower than that of the prophets. Such a man, before he does a single act or deed, considers and reflects whether or not it will bring him to that goal, and if it will, then and only then, does he do it.*

Moshe said, “And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul...” (Deut. 10:12). Chazal said, “And is it a small [easy] thing to fear God? Yes, for Moshe it was easy.” We derive from this that once one reaches this level where all he says and does is in the pursuit of knowledge of God, it appears so simple to him, as Moshe expressed.

*Such striving does the Almighty require of us, according to the words (Deuteronomy 6:5), “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” that is, with all the faculties of your soul, each faculty having as its sole ideal the love of God.*

What is might (me'odecha)? Might means “much,” a form of the word “me'od.” Peoples' energies are directed toward various areas; “might” does not specify the area where one places his might. With this term “might,” the Torah teaches that one should love God with his most intense energies, meaning, he should redirect his greatest energies—which he currently directs elsewhere—toward God. Love of God should now be the focus of his greatest passions and viewed with infinite importance. If one channels all his energies toward God, then he fulfills this verse.

The perfect person's motivation is to obtain knowledge of God—a very high level. But a person cannot commence at this level.

*Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: “A person should always engage in Torah study and the performance of mitzvos even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvos not for their own sake one gains understanding and comes to perform them for their own sake” (Peschim 50b).*

What is the meaning of the term “always?” It refers to every person, because everyone must start his Torah observance not for its own sake. But then one progresses from one level to the next in his observance and love of God. “Not

for its own sake” means one’s initial attachment to Torah is akin to his attachment to his material desires, but he substitutes Torah in place of those desires. He accepts Torah as the real good, but he approaches it in the same manner as he approaches other desires. This is observance “not for its own sake” (lo lishma). But as a person progresses in his Torah study and observance he realizes that Torah is a different object requiring a different relationship. And one who attains the proper level, Maimonides says, is on the level of the prophets.

*The prophets, similarly, urge us on in saying (Proverbs 3:6), “In all your ways know Him,” in commenting upon that which the sages said (Berachos 63a), “Even as regards a transgression (of the ritual or ceremonial law),” meaning thereby that you should set a goal for every action, namely, the truth, even though it is, from a certain point of view, a transgression.*

An example of fulfilling “In all your ways know Him” through a transgression performed for the sake of Heaven, is the case of Yael. She had intercourse with Sisra in order to kill this Jewish enemy. Her involvement in this sin was to save the Jewish people and it had nothing to do with physical pleasure. Similarly, Eliyahu violated the prohibition of temporary altars when he sacrificed on Mount Carmel in order

to return the Jews to God and to the Torah. On the words “In all your ways know Him,” Rashi says, “Consider if your actions are in the service of a command.”

Maimonides continues:

*The sages of blessed memory, too, have summed up this idea in so few words and so concisely, at the same time elucidating the whole matter with such complete thoroughness, that when one considers the brevity with which they expressed this great and mighty thought in its entirety, about which others have written whole books and yet without adequately explaining it, one truly recognizes that the Rabbis undoubtedly spoke through divine inspiration. This saying is found among their precepts (in this tractate), and is (Pirkei Avos 2:12), “Let all your deeds be done for the sake of God.” This then is the thought we have been dwelling upon in the present chapter and what we have said must be considered sufficient for the needs of this introduction.*

The Brisker Rav said, “An example of divine inspiration (ruach hakodesh) is Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, [as] the human mind could never arrange such a work.” In his Guide, Maimonides himself says that he composed the Guide with divine inspiration.

## DEFINING MAIMONIDES' WORDS

I would like to precisely define what Maimonides teaches with this lengthy description. He says Chazal encapsulated a principle that defines perfection: "And all of your actions should be [performed] for the sake of Heaven." This principle is different from the psychological principle. Psychologists said that man is guided by one principle, the "Pleasure/Pain Principle": deciding all matters based on the level of anticipated pleasure or pain. But here, Maimonides presents the principle we will refer to as the "Perfection/Imperfection Principle." This principle is in line with man's higher nature. "And all of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven" means that there exists in man another mode of operation. While most people are guided by pleasure and pain, man can rise above this lower level to the higher level of perfection that draws him in and determines his every action. This is the level of the prophets and very few people reach it. This level cannot be artificially imposed. People fool themselves that they can reach this level simply by being meticulously careful about all their actions. But this approach is not possible as it stems from man's core; he becomes attached to perfection just as one is naturally attached to pleasure. When Maimonides says that every action this person does is for the sake of Heaven, he is not referring to extreme vigi-

lance, as such vigilance is humanly impossible. Maimonides means it is a natural result of reaching that level where one is completely overcome by the knowledge of God, and therefore, all that he does is tied to knowing God. This is the ultimate level man can attain. Chazal expressed this level in these words: “And all of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven.”

The mistake of some mussar approaches is that they thought they could bring about this perfected level artificially. They thought that with extreme care about every word and action they would attain this level of perfection. But this approach is not based on wisdom. Extreme vigilance cannot produce this perfection. This perfected individual must emerge naturally from a very carefully planned approach and method of self-improvement and progress.

One must appreciate that there is a difference between one person who enjoys a beautiful definition or idea and learning *lishma*, and another person who is under the sway of a totally different reality, to whom Maimonides refers here. In the former, the person’s goal is still pleasure. But Maimonides’ description is not of a person with a goal of pleasure. This person is overcome by the knowledge of God, and he is drawn like a magnet to involve himself in this pursuit. He has no aims or goals.

These psychologists were wrong for a very simple reason.

Like all phenomenon, the science of psychology is limited: it is based only on observable phenomena. Psychology's breakthroughs came from the study of neurotics, a class in which one will not find a person operating on the level of "In all your ways know Him." Therefore, the phenomenon of a person overcome by a knowledge of God escaped them. Their mistake was universalizing from limited cases of human behavior. They should have said, "What we see is prevalent in mankind." But to universalize as they did, that man's primary motivation is the Pleasure/Pain Principle, is false. Their flawed view was not based on evidence, but on an extrapolation from their cases, rendering their results flawed. The psychologists did not study Maimonides' fifth chapter of his Eight Chapters. The level Maimonides describes exists only in a person possessing a high level of wisdom.

Regarding studying and understanding metaphysics (Ma'aseh Mercavah ), Chazal were secretive. This area is beyond halacha. Halacha is referred to as a small matter while metaphysics is referred to as a great matter (Succah 28a, Baba Basra 134a). Once a person achieves a certain level of perfection, he starts seeing the next step. Chazal felt one must enter this area of metaphysics naturally. It is not something that is taught or allowed to be taught. If one must be taught metaphysics, he is not capable of understanding it. In this area, there is a great danger of developing severe mis-

conceptions, which can lead to disaster. Therefore, Chazal said that a person who approaches this level should only receive the headings (roshei perakim). And if he discovers the meanings of those headings by himself, this is acceptable. But he is not told of those discoveries.

How are Rabbi Yosi's three statements related? To reiterate, he says that your friend's money should be as beloved to yourself as your own, that you must prepare yourself for Torah study as it is not an inheritance, and that all your actions should be performed for the sake of Heaven.

According to Maimonides, there is an objective justice, but it cannot exist without recognizing God. As this principle is based on the concept that all people have inherent rights, they only possess these rights through some being endowing them with these rights, and this being is God. By not respecting someone else's property, one does not merely steal, but he denies how that person's Tzelem Elohim—intellect—should function: the other person has God-given ownership rights that demand our proper treatment.

#### PREPARE YOURSELF FOR TORAH STUDY.

Maimonides explains that man's perfection is a skill. It is not merely actualizing potential, but more than that.

ALL YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE PERFORMED  
FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN.

As we stated above, this is the Perfection/Imperfection Principle in contrast to the Pleasure/Pain Principle.

Rabbi Yosi's three principles reflect man's status. Man is endowed with rights (ownership); his nature is such that he attains perfection through skills; and finally, man can operate under a principle aside from pleasure, and that is perfection. Thus, Rabbi Yosi placed man's greatness before his mind's eye each day.

Rabbi Yosi refers to an ethical reality. The medrash of the moon complaining and God making it smaller and limiting its range of illumination to night alone illustrates this point. The six days of creation included not only physical reality, but God also created an ethical reality, which is just as real as the physical reality—there is no difference. If a person robs another, this is a violation of a natural law; ethics is as real as physics. God created both systems.

The diminishing of the moon represents a breach in natural law. Kiddush Levana is a blessing for this breach to be removed, i.e., the breach in laws of ethical perfection. We pray that the moon return to its full size as it was in Genesis, and this blessing includes "The Jews will eventually be renewed like the moon." The parallel is that Jewish history is

as real as natural law.

The blessing also includes “They shall seek Hashem their God and David their king.” This means the Jews should attain the level of total ethical perfection, as King David said, “In all your ways know Him” (Prov. 3:6).

## 2:13 RECOGNIZING REALITY, LIVING IT, AND AVOIDING HARM

RABBI SHIMON SAYS: “BE CAREFUL IN THE RECITATION OF SHIMA (AND PRAYING). WHEN YOU PRAY, DO NOT MAKE YOUR PRAYER A BURDEN, RATHER, [PRAY] FOR MERCY AND SUPPLICATION BEFORE THE OMNIPRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, AS IT SAYS (JOEL 2, 13), ‘FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL, LONG-SUFFERING, AND FULL OF KINDNESS, AND REPENTS EVIL.’ AND DO NOT BE WICKED IN YOUR OWN EYES.”

The Rav said in Rav Chaim’s name that there is no difference between the obligation of Torah law and rabbinic law. Therefore, even if one disagrees with Maimonides and follows the opinion that tefilah is a rabbinic law, one must

show equal concern for the commands of tefilah and reciting the Shima (a Torah law). Therefore, we wonder to what additional care Rabbi Shimon refers.

Rabbeinu Yona says that this care refers only to the Shima and not to tefilah:

*Rashi warned people to show greater care for the Shima than for tefilah because the time frame for fulfilling tefilah is greater and can be fulfilled until four hours into the day. But the Shima must be recited immediately preceding sunrise.*

Thus, Rabbi Shimon used the word “careful” concerning Shima since the window of opportunity is very small. We must note that according to Maimonides, the phraseology of this mishna is problematic; tefilah should come first, as, according to his view, it is a Torah law. And

a person’s actions result from his views. People relate to mitzvos in two frameworks. One framework is simply the action of the mitzvah. But our mishna does not discuss that halachic obligation, it discusses philosophical perfection. And in this perfection, Shima and tefilah play a significant role. One must have a special appreciation for the importance of these two mitzvos, and this will naturally result in one expressing great care for them. But the phrase “be careful” would seem unnecessary in the application of such

mitzvos that one knows are of extreme importance. However, “care” has another implication.

There are some mitzvos, the value of which one is not naturally attracted to, although one agrees that mitzvah is the correct action. It is in this capacity where one requires care. This is the distinction between one who is *koveish es yitzro* and one who is *oveid me’ahava*—the one who conquers his instincts (mitzvos are a struggle) and the one who performs the mitzvos based on love. Care is unnecessary when one performs the commands based on love. But the person who struggles with performing mitzvos—the *koveish es yitzro*—has a force within his personality that opposes some mitzvos, requiring this additional warning to be careful. Therefore, Rabbi Shimon teaches about these emotions that oppose aspects of Shima and tefilah. One must be aware of them and conquer them. Recognizing the benefits of both mitzvos will help one conquer the opposing forces. Conquering one’s forces is required if one is to progress to the level of performing the mitzvos out of love. This is difficult, as one is torn between his emotional forces and his knowledge that mitzvos benefit himself. Rabbi Shimon held that these two mitzvos are the main instruments of perfection.

At the end of his Guide, Maimonides speaks at length regarding how perfect people live; he cites the importance of tefilah and Shima. It is advisable to read this chapter. There

is nothing more important than gaining an understanding of tefilah and Shima, how they are important and the difficulties involved in their performance.

Being careful is not about performing versus not performing. It regards how one performs. Does one perform mitzvos simply because he has an obligation? Or, does one express great care about how he performs them? Being careful means that the significance of the mitzvah impacts the person.

What great importance exists in these two mitzvos and what does a person find difficult in their performance? One significance of these two mitzvos is the halacha prohibiting any other activity until they are performed. Regarding other mitzvos, one should not engage in other activities until he has performed them because he might forget to perform them. But if one does engage in other activities, this does not affect the mitzvah he subsequently performs. But these two mitzvos of tefilah and Shima differ in that any prior activity detracts from the very mitzvah. We know this to be so as the Torah addresses this flaw. If one eats before doing these two mitzvos, the Torah says about this person, “He has thrown Me behind his back” (I Kings 14:9). This reveals that this person lacks an essential element of the tefilah. Another halacha is the prohibition to visit or call a friend before one prays in the morning. The Torah says, “Remove yourself

from man that his spirit is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?” (Isaiah 2:22). Chazal said, “Do not read ‘for what’ (bameh), but read, ‘an altar’ (bammah) [is man considered].” What do these verses teach?

Man’s concept of reality is distorted, requiring the Torah to tell man to remove himself from this psychological dependency and need for others, “Remove yourself from man....” Tefilah responds, providing man with the true concept of reality. But why did Chazal alter this verse that seems sufficient as it is? As is, the verse tells us an important idea, to abandon man. But Chazal teach that man’s attachment to others is quite strong, like his attachment to idolatry. Chazal also verbalized their wish that man’s fear of God would be just as great as his fear of man. When man is about to sin, he’s concerned whether another person will see him. Man’s underlying concern is what others think of him.

Shima and tefilah are a total removal from that state of mind and from all influences from one’s attachment to man. “Remove yourself from man” means enough already. We are rebuked for being so wrapped up with others. Shima and tefilah offer man a momentary break from this psychological and false state of existence, focusing us on God, the source of the universe. If one views the world of objective reality, all else becomes insignificant. [Objective reality refers to the truth of God and His role as creator of the universe as it is

and functions naturally. Subjective reality refers to each person's set of emotions, and the fallacy of the assumed value of those feelings and imaginations.]

This explains why one should not engage in other activities like visiting a friend before tefilah. One's first confrontation with reality each morning as he approaches his day should be tefilah and Shima, objective reality. But if one cannot make his first confrontation with reality—with God—and something else takes priority, his tefilah is worthless. This is unlike visiting a friend before one waves his lulav, or some other mitzvah. If one finds that he must be in contact with man before Shima and tefilah, he has a false concept of reality. This is Chazal's equation of man to an altar; man is drawn toward his friend with the same intense psychological pull as he is drawn toward idolatry. [Man is attached to his emotional needs more than he is attached to the source of everything.] But the perfected man is attached to God as God is his view of reality. He has made the transition from psychological reality [the social world and all its emotions like ego, competition, jealousy, etc.] to reality. These are the two worlds in which man lives. The imperfect man leans toward what is most emotionally satisfying while the perfect man clings to God.

Leaving psychological reality is difficult, but the Torah obligates one to remove himself from that world three times

a day with tefila and Shima. This detachment from psychological reality helps man change his nature. We appreciate why Rabbi Shimon said that one must be careful, as the significance of Shima and tefilah are great regarding one's perfection.

Shima and tefilah can be defined as the moment of sanity.  
[They are brief glimpses of reality.]

#### WHAT IS THE SHIMA?

Shima is kabbalas ol malchus shamayim, accepting the yoke of Heaven. On a basic level, this refers to one accepting to perform certain painful activities. [If one cannot daven properly, he does not have the correct notion of tefilah.] On another level, kabbalas ol malchus shamayim refers to one whose intellectual idea of God and reality become greater than just an idea; his entire personality is moved by that idea. His emotions and his feelings fall in line with this realization to the point that he removes the conflict between his emotions and the truth of God and reality; all parts of his nature accept what is true. This is Shima and tefilah. Man achieves this acceptance through intermittent realizations of objective reality that slowly affect his nature. Although after performing these mitzvos one slips back into psychological

reality, this does not mean that one did not make progress toward perfection.

Kabbalas ol malchus shamayim differs from the mitzvah of knowing God; the latter is referred to as “yesod hayesodos v’amud hachochmos,” “the fundamental of all fundamentals and the pillar of wisdom” (Mishneh Torah 1:1). But if one’s emotions are not in line with that idea of God, one has not fulfilled kabbalas ol malchus shamayim. Knowing God exists is knowledge—not an emotional acceptance. Maimonides formulates the mitzvah to know God as knowledge of a first cause (ibid. 1:1, 1:6). But the mitzvah of Shema is a distinct mitzvah other than knowledge of God. We are commanded to recite the Shema twice a day. The need for this repetition teaches that the idea of God’s existence must be accepted by the person’s total personality and not merely intellectually. And one with a greater understanding of God will have a greater kabbalas ol malchus shamayim.

Kabbalas ol malchus shamayim has two variables: 1) one’s concept of God, and 2) the degree to which one’s emotions are in line with that concept. One can have a greater understanding of God while the rest of his nature is not in line with that concept. And if another person has a lesser idea of God but his entire nature is in line with that knowledge, he has a greater kabbalas ol malchus shamayim. And the converse is also true.

This conversion of one's total nature falling in line with kabbalas ol malchus shamayim requires daily repetition. Knowledge of God's existence is performed intellectually and once one knows this, repetition is inapplicable, as this is not a process requiring time, whereas kabbalas ol malchus shamayim is a process of change requiring daily repetition. Similarly, the Ten Days of Repentance occur only once a year, as God in His wisdom designed the Torah to work within human nature. Had these days been longer, they would lose their significance.

Now, although one slips back into his psychological reality after Shema or tefilah, during those moments one sees reality, thereby raising his level. This also applies to other mitzvos like mezuzah, which, upon seeing it, one contemplates God's unity and again raises his level, although he slips back afterward.

The world has a false notion of human perfection, portrayed in the personality of the saint. They feel it's all or nothing. People wish to maintain a self-image of 100 percent perfection. But Judaism recognizes that man has a dual nature comprising both instincts and intelligence, and that he swings between these natures. This is reality. Therefore, the world's approach must fail as people are not in line with reality. Once a person can part with the world's desire for an image of 100 percent perfection, he can harness those ener-

gies that previously sought that impossible “perfect” self-image and apply them toward true perfection. This is Shima and kabbalas ol malchus shamayim.

What is tefilah? “They will fear You with the sun and before the moon for all generations” (Psalms 72:5). People will fear God at sunrise, at the beginning of their day. One would think that fear is more closely related to kabbalas ol malchus shamayim, so we wonder what is left to be addressed after it?

The answer is that tefilah is the actualization of Shima’s potential. How is this so? Man is not purely theoretical, he must put his ideals into action. Shima provides the opportunity to recognize the truth. By becoming aware of this reality, i.e., God, the Universe, and the Torah, man reflects on how his life fits into this reality. Man searches to learn how these truths relate to his life. He asks himself, “What is lacking in my life in order that these ideas become part of how I function?” Thereby, he formulates his tefilah. Shima is the recognition of the Source of reality—God—and through tefilah, man confronts God and requests those things necessary to live according to reality [and the goals of the Torah.] Thus, tefilah actualizes Shima, explaining why tefilah immediately follows Shima. As man knows that God answers prayer, he properly requests from Him his needs to live according to Shima’s truths. Therefore, tefilah should be

a thought-out petition. If it is not, it is not based on kabbalas ol malchus shamayim.

This explains Chazal's formulation of tefilah: knowledge is requested first, followed by repentance, forgiveness, physical health, finances, Israel attaining its perfect state, restoring the judges, and so on. Tefilah is the perfect formulation for living according to kabbalas ol malchus shamayim. "They should fear you with the sun..." refers to the actual living of that life. Therefore, this verse applies to tefilah and not to Shima. [Shima identifies the ideas, but tefilah is its actualization. Fearing God at sunrise in one's tefilah is actuality.]

Tefilah is the most natural response of one who recognizes reality. But if this is so, why is tefilah so difficult, requiring the warning to be careful? And why is a person who prays properly so rare? Chazal recognized tefilah as one of the areas in which man cannot escape difficulty. Man has a constant stream of thoughts that distracts him. Tefilah is difficult as we suffer from psychological reality, and man finds it difficult to emancipate himself from that framework. People do not like tefilah, and this is expressed in Rabbi Shimon's principle of "not making tefilah a burden." He says we should make it "a merciful supplication before God."

In his teshuvos (responsa) Rivash discusses the problems with studying philosophy that caused people to leave Juda-

ism. Some rishonim banned the study of philosophy. Rivash noted that one of the problems of those studying philosophy was that they stopped davening. The reason they stopped was because through their philosophical studies, they uncovered the infantile motivations for their davening. And as they had no replacement reason to daven, they stopped.

One of the greatest problems with tefilah is that people relate to it in an infantile fashion. But the mature person loves tefilah. The infantile person feels convinced that with his tefilah, he does God a favor—an absurdity. He is further convinced that tefilah is protective, and if he does not daven, something bad will occur. For these infantile reasons, tefilah becomes a burden. He does not want to daven, but feels he must do God this favor, and its protective aspect makes him feel he must go through the motions and get it over with.

Tefilah also engenders an identification with God. One feels he is walking with God, which engenders arrogance. There are dangers with these infantile feelings. Such people have not realized their infantile state and have not progressed to the next level.

One must realize that he is a creature apart from God, but God listens to him and can help him improve his life. If one knows that God is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness...” (Exod. 34:6) he will naturally love tefilah. The one who davens properly

is the truly mature individual. Thus, Rabbi Shimon said these two mitzvos of tefilah and Shima are most crucial in order for one to embrace reality.

Why then was Rav Shimon bar Yochai exempt from tefilah, and why did Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi daven only once a month? Since tefilah is to bring one's emotions in line with his intellect (kabbalas ol malchus shamayim), and these rabbis were past that stage, they no longer required tefilah. But our mishna addresses average people. Thereby we derive that all people require Shima, even these rabbis, as all people retain some unruly element in their soul requiring a constant realigning to objective reality.

DO NOT MAKE YOURSELF INTO AN EVIL PERSON.

Rashi comments:

*Do not do anything that today or tomorrow will turn you into a rasha and make you say, "Why did I do this terrible thing?"*

Of what relevance is it that the person will make this statement? Rashi should simply have said, "Do not do evil."

A person operates in two ways: for his own perfection, and to preserve the Torah system for future generations. The

latter is based on justice, i.e., equality: all people should benefit, not only me. But here we discuss the system of personal perfection. Rashi warns one not to do anything that will lead to psychological harm. Rashi refers to being overcome by a sense of guilt, which is the most overpowering feeling. Other religions thrive on guilt, but Judaism denounces it. Once caught up in this emotion, it is almost impossible to escape from it. Guilt also freezes one's mind and makes it hard to make decisions.

According to Rashi, the mishna flows as follows: 1) be careful reciting Shima (recognize reality); 2) be careful in tefilah, which is the natural result after recognizing Shima's fundamentals; and 3) avoid the strong sense of guilt, for this cripples one's mind and blocks the path toward perfection. The mishna addresses the positive and the negative. The positive is to perceive the reality of God through Shima and then to actualize it in prayer. The negative is to prevent one's emotions from experiencing guilt. Judaism wants a person to move toward God through wisdom, not guilt. Guilt can only lead to an emotional reaction; wisdom will lead a person toward perfection.

There is an old Yiddish saying, "The Jews copy other religions." This is very true. From early youth, one hears and absorbs the values of surrounding religions and cultures, never questioning their validity. One's own religious beliefs

are then built on those blindly accepted notions. Judaism's approach is not to follow society, but to use wisdom to determine proper values and absolute truths. One must then extricate society's fallacies from his mind. Part of the appeal of those fallacies is that they are coded as being the good. Thereby, one feels justified following what all others praise, regardless of their false nature. The phenomenon of Nazi Germany never could have occurred had this adoption of societal norms and values been false. The power of society convinces people that a certain value is worthwhile, regardless of its evil nature.

The average person cannot buck society. But Judaism demands that this power of society be rejected, as Abraham displayed. He was called Abraham Ha'ivri (ivri means side), for the world took one side regarding religion and Abraham took the opposite side. He spoke publicly against the world's idolatry. Abraham's greatness was that he knew himself so well that society exerted no influence whatsoever upon his thinking. He was the founder of our Torah system; his independence of thought and his extreme intelligence are the core of Judaism.

## DON'T VIEW YOURSELF AS A RASHA.

Maimonides writes:

*One should not think lowly of himself, for when he thinks he is deficient, if he performs poor actions, they will not impress his mind.*

By viewing oneself as inferior, one might find some solace in accepting that humble self-image, for humility is of value. However, Maimonides says this can have disastrous results as such a person will not hesitate to perform bad actions. One who maintains the self-image of a rasha accepts his corrupt actions and does not strive for perfection. This acceptance allows him to condone any poor quality. But one must not confuse true humility with a poor self-image. The humble person is one whose accurate wisdom tells him that he is a small thing in the universe. But our mishna describes a personality flaw.

How does Maimonides' explanation fit in with the theme of our mishna? Maimonides' view follows naturally from the first two statements. As the mishna discusses perfection, this is not limited to knowledge alone, but to the entire organism where the whole person follows that knowledge. This means that all one's emotions fall in line with one's

knowledge. The first part of our mishna refers to one bringing his emotions in line with his wisdom.

There are two types of wisdom. One type is wisdom vis-à-vis the external world. A person might view his eighty-year lifespan as long, but when he contrasts that amount of time to the age of the universe, his lifespan is like the blink of an eye. A person is disturbed that in one hundred years no one will know he ever existed. The emotions view the small picture and focus on the present alone, offering a false value of significance. But the mind can see the big picture. This is one type of acquisition of wisdom concerning the universe—the external world. If one does not gain knowledge of what time is, which is part of the external world, he cannot appreciate that God is eternal. Thus, knowledge of reality is essential regarding one's knowledge of God.

Man requires a second acquisition of knowledge: internal knowledge. One must understand himself. The man who constantly raises himself to a higher level increases his knowledge in both areas. Kabbalas ol malchus shamayim (accepting God's commands upon oneself), is twofold. One method of kabbalas ol malchus shamayim is gaining knowledge of the external world, and the second method is obtaining wisdom of one's internal makeup. Without either one, a person cannot progress toward perfection. Knowledge of the external world without knowledge of oneself inhibits the

progress achieved by conquering one's emotions that block a person in many ways. Conversely, one can have knowledge of himself but remain ignorant of the external world, which is the mistake of psychologists. [They feel that once one is self-aware of his inner workings he will achieve happiness and perfection. Judaism says that knowledge of reality is essential and inner perfection is insufficient by itself.] If one is psychologically healthy but ignorant of the universe, he has nothing. He is merely a healthy animal. Man must possess knowledge of both worlds.

Maimonides' view is that when one gains greater knowledge of himself, and is honest with himself, he will find that he is not as righteous as he thought. The process of knowledge goes hand in hand with the loss of one's estimation of his religiosity and his stature as a person. Maimonides means that as one climbs the ladder of knowledge, there is a danger. Once one uncovers his true emotions and sees his real nature, one might give up his pursuit of perfection, for he realizes just how inadequate he is. This is certainly a difficult matter. One can lose his self-esteem to the point where he can no longer function. Maimonides says that without courage, one cannot do anything. Courage is not simply bravery; it stems from one's self-esteem.

Maimonides advises that as one advances his knowledge of the external world—*kabbalas ol malchus shamayim*—he

must be aware of the one pitfall of viewing himself as a rasha, which could destroy him. The internal world must be monitored together with one's advances in his knowledge of the external world. One must not view his newly discovered shortcomings as grounds for self-blame, which might become his undoing. Rather, he should view this discovery as part of his greatness. This is the idea of teshuvah, where one is totally honest with himself and recognizes his every emotion. This is a painful process, but it should not shatter a person. The teshuvah process should allow the person to walk away with a stable state of mind and a certain happiness. One's recognition of his flaws might be painful, but once he understands them, if he relates to this knowledge properly, he will feel very good about his discovery.

Rabbeinu Yona says as follows:

*One should not view himself as overly righteous. While the person was in his mother's womb, he was coerced to swear the following: "Even if the entire world tells me that I am a tzaddik, I will view myself as a rasha."*

But he does not mean a literal rasha. Rather, he should view himself 50-50, neither perfectly righteous nor perfectly evil. Thereby, if he performs one mitzvah, this is beneficial as it tilts the heavenly scales of judgment toward a righteous

status, while one sin tilts the scales toward a culpable status.

Rashi says that one should avoid the unconscious force of guilt. Maimonides held that having the conscious self-image of a rasha can destroy a person. Rabbeinu Yona felt that one should not view himself as either totally righteous or totally evil. The point is that one must not follow the views of other religions, which view everything through the lens of either good or bad, i.e., “Is one a good person or a bad person?” People perform mitzvos to feel good about themselves. And when one sins, he laments and views himself as a bad person. This good/bad person self-image is the basic motivation of human life. But Judaism was not satisfied with it. Judaism said this is shallow thinking. Rabbeinu Yona says one should view himself as 50-50, meaning he is neutral. Neither emotional pole is constructive. One who is neutral about himself can advance with wisdom. When one is neutral he will strive to observe mitzvos and avoid sins.

The path to perfection is kabbalas ol malchus shamayim, where one says, “Blessed is the reputation of His honorable kingship” (baruch shem kevod malchuso), referring to what man sees in creation, since man cannot know God directly, but only through His creations. Then man must actualize his knowledge through davening and avoiding the emotional good/bad person syndrome, and instead, use wisdom to perfect himself. [Feeling good offers no knowledge and there-

fore cannot help man advance, which is based on knowledge of the external world, i.e., God and the universe, and knowledge of oneself.]

In summary, through Shima one obtains true ideas, and he must accept these ideas emotionally; this is kabbalas ol malchus shamayim. He must then put these ideas into action; this is tefilah.

## 2:14 ATTITUDE OF LEARNING, CARE FOR OTHERS, & MOTIVATION

RABBI ELAZAR SAYS: “BE DILIGENT (SHAKUD) IN LEARNING TORAH, AND KNOW HOW TO RESPOND TO A HERETIC. KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU LABOR—THE MASTER OF YOUR WORK IS TRUSTWORTHY TO PAY YOU THE WAGE FOR YOUR ACTIVITY.”

Maimonides says “shakud” has two meanings. It could mean eagerly awaiting, or it could mean a constancy. “The Lord said to me: ‘You have seen right, for I am watchful [shakud] to bring My word to pass’” (Jer. 1:12). This verse

denotes eagerness and imminence. “Happy is the man who listens to Me, waiting [shakud] outside My doors, coming early to My gates each day” (Prov. 8:34). This verse depicts the righteous man as one who is always at the doors of the temple. This verse notes a constancy. “Shakud lilmod Torah” refers to one who is eager for Torah study, which should be a constant involvement.

#### KNOW HOW TO RESPOND TO A HERETIC.

Simply put, one should know how to answer the heretic’s questions on Torah. Other religions ostracized their heretics because the heretics posed questions those religions could not answer. [There are no answers to defend other religions because they are not based in truth.] However, Chazal did not fear the heretic; he was never a threat because Judaism is replete with wise sages. Our sages knew why a heretic chose his path and they had answers to all his questions. There was no threat that his questions would overthrow Judaism. No religion treats a heretic as Chazal treated Achare. They learned halachos from him, they never banished him, they prayed for him when he died, and they praised his Torah knowledge. But in all other religions the heretic is a real threat because his questions are unanswerable.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*One should establish himself to learn Torah so he knows how to respond to a heretic. For if he does not answer him according to his lies, people will learn from [the heretic] and they will drink his bad waters for others will witness the heretic defeating the talmid chocham. This results in a profanation of God's name and the Torah. And this heretic is one who denies the Oral Law. This also applies to those who give rulings not in accordance with Torah law.*

This last description fits Conservative rabbis as they deny the authenticity of the Oral Law. For example, when one gives reasons for how Chazal learned and taught, suggesting Hillel gave more lenient rulings because he had a more pleasant personality, or if one suggests that historical or social situations influenced Chazal's thinking, this is a denial of the Oral Law (Torah She-ba'al Peh). Such thinking led Conservative rabbis to abandon Chazal and follow modern society. This thinking is implicit in the Conservative Movement. Rabbeinu Yona says this is a hefker (wanton) approach, meaning it has no halachic structure.

What is the relationship between "Know how to respond to heretic," and "eager to study Torah?" Rabbeinu Yona connects two [seemingly] unrelated matters when he says, "One

should establish himself to learn Torah so he knows how to respond to a heretic.” [Should not one learn regardless of concerns about heretics?]

We said the phrase “shakud lilmod Torah” refers to eagerness. Why is one eager? Because he has the realization that he is about to embark upon the study of man’s ultimate reality: life itself. If one’s attitude toward learning Torah is to complete a masechta (tractate), this is good but it is not on the level of shakud. But if one learns as a shakud, he will be able to answer the heretic. This explains why Rabbeinu Yona connects shakud to a heretic. One’s eagerness to learn and understand reality will drive him to investigate all matters of religion, including the heretic’s questions.

One who is fortunate to have good rebbeim and learns the proper derech of limud Torah will gain the full spectrum of Torah [which includes why certain ideas are true and others are false. He will encounter the heretic’s questions, but unlike the heretic, who does not find answers and thereby rebels, the talmid chocham finds answers.] However, if one does not know how to answer the heretic, this person’s Torah is lacking.

Answering the heretic is not a matter separate from Torah study. By definition, the shakud studies all areas including the heretic’s questions. But if one cannot or does not answer the heretic, people will view the Torah as not having the answers, and this profanes the Torah. One’s learning cannot be myopic.

He must learn the information he needs to answer the heretic. His learning is not just for himself but to prevent any profanation of God and the Torah and to sanctify both.

Many people learn an area of talmud well and know halacha, but they do not know the fundamentals of Judaism. Maimonides discusses what a crime this is. And before him, Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda (author of Duties of the Heart) voiced the identical concern. One cannot learn Torah in the full sense if he doesn't understand the basic problems of life. The Chumash cover all aspects of how to live, the *derech ha'chaim*. Without this knowledge, one has no concept of Judaism. One cannot attain the level of *shakud* unless he knows Torah's fundamentals, the *yesodei hada'as*.

#### KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU LABOR.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*When you labor in Torah you should entertain yourself (play) with the Torah, for we find the Torah saying, "The Lord created me [Torah] at the beginning of His course, as the first of His works of old" (Prov. 8:22), and after this it is written, "I was with Him as a storehouse, a playing thing every day" (ibid. 8:30). Behold, God played with the Torah and you should do*

*this too, and that is what the next verse says, "Rejoicing in His inhabited world, finding delight with mankind" (ibid. 8:31). Just as the Torah was God's plaything before creation, so too it should make people happy after creation and be man's plaything.*

Rabbeinu Yona learns "Know before Whom you labor" to mean that learning Torah is not the same thing as working for an employer; the latter requires time and effort. But here, one must "Know before Whom he is working." One must emulate God in order to reach him. Therefore, we must understand how God himself works. The Torah says God used it as a plaything. Metaphorically speaking, God entertained himself with the Torah. On our level, we should imitate that process.

When Rabbeinu Yona says "The one who examines kidneys and hearts" [man's deepest thoughts] he means God knows whether one toils in Torah or not. There are two dimensions in learning Torah. One dimension is toil. The second dimension is emulating God. This means that one's studies must result in the Torah becoming one's entertainment. If this entertainment is lacking, then one is lacking in his labor of Torah.

Rarely is it found that one possesses qualities both of

diligence in Torah study and the ability to thoroughly enjoy Torah as a plaything. The combination is needed and is discussed here. Upon commencing Torah study, one experiences weariness, as one must gather all the sources, and that is difficult. Then one can experience the pure enjoyment of Torah study. One finds that he spontaneously thinks about learning; he might be walking down the street and suddenly thinks of an answer to a question. One enjoys thinking about learning more than any other pleasure. It is the greatest enjoyment and one is drawn to it. But to get to this point, one must first toil diligently and then enjoy the Torah as his greatest entertainment. But either activity alone is insufficient.

On the verse “This is the Torah, when a person dies in a tent” (Num. 9:14), Chazal say, “Man does not merit the crown of Torah unless he kills himself.” Death refers to the removal of all physical pleasures.

*This is the way [to toil in] Torah: Eat bread with salt and drink a small amount of water and sleep on the ground and live a life [whose conditions will cause you] pain, and in the Torah you should toil; if you do so (Psalms 128: 2) “Happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you.” Happy shall you be in this world, and it shall be well with you in the world to come. (Avos 6:4)*

Without the ability to remove oneself from physical pleasures, one cannot become a talmid chocham. This explains the statement, “Be careful with the sons of poor people because from them comes forth Torah” (Nedarim 81a), as the poor are detached from physical pleasures.

While the talmid chocham excels and experiences less pain in learning, he too must weary himself in his studies. King Solomon said, “But (af) my wisdom stood with me” (Koheles 2:9). Af also means anger—anger is required in Torah study if one is to become a talmid chocham. [Both anger and weariness denote diligence.]

THE MASTER OF YOUR WORK IS TRUSTWORTHY  
TO PAY YOU THE WAGE FOR YOUR ACTIVITY.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Do not make your work in Torah fraudulent because God is the employer and nothing is hidden from His eyes. Furthermore, how can one not work in Torah? You will gain a great reward for it and you can trust that God will pay your wages.*

Rabbeinu Yona makes two points: 1) one’s labor in Torah study should not be fraudulent, and 2) since there is much

reward, how could one not work in Torah?

Fraud applies either to others ... or to oneself. Torah study differs from other mitzvos like tefillin, wherein one cannot be fraudulent regarding the act of the mitzvah: one either wears his tefillin or he doesn't. Fraud is inapplicable. But Torah study is different as it is an internal phenomenon. One can go through the motions and not learn. Others will sit in front of the gemara but will waste time [and not learn], still thinking there is value in the external appearance. Therefore, we are told not to be fraudulent.

Rabbeinu Yona asks a strong question: "How does this mishna give us the incentive to learn in order to gain reward, when previously, in mishna 1:3, we are told that one should not serve God for a reward?" Rabbeinu Yona answers as follows: "In our mishna, the reward intends to quiet the powerful evil instincts that they do not have recourse to rebel against following the Torah." What is his answer?

Avos 1:3 says, "Do not be as servants who serve their master for a reward." The reward here is something other than the good of the Torah: one serves God expecting an external reward in the next world. When a person is on the proper level, he perceives the good of Torah and learning and needs no external reward to motivate his involvement, as Maimonides says, "One who knows what the good is desires to do it." But there is a stage in between these two,

where one does not see the good of learning itself and his instinctual drives momentarily remove him from the good. This person is stuck: he knows intellectually that the Torah is the good and needs no external incentive, but his emotions are not yet in line with the good. Therefore, Rabbeinu Yona says that one should translate the good of the Torah into emotional terms and say to himself as follows: “Isn’t it true if I learn I will have a greater reward than the reward [benefits] of the physical pleasures?” Since this person is still subject to emotional influence, Rabbeinu Yona says this person should view learning in that emotional framework in order to escape falling prey to pure instinctual passions. He uses a logical argument to win himself over to the side of learning. Once he learns, he no longer requires this ploy; the learning itself provides enjoyment [and retains his interest.] As this specific personality still functions in material terms, and he does not yet have the real perception of the good of learning in absolute terms, he translates his perception of learning into a material benefit to sway him to learn. Through the realization that he would benefit more from learning than from following his instincts, even in terms of material gain, he makes a proper evaluation in this in-between level. Although this person gauges the value of learning in comparative terms, he gains motivation to learn. [Of course, the highest level is when one is naturally attracted

to learning because of the value of the ideas alone. But one isn't born on that level so Rabbeinu Yona advises one on this interim level how to progress.]

Parenthetically, the Gaon was asked how he became a great lamdan (learner). He replied that he spent only a few minutes a day learning. [In truth, he spent much time daily in Torah.] This refers to those few free moments we each have every day. What do we do with them? One's entire framework and mental attitude are expressed in these minutes. If one opens a sefer and learns, he is a transformed person. If one doesn't learn during those few free minutes, it is indicative of one's attitude toward Torah. The soul's attitude toward Torah is expressed in minutes, not necessarily in many hours. If one needs many free hours to sit and learn, he does not fulfill the blessing "To involve in words of Torah." This means that all other actions aside from Torah study are interruptions. A person's primary involvement is Torah study. When he has free minutes, one can express his attitude.

Rabbeinu Yona offers a second explanation of "He is trustworthy to pay your wages":

*This was not stated to motivate people to serve God. Rather, just as one must search and understand God's unity, His greatness, His wisdom, and His wonders ... so*

*too, one is obligated to know that God rewards one's work and to understand the greatness of God's kindness in doing so.*

God's reward of man's labor in Torah—just like his unity—reflects His perfection. Knowing that God created a world where man earns reward adds to one's love of God. If one appreciates the true good that awaits man after death, he will have a great love for God. This is part of knowledge of God.

One must not confuse the reward of Torah with physical goods, otherwise he will err like Achare, who saw the son who 1) followed his father's command to 2) climb to the roof to send away the mother bird [two mitzvos rewarded with long life]. Nonetheless, the son fell and died. This caused Achare to question the Torah and say there is no reward. [Achare's error concerned the reward for mitzvos.] But one must understand that the Torah's reward is not in this world: "Rabbi Yaakov said, 'There is no reward for mitzvos in this world'" (Kiddushin 39b).

At times, we can perceive the greatness of God's wisdom. But, as Maimonides says, there is no comparison to the soul's enjoyment in the next world disconnected from physical existence. If a person can understand that benefit, he will understand God's kindness. But if one does not un-

derstand this, he will have questions such as “Why did this person die young?” We do not know why such matters take place, but we must know what the true reward is, as Avos 2:16 says, “Know that the reward for the righteous is in the next world.”

#### KNOW HOW TO RESPOND TO A HERETIC.

Maimonides comments:

*One needs to learn matters to know how to answer the Gentile heretics, and argue with them and answer them if they ask questions. Chazal say that this refers only to Gentile heretics. But the Jewish heretic will become worse if you answer him; he will continue to degrade the Torah. Therefore, there is no need to talk with him at all for there is no remedy or cure at all, as the Torah says, “All those who come to her will never return; they will not reach the paths of life” (Proverbs 2:19).*

Maimonides teaches that a Jewish heretic will not repent and change his ways. He says similarly in his Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Avodas Kochavim (Laws of Star Worship):

2:5 *A Jew who serves idols is identical to an idolater in every manner and he is unlike a Jew who sinned and is stoned. A rebel who follows idolatry rebels against the entire Torah. This Jew's repentance is never received, as it says, "All those who come to her will never return; they will not reach the paths of life" (ibid.). And who are these heretics? They are the ones who follow the ways of their thoughts and their nonsense until they finally violate the Torah's fundamentals and say there is no sin in doing so. It is prohibited to speak with them or to answer them in any way, as it says, "Do not approach the door of their house" (Proverbs 5:8).*

#### AND KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU LABOR.

Maimonides comments:

*Even though you should learn the views of the Gentile nations to know how to respond to them, be careful from considering any of their ideas. And know that the One you serve knows the recesses of your heart, as it says, "And know before whom you labor," meaning that your heart's intent must be the belief in God, blessed be His name.*

Maimonides writes in Hilchos Avodas Kochavim:

*2:2 The idolaters wrote many books concerning how to serve idols: what is the main part of the service, its various actions, and the details. God commanded us not to read those books at all, nor to think about them nor a single matter of these things. And it is prohibited to even look at an idolatrous form, as it says, "Do not turn toward the idols" (Lev. 19:4). And regarding this the Torah says, "Do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did those nations worship their gods?, and I too will follow those practices.'" (Deut. 1:30). One should not inquire even though he does not worship it because inquiry causes one to follow idolatry and to act as the idolaters act, as it says, "and I too will follow those practices."*

*2:3 And all these prohibitions are one category, that one should not turn after idolatry. And anyone who turns after it in the manner that he performs an action will be whipped.*

What is Maimonides' implication concerning being whipped? He means that one reached a certain level leading him to act. Actual idolatry is punished with death. Here, one did some activity not deserving death, but whipping. Maimonides continues:

*And not idolatry alone is one prohibited to turn after in one's thoughts, but regarding any thought that causes one to uproot a fundamental from the Torah's fundamentals, we are warned not to entertain it in our hearts. And we must not interrupt our minds to consider it and be drawn after the whims of the heart. Because a person's mind is limited and not every intellect can soundly understand the truth. And if every person would follow his thoughts, the result would be the destruction of the world due to man's limited mind. How will this occur? One time a person will think about idolatry and another time we will think about God's unity: "Maybe God exists, maybe He doesn't?" [Man will ponder] what is above [the world], what is below? What preceded it? What will follow it? At times, one will question prophecy: "Maybe it is true, maybe it is not?" And sometimes he will question the Torah: "Maybe it is divine, maybe it is not?" And he is bereft of the skills in thought to accurately determine the full truth and he will find he turns toward heresy. And on this matter the Torah warned, "You should not turn aside after your hearts and after your eyes that you lust after" (Num. 15:39). Meaning, you should not be drawn after your limited minds and think that your thoughts have attained the truth. For Chazal have said "after your hearts" refers to heresy, and "after your eyes" refers to lewdness. And even though this prohibition causes one to lose Olam Haba, there is no whipping.*

2:4 *The prohibition of idolatry is as weighty as all the other mitzvos, as it says, "If you err not to observe all these mitzvos that the Lord has declared to Moshe" (Num. 15:22), and from Chazal we learn "all these mitzvos" refers to idolatry. Thereby we learn that all who agree with idolatry deny the entire Torah and all the prophets and all that which the prophets commanded from Adam until the end of the world, as it says, "From the day that it was commanded and further to your generations" (ibid. 15:23). And all who deny idolatry affirm the entire Torah and all prophets and all that which the prophets commanded from Adam until the end of the world, and this is the core of all the mitzvos.*

The question is that Maimonides himself said in his Guide (book III, chap. XXIX) that he conducted a thorough study of idolatry, reading all available books. Furthermore, he says the more one understands concerning idolatry, the more one understands certain parts of the Torah. He writes:

*... my knowledge of the belief, practice, and worship of the Sabeans has given me an insight into many of the divine precepts and has led me to know their reason (ibid.).*

How then can Maimonides say that God prohibited one to read idolatrous books at all or to think about them? A Tal-

mudic portion (Shabbos 75a) answers this:

*“When you come into the land that the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to go after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one that uses divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer” (Deuteronomy 18:9–10). And the Sages inferred: “You shall not learn to do, but you may learn to understand and to teach [against them].”*

The problem is that this mitzvah applies to someone like Maimonides, but not to others, as Maimonides writes, “Because a person’s mind is limited and not every intellect can soundly understand the truth. And if every person would follow his thoughts, the result would be the destruction of the world due to man’s limited mind.” [It is difficult to conceive of a command that applies to only a portion of the population.]

The answer is derived from the verse “Do not turn toward the idols” (Lev. 19:4), and this also applies to [turning toward] anything from one’s own mind. This verse means that if a person is captivated by the attraction and curiosity of idolatry, it is a Torah prohibition to pursue that curiosity. This is the meaning of “Do not turn after your hearts.” Curi-

osity will lead one to embrace idolatry. How does this work?

There is a reason for one's curiosity in this area: it is the same emotion behind those practicing full-blown idolatry. Why does Maimonides state that the idolaters had special practices? Idolatry is highly detailed and each detail is based on some emotion. When a person expresses curiosity about idolatry, he is being hit by the same emotion the idolater expresses in his many practices.

Don't think idolaters existed only in ancient times, they are here today as well. Human emotions do not change [throughout time]. People are drawn to idolatry as it awakens certain emotions of which man is unaware. Those emotions reside deep within man's psyche. If those emotions are awakened, it is a Torah prohibition to follow them. But if one is a great chocham, and he has overcome those emotions and they play no role in his life, if he studies idolatry to gain knowledge, he is not in violation.

When Maimonides says one will think about idolatry one moment and about God another moment, such varying thoughts are not based on study, but are due to a strong part of his nature that finds idolatry attractive. He is not investigating the validity of idolatry. [Maimonides carefully isolates the unique behavior of one who is under the sway of curiosity—he does not engage in rational analysis, rather he acts out of emotional curiosity.] Such questions are a viola-

tion. But if one doesn't ask based on emotions, but from his mind, then it is a mitzvah to understand idolatry. On the previous verse, "You should not learn to perform" (Deut. 18:9), Rashi comments as follows:

*But you should learn to understand and to teach: to understand their actions, how damaging they are, and to teach your sons not to do such and such, for this is the statute of the Gentiles.*

It is interesting that this mitzvah was formulated based on which part of the psyche is being drawn to inquire about idolatry. The Torah also says, "Do not turn toward the Ovov and the Yidonim" (Lev. 19:31) [other idolatrous practices]. Therefore, depending on what part of the person inquires about idolatry, in one case there is a violation, and in the other case, where one seeks to understand the corrupt elements of idolatry, it is a mitzvah to gain this knowledge and steer others clear of idolatry.

Why do we reject the teshuvah of a Jewish heretic? He lost his rationality and bases his thoughts on his emotions alone. It is impossible to become a heretic otherwise. Since everything in the Torah is based on reality and everything in the Torah is true, one who uses his mind cannot become a heretic. "The disgusting man says in his heart, 'There is no

God” (Psalms 14:1). But the Jewish heretic who was raised in a system of wisdom and rejected it, arrives at his heresy through a part of his personality that is not rational. Like Maimonides said, the Jewish heretic follows the “thoughts of his heart,” his emotions. [Through emotions and not reason], he becomes the final arbiter on what is reality. The reason his teshuvah is rejected is because there is no means to reach a person who rejects reality and is convinced by his subjective emotions alone. This is a withdrawal into a narcissistic mentality. The more such a person is told that he is wrong, the more he will entrench himself in his position, despite rational arguments. One cannot interact with such a heretic. His teshuvah is not accepted since it is almost impossible for him to return to his senses. “All those who come to her will not return” (Proverbs 2:19). By what means can this person be reached if he denies reality and determines his own reality based on emotions? But the Gentile heretic has not yet been exposed to a system of wisdom; perhaps he will recognize rationality. Therefore, we do talk with the Gentile heretic to try and expose his accepted views as false, and share true reality with him. The Gentile heretic did not yet reach the deformity of his personality. He is equally God’s creature and one should help him learn what reality is.

Why does Maimonides say the denial of idolatry is the summation of the Torah? Idolatry is defined as catering to

the emotion's projections [fabricated reality]. The essence of the Torah is to subdue that part of man, and to raise to the highest level the other part of man that perceives wisdom: the intellect. Idolatry is the exact opposite.

This decision to assess idolatry or not, was given over to one's self estimation. As Maimonides says, "One must be careful from accepting any idolatrous views, as God knows the recesses of one's heart, and all man's intent should be on the belief in God" (Avos 2:14).

We also cited Chazal, who said, "Turning after one's heart refers to heresy, and turning after one's eyes refers to lewdness." From infancy, the child desires the removal of parental authority [restrictions] and chases the satisfaction of his desires. Man retains these two powerful unconscious attractions. With his sexual fantasies, man feels his salvation will be had. And with heresy, man desires freedom: "Why do I need all these restrictions?" These drives continue throughout life and are the meaning behind turning after one's "heart" and one's "eyes." The Torah worked out an amazing system to protect man from these dangers.

According to Maimonides, our mishna first urges one to learn Torah for himself, "Be eager and diligent [shakud] to learn Torah." But the following statement, "Know how to respond to a heretic," means man must learn to help others—even Gentiles—so others should have the true ideas.

## 2:15 THE HUMAN CONDITION: THE PROBLEM

RABBI TARFON SAID: "THE DAY IS SHORT AND THE WORK IS MUCH, AND THE WORKERS ARE LAZY AND THE REWARD IS GREAT, AND THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE IS PRESSING."

Moshe Rabbeinu directed all his energies toward wisdom. This explains why he did not sleep during those forty days and nights on Mount Sinai. [Because of his great desire to learn God's wisdom] there was no way to turn off those energies. Rabbeinu Yona says that Moshe viewed wisdom like pearls and he did not wish to forfeit a single idea through sleep. Rabbeinu Yona gave an example of a person to whom the king offered to collect all the gold he desired and to keep whatever he could collect. Certainly, the person would not waste any time sleeping. But even in this example, the person would eventually tire and fall asleep because even with regards to money, there exists frustration. Sleep is the withdrawal from reality because of these frustrations. But Moshe Rabbeinu represents man in a state where there is no frustration. When a person is attracted to the true good, he does not sleep. People sleep because of psychological factors. Animals sleep as there is no positive conscious energy flow. Man also dreams to satisfy frustrations he could not

satisfy while awake. Therefore, he satisfies his desires in his dream world. But if man was put in the perfect state, he would never sleep. That was Moshe Rabbeinu. It was not a miracle that he did not sleep: Any person in the perfect state would not sleep. But Moshe's refraining from eating and drinking was a physiological miracle. The Vilna Gaon's son said that his father would sleep one half hour at a time, four times a day. He didn't sleep on the bed, but on the table. Rashi says that when Yaakov attended the yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years, he did not sleep. I believe this means he slept very little. Yaakov had a very enjoyable time involved wisdom. How could he sleep?

... THE WORKERS ARE LAZY AND THE REWARD  
IS GREAT.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*People are lazy when it comes to learning  
Torah. Even the zealous chochamim are  
lazy because man's nature is to be lazy;  
nobody escapes this. Some are lazy to a  
greater or lesser degree.*

A business owner earns all the profits and he also receives honor. Workers receive only X dollars per hour. The owner

isn't lazy as he does what he loves—he becomes rich and people praise him. The workers are lazy as they receive little. The rule is that when one does what he loves he is not lazy. Laziness is not a character trait but a mood that results from a situation.

Rabbeinu Yona teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu was not lazy as he was involved in an activity that gave him tremendous satisfaction. But the zealous chochamim refer to a resistance, which explains why zeal is necessary. Those not on the level of Moshe are drawn toward matters other than learning, requiring a zeal to coerce themselves to learn.

A second laziness is a resistance to impose an authoritative will on oneself. This echoes what was said previously regarding childhood. The child rebels against his father as he desires freedom without restrictions. One rebellious expression is positive aggression. Another expression is passive resistance. These two expressions can also exist in one person. One can try to impose on himself an authoritative drive to do X, and another part of his personality passively resists. This is laziness, the resistance against that authoritative part.

Thus, one is lazy because he is currently drawn toward other attractions, even though the higher areas of learning would yield greater satisfaction. And the second laziness is resistance. Therefore, Rabbeinu Yona says that no one es-

capacities since every human being possesses these components of an authoritative voice and resistance.

To overcome laziness, one must be honest with himself and explore the causes. Rabbeinu Yona mentions that even the chochamim are lazy in order that an average person will not feel guilty by comparison about his laziness and will come to terms with it and work on himself.

... AND THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE IS PRESS-  
ING.

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*A regular employer agrees to pay his worker for his time; be it a small or a great amount, he pays accordingly. But God is not that type of employer, if even one moment is wasted there will be a punishment.*

This mishna contrasts the infinite and the finite, and that man must translate the infinite into finite terms. The finite is “The day is short.” How much wisdom can man acquire, even if he is the greatest chocham? Compared to the wisdom that exists in the universe, man’s wisdom is nothing. The greatest mind tapped but a fraction of the wisdom that exists. And even those minds like Aristotle were later found to

have faulty premises. Therefore, what can man accomplish in seventy years?

Rabbi Tarfon was discussing the absurdity of the situation. Man is finite with seventy years, yet he has a mechanism that can perceive something so much greater than his existence. But regardless of his level of wisdom, he can only hope to scratch the surface.

“The workers are lazy and the reward is great” means the same thing but in a different respect. The first contrast deals with the objective framework: man’s mind versus the world of wisdom. The second contrast addresses how man’s motivation relates to the infinite. The reward is great as it stems from the infinite. But the worker tries to translate the reward into finite [earthly/material] terms to attain some motivation. As man is psychological, he must translate everything into instinctual terms. Doing so, he loses his view of the infinite reward. In terms of creating motivation, he is inherently at a tremendous loss. Man cannot picture the infinite reward; he can’t relate to this “great reward.” This results in laziness, as Maimonides says, “Despite all the warnings in the Torah to observe it, it does not help to the degree one would imagine.”

## ... AND THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE IS PRESSING.

In this area of Torah obligation, there is no such thing as free time. There is no rest from reality. Either one is gaining or he is losing, he is either progressing or declining.

“Let us make man in our form in our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). From the phrase “Let us make man,” other religions interpret there to exist more than one God [“us” implying plurality]. Why then did God not say, “I will make man,” instead of “Let us make man?” Rashi says that God consulted His angels as to whether to create man, and the angels said “No.” Why did they oppose man’s creation? They saw no purpose in creating man, who cannot accomplish much. His life is short, his motivation is crippled, and he is caught up in this trap at every moment. But as God created man—as Rabbi Tarfon underlines—the point is that we cannot understand God’s wisdom in creating man. God alone knows the answer. “Let us make man” implies the dialogue with the angels who could not agree upon a reason to create man. “Let us” teaches that God alone possesses the answer. Therefore, we have the last mishna in Avos...

## 2:16 THE HUMAN CONDITION: THE SOLUTION

HE [RABBI TARFON] USED TO SAY: "IT IS NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FINISH THE WORK, BUT NEITHER ARE YOU FREE TO DESIST FROM IT. IF YOU HAVE LEARNED MUCH TORAH, YOUR REWARD WILL BE MUCH; AND THE MASTER OF YOUR WORK IS TRUSTWORTHY TO PAY YOU THE WAGE FOR YOUR ACTIVITY. AND KNOW THE GIVING OF REWARD TO THE RIGHTEOUS IS IN THE FUTURE [WORLD] TO COME.

In mishna 2:15, Rabbi Tarfon sets forth the painful reality of man's existence. Such knowledge gives man an attitude of the soul. But what does man do next? mishna 2:16 is the practicality. Now that we see that man's existence is absurd, how should he proceed?

"It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it" means that one must remove the desire for accomplishment from his Torah learning. Therefore, don't disengage because you cannot complete it, but realize that learning is not an accomplishment, but an activity. This is something in which one can partake. ["Activity" is something one can enjoy at every moment, and provides man with satisfaction. Whereas if man learned Torah to gain a sense of accomplishment, the reality that he could not learn

all the wisdom that is out there would make man apathetic and lazy.] Rabbeinu Yona says:

*Don't say, "I am not one with a broad heart,  
I can't span all of Torah and I cannot com-  
plete it; of what benefit is there in my toil,  
and what will I gain from all this effort?"*

This voices man's attempt to translate learning into physical terms, like accomplishments or accumulation. But rationality dictates that we do not apply to learning [which is the infinite] the rules of other areas [the finite].

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*As long as you work in Torah, that is the mitzvah.*

This means that one should have before his mind's eye nothing other than the activity alone. This is Rabbi Tarfon's lesson. As we stated, man's problem is that he is finite, but he deals with wisdom, which is an infinite commodity. The quest is insurmountable and this destroys one's motivation. Therefore, one must remove the motivation of accomplishment and attach himself to the activity alone. This is the only way to approach learning. We are here; there must be some method by which we can approach learning [and life.]

IF YOU HAVE LEARNED MUCH TORAH, YOUR REWARD WILL BE MUCH.

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*There is an advantage to the one who [decides] for himself [to learn] much, as he becomes wiser than the one who learns little, even though both do not desist.*

After the first part of the mishna, one understands that he is not free to abandon learning. Of course, if one learns more, there is more benefit. What then is Rabbeinu Yona's point?

He means that learning is not just an involvement in an activity; that is not where it ends. The activity results in a certain attitude of the soul. "There is an advantage to one who decides for himself to learn much, as he becomes wiser." This means that the activity of learning changes the man's soul. Rabbeinu Yona explains what the reward is; a person should have some idea where the reward lies. With no idea of the reward, man is not motivated. Rabbi Tarfon points to the answer. First, one must forget about accomplishment, since learning is [intended to be enjoyed as] an activity [and not as an accumulation.] But this activity changes the soul of the one partaking of it. If one learns properly, he learns more, and his soul's attitude toward reality changes. This is the meaning behind "The reward is much."

