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Honey and Circles

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

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¹ As well as a conclusion of the Order of *Taharos* and all *Six Orders of Mishnah* (see next fn.); and see at length *Sefer HaSichos* 5748 vol. 2, p. 645 ff.

1.

THE LAST TWO MISHNAYOS

The last tractate of the Six Orders of Mishnah² — tractate *Uktzin*³ — details the laws of food and liquid impurity (recorded in our *parshah*).⁴ The final halachah⁵ in this tractate states:

From when does {the honey within} honeycombs become {susceptible to being rendered} impure as a liquid?⁶ Beis Shammai says: From when one contemplates⁷ {extracting the honey} [or in an alternate version: From when one smokes {the bees out}⁸]. Beis Hillel says: From when one crushes {the honeycomb to extract the honey}.

Beis Shammai maintains that honey is defined as a liquid from the moment a person contemplates⁹ “to extract the honey.” At that point, the honey is subject to the law of liquid impurity. In contrast, according to Beis Hillel, honey is susceptible to impurity as a liquid only “from when one crushes {the honeycomb},” at which point it becomes a liquid in actuality.¹⁰

Next, in the following mishnah (the final mishnah of the Six Orders of Mishnah),¹¹ it says:

² According to the standard order used for the Mishnah and Talmud of *Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodashim, Taharos*; see sources cited in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 11, p. 56, fn. 13; et al.

³ So it is in the prevalent editions of the Mishnah and Talmud. This is also written explicitly — by Rambam in his Introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*; the *Meiri* in his foreword; **et al.** — *Rash* is of the view ({as recorded in his commentary} on the beginning of tractate *Taharos*) that tractate *Taharos* should follow the tractate of *Uktzin*. “However, the vast majority of authors and commentators do not agree with *Rash* on this point” (Introduction to *Smichas Chachamim* (70c)).

⁴ *Vayikra* 11:34.

⁵ *Uktzin* 3:11. {This the penultimate mishnah but the last that teaches a halachah.}

⁶ {The laws regarding food and liquid impurity differ in various respects. For instance, they vary in the severity of the level of impurity that they incur upon contact with something having the status of *rishon letum'ah* (first degree of impurity), among other distinctions. Until honey is removed from the honeycomb, the honey has the status of solid food just like the honeycomb. It is not considered a liquid. This mishnah seeks to identify that moment the honey's status changes to that of liquid.}

⁷ The alternate version cited in the commentaries of Rav Hai Gaon, *Rash, Rosh, the Aruch* (“*charcher*”), *Bartenura*; et al.

⁸ The primary version is cited in the sources mentioned above in fn. 7 {fn. 5 in the original}; Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishnah*; et al.; this is also the extant printed versio.

⁹ This is the interpretation in the sources mentioned above in fn. 7 {fn. 5 in the original}. In *Tiferes Yaakov*, ad. loc. {it says} that it should be speech; see also *Mishnah Achronah*. Further discussion is beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁰ See Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishnah* and commentary of *Rosh*; see also *Mishnah Achronah*.

¹¹ {*Uktzin* 3:12.} It is noted in *Chillufei Girsas LeMishnayos* that this mishnah “does not appear in the Munich manuscript.” See also *Melech Shlomoh*, ad. loc. (mis. 11).

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: In the Future, the Holy One will bequeath to each and every tzaddik 310 worlds, as it says:¹² “To bequeath *yesh* {substance} to those who love Me, and I shall fill their storehouses.” {The numerical value of *yesh*, *שׁ*, is 310.} Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta said: The Holy One could find no vessel to hold a blessing for Yisrael other than peace. As it says,¹³ “Hashem gives strength to His nation, Hashem blesses His nation with peace, *בְּשָׁלוֹם*” {which can be read as, “*in* peace, *בְּשָׁלוֹם*”}.

We need to clarify: What is the connection between the final mishnah — the teachings of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta — and the previous mishnah (the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding honeycomb)?

Rambam¹⁴ (and other commentators)¹⁵ explain: “Once {the Mishnah} has completed outlining all the laws... its concluding statements describe the reward {received for fulfilling these laws}.” In other words, there is indeed no cohesion between this mishnah and the preceding one. Nevertheless, it is {placed here} at the end of the entire Six Orders of Mishnah “to inform us, upon the conclusion of the Mishnah, of the reward received by tzaddikim who study and uphold all that is written in the Mishnah.”¹⁶

However, in several places,¹⁷ the Gemara offers explanations for the juxtaposition of mishnahs, even when they appear (immediately following each other) in different tractates — and all the more so for two mishnahs in the same chapter.¹⁸ Therefore (although the Rambam’s reasoning remains unimpeachable), there is presumably justification to also explain the connection between these two mishnahs (at any rate, to make this juxtaposition more palatable, etc.).

¹² *Mishlei* 8:21.

¹³ *Tehillim* 29:11.

¹⁴ In Rambam’s *Commentary on the Mishnah*, ad. loc.

¹⁵ *Rosh* and *Bartenura*.

¹⁶ In the words of *Bartenura*.

¹⁷ See beg. of tractate *Taanis*; *Sotah*; *Makkos*; et al.

¹⁸ For all are in agreement that the order of Mishnah is significant within the same tractate (*Bava Kamma* 102a), and all more so in the same chapter.

Thus, we may posit that the theme of the mishnah immediately preceding the mishnah's conclusion (i.e., the principle of reward for {the performance of} mitzvos) — the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding honeycomb — is related to the reward for mitzvos discussed at the Mishnah's conclusion.¹⁹

2.

SERVING HASHEM FOR REWARD?!

To answer, we need to preface with an explanation of the abovementioned commentaries. These commentators say the Six Orders of Mishnah conclude with the above statements to allude to the reward of the tzaddikim. This is problematic:

The subject {of this mishnah} is the spiritual level of tzaddikim after they conclude learning the Six Orders of Mishnah. This conclusion represents the consummate level of Torah study, covering the whole ambit of the Oral Law, in the manner of tzaddikim. Obviously, these tzaddikim surely engage in *avodah*²⁰ that conforms to the guidelines laid down earlier in the Order of *Nezikin*: “Serve the Master without the intent of receiving a reward.”²¹ In other words, observe mitzvos not for the sake of reward but for their intrinsic value.

Moreover, the verse cited in this very mishnah says: “To bequeath *yesh* to **those who love Me**” — {referring to} those who serve Hashem **out of love**. This denotes (as Rambam explains at length)²² people who serve Hashem **for its intrinsic sake**, not for the sake of reward. Rather, “he does what is true because it is true.”²³

¹⁹ See as well *Cheshek Shlomo* on the end of *Uktzin*.

²⁰ {Divine service.}

²¹ *Avos* 1:3.

²² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 2 ff; Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishnah*, “*Sanhedrin*,” Introduction to chapter “*Chelek*.”

²³ Wording of Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” *ibid*.

(One who “does what is true because it is true” is assured [as Rambam mentions there]²⁴ that “because of it, ultimately, good will come {to him}.” Nonetheless, **this ultimate** goodness is not the ultimate objective of his *avodah*. After all, for a person motivated by his love for Hashem and his desire to serve Him, the promise that “ultimately, good will come because of it” is only a secondary and subordinate benefit. The person’s **primary** {concern} is to merit serving Hashem **for its own sake**.)

Since the primary objective when engaging in Torah and mitzvos is to do so selflessly, not for the receipt of reward, the question arises: How is it fitting for the completion of all Six Orders of Mishnah — which signifies a milestone of the greatest and foremost level in *avodas* Hashem, etc. — to **conclude** with (not “his soul is bound up in the love of Hashem...,”²⁵ but) the promise that a person will receive 310 worlds, etc., as compensation and reward for the *avodah* of Torah and mitzvos?!²⁶

Therefore, we must say that the promise of being given “310 worlds” discussed in the present mishnah is not reward in its usual sense²⁷ — **remunerating** a person by gifting him with “worlds” for his service to Hashem. Instead, this endowment is a mark of proficiency in *avodah*, an **ascent** attained by a person through his *avodah*, serving Hashem out of love.²⁸

²⁴ Rambam, *ibid*.

²⁵ Wording of Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 3.

²⁶ Note *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 20, p. 45; “*Hadran*” for the tractate *Avos*, sec. 3 ff (appears at the end of *Sefer HaBiurim LePirkei Avos* (Kehot)).

²⁷ And accordingly — the terms “reprisal” and “reward” used by the commentaries are **borrowed** terms.

²⁸ See, as well, *Mishnah Achronah*, ad loc: “...and this reward is the knowledge of G-dliness...”

3.

BEIS SHAMMAI AND BEIS HILLEL

This principle is also the theme shared by this mishnah and the preceding one — the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding honeycombs:

One of the reasons (from a homiletic-based approach) that the subject of the final laws (of the Mishnah) — the conclusion of Mishnah, and everything follows its conclusion²⁹ — concerns “bees” and “honey,” **as explained by our Sages**, is that bees³⁰ symbolize the consummate level of *avodah* — ***avodah for its own sake*** (as explained in Section 7). Such *avodah* is the precursor and prelude to what “in the Future, the Holy One will bequeath to each and every tzaddik...” — the perfection that can be reached through an *avodah* resembling the *avodah* of bees.

And the reasoning behind Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel’s **dispute** (about a honeycomb):

As discussed several times,³¹ this dispute is linked to a broader difference between their two respective schools of thought, whether “we focus on the potential state” or “...on the actual state”: Beis Shammai maintains that “we focus on the potential state.” Accordingly, honey is subject to the laws of liquids from the moment (“he smokes it,” or even from when) “he thinks {about extracting and making the liquid honey}” (since in **potential**, the honey is liquid, even though it is still far from being transformed into an actual liquid state). In contrast, Beis Hillel maintains that “we focus on the actual state.” Accordingly, honey is not subject to the laws of liquid until it **actually** reaches a liquid state, “from when he crushes {the honeycomb}.”

This dispute illustrates a foundational difference between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel concerning the overarching purpose of “a person’s creation upon

²⁹ *Berachos* 12a.

³⁰ *Devarim Rabbah* sec. 1, par. 6.

³¹ *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 1, p. 146; vol. 6, p. 70; vol. 7, p. 114; et al.

earth.”³² {In the words of the Talmud:} “I was created to serve the One who formed me”³³ (as explained in Section 8 and onwards). This (also) leads to a divergence in their views concerning the ultimate level a person can attain through his *avodah*. Therefore, following this dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel, the conclusion of the Mishnah — “in the Future, the Holy One, will bequeath...” — may be better understood.

4.

RECEIVING VS. INHERITING

The wording of Mishnah is concise³⁴ and precise. {Therefore, the wording of this mishnah,} “In the Future, the Holy One will **bequeath...** 310 worlds,” seems baffling. How is it appropriate for the mishnah to use the verb “bequeath” — denoting inheritance?³⁵ Inheritance does not entail an heir to expend **effort** (since as soon as a relative of the deceased is **born**,³⁶ he is **automatically** an inheritor). Accordingly, when discussing the **reward** of tzaddikim, the mishnah should have said, “In the Future, the Holy One will *give*” (or the like)!

The mystery is even greater: The same statement is cited in tractate *Sanhedrin*.³⁷ There, it does say, “In the Future, the Holy One will **give** to each and every tzaddik 310 worlds”!

The explanation, we can say, is that within the question lays the answer:³⁸ The statement in tractate *Sanhedrin*, by the *Amora*³⁹ Rava bar Mari, indeed discusses the **reward** for the performance of mitzvos. Therefore it says, “In the Future, the Holy One will **give**.”

³² {Stylistic adaptation of *Iyov* 20:4.}

³³ End of *Kiddushin*.

³⁴ Rambam’s Introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, s.v., “*Acharei Chein Ra’ah LeHistapek*.”

³⁵ As is in the question in *Tosfos Yom Tov* (et al.) ad. loc.; see also Responsa *Noda BeYehudah*, 2nd ed., “*Yoreh De’ah*,” ch. 161 (in answer to the question asked below in fn. 38 {fn. 34 in the original}).

³⁶ Or by way of marriage (see *Kesubos* 83a ff.; *Bava Basra* 108a; 111b).

³⁷ *Sanhedrin* 100a; see also next fn.

³⁸ In light of the explanation here, the question raised by the commentaries — what does the statement (made by an *Amora*) in *Sanhedrin* add to what had already been explicitly stated in the **mishnah** — is resolved.

³⁹ {A title given to the sages of the Talmud.}

However, this mishnah, which **concludes** the entire Mishnah and is its summation, (plainly) is not discussing the reward for mitzvos. Rather (as mentioned above), this mishnah discusses the perfection a tzaddik can achieve through *avodah* when propelled by love. Therefore, **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi**⁴⁰ says precisely, “In the Future, the Holy One will **bequeath**” — since {the benefit conferred to a tzaddik by dint of} the tzaddik’s perfection is analogous to how an heir receives his inheritance and falls within similar parameters.

5.

A UNIFIED HEIR

The Rogatchover’s⁴¹ explanation⁴² regarding the process of inheritance is well-known: An heir is not a separate personhood who receives the deceased’s property. Instead, heirs (in the words of the verse) stand “in place of your fathers.”⁴³ In other words, an inheritor assumes **the role of the one who bequeaths**. An heir is one with, and the same person as, the bequeather ({a son is} “the essence of the father,” to borrow the Rogatchover’s expression).

The same applies to Jews: The ultimate level attained by a Jew through learning Torah and performing mitzvos {is described similarly. In the case of Torah study}, the Jews, the Torah, and the Holy One become unified (“three... are tied to each other, the Holy One, the Torah, and Yisrael,”⁴⁴ and are all one). Similarly,⁴⁵ by performing mitzvos — the word *mitzvah* being etymologically related to “*tzavsa*,” denoting **connection** — the Jew, as it were, becomes a single being with the Giver of the Torah and Commander of the mitzvos, Hashem Himself.

⁴⁰ See the end of Rambam’s Introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (ch. 2), which states that he was a *Tanna*. See also *Tosfos Yom Tov, Melechos Shlomoh*, et al., on this mishnah.

⁴¹ {Rabbi Yosef Rosen (5618-5696), known by his place of birth in ‘Rogachov.’}

⁴² Responsa *Tzafnas Pane’ach*, Dvinsk ed., vol. 1, ch. 118; Warsaw ed., vol. 2, ch. 118; et al.

⁴³ *Tehillim* 45:17; see also *Bava Basra* 159a.

⁴⁴ *Zohar*, vol 3, 73a.

⁴⁵ However, there exists a difference between Torah and mitzvos themselves; see *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 23; et al.

This is the meaning of “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me”: Rambam⁴⁶ explains that “*yesh*” denotes “a continuous existence with no end.”⁴⁷ And “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me” means: “I will bequeath ‘*yesh hamuchlat* {absolute existence}’ to those who love Me,” for “any soul that merits the life of the World to Come will never expire.”

How can a created being “obtain” “*yesh hamuchlat*,” a “continuous existence” — something that is everlasting and infinite? The verse explains and emphasizes: “To **bequeath** *yesh* to those who love Me.” Meaning, Jews don’t obtain this as one **receiving** from one who is **giving** it, as a **separate** being who takes from the “Giver.” Rather, Jews **inherit** as **heirs** who are one with Hashem who bequeaths: After all, Jews are Hashem’s “children.”⁴⁸ Therefore, by learning Torah and performing mitzvos, a Jew reveals that he is the same entity as the true “*yesh hamuchlat*”⁴⁹ (“continuous existence”). {This principle is alluded to by the well-known interpretation given to the verse, “Take (for) Me *terumah*,” that} “you are taking Me.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Rambam’s *Commentary on the Mishnah*, ad. loc.; a similar explanation is given by the *Rosh* (see marginal notes on fn. 13 in the original).

⁴⁷ This is the wording in Kapach’s edition. There are slight differences in wording in the prevalent versions of Rambam’s *Commentary on the Mishnah*. {The same applies to all other quotes from his *Commentary on the Mishnah* cited below.}

⁴⁸ *Shemos* 4:22; *Devarim* 14:1; *Avos* ch. 3, par. 14; et al.

⁴⁹ See as well *Maamarei Admur HaEmtza’i*, “*Bereishis*,” p. 55 (and citations there); end of *Maamar* “*Amar Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi*” (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, vol. 2, 103a, and *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5700 (p. 49)) that the verse, “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me,” alludes to the idea of “***yesh ha’emiti***,” “Real Existence.”

⁵⁰ *Shemos Rabbah* sec. 33, par. 6 (see also par. 1); *Vayikra Rabbah* sec. 30, par. 13; et al.

6.

FEELING HASHEM'S DELIGHT

From the above discussion, the **delight** experienced by tzaddikim is now also understood. Parenthetically, this is the meaning of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's words, "In the Future, the Holy One will bequeath to each and every tzaddik **310 worlds**," as explained by Rambam.⁵¹ This statement intimates that the delight experienced in the World to Come is "310 times" greater than "all the delights of This World."⁵²

This is not the delight derived by tzaddikim as they exist in their own right [in Chassidic vernacular,⁵³ the "gratification of a created being" — gratification felt by a Jew in recompense for having fulfilled Hashem's will]. Rather, it is as if {they were experiencing} ("the **Creator's** gratification"), as in our Sages' statement,⁵⁴ "It is a source of gratification **for Me**, as I spoke and My will was fulfilled":

Since Jews constitute a single entity with the "**One who bequeaths**," it is as if they can "**inherit**" the Creator's delight.

[As Rambam explains immediately, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's use of the number "310" is a rhetorical device⁵⁵ to garner the listener's attention.⁵⁶ In truth, however, this delight is **limitless**.]

This is the difference between the reward for mitzvos and Hashem bequeathing "*yesh* to those who love Me":

The rapture granted to a person as a **reward** for his *avodah* can only match the capacity inherent in a **created being** to experience. This **receipt of**

⁵¹ Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishnah*, ad. loc.

⁵² See fn. 47 above.

⁵³ See *Likkutei Torah*, "Re'eh," 29a; *Hemshech "VeKacha 5637,"* ch. 12; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 244.

⁵⁴ Rashi's commentary on *Vayikra* 1:9; *Bamidbar* 28:8 from *Sifrei*, ad. loc. (this also appears in *Sifrei*, "*Bamidbar*" 15:3, see Rashi, ad. loc.).

⁵⁵ {In the original Hebrew, "*derech haarah bilvad*."}

⁵⁶ See fn. 47 above.

a reward demonstrates that the beneficiary is a distinct being (who must be compensated for his labor).

In contrast, the statement, “In the Future, the Holy One will bequeath... *yesh* to those who love Me,” speaks of the Creator’s delight (something concerning “*yesh hamuchlat*”). This is not a matter of **reward** for performing mitzvos; it is the “**essence** of the mitzvah itself.”⁵⁷ And this “{Divine} delight” is “inherited” by a person; it is as if the person were a single entity with Hashem.

7.

INHERITING *YESH*

This is why it is specifically “**to those who love Me**” that Hashem will “bequeath *yesh*.” When can a person attain this level — “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me”? When he also conducts his **avodah** with no thought of himself. Rather, he performs his *avodah* entirely for its own sake — to gratify Hashem.

As long as a person is concerned with reward or with himself (**his** ascent), he can't become a single entity with the *yesh hamuchlat* and “constant existence,” which completely transcends the delimitations of created beings.

Specifically, when he conducts his *avodah* entirely for its own sake — when he does not act as an independent entity at all, he only thinks about the **essence** of the mitzvah (which generates the “contentment **before Me**, for I spoke and My will was fulfilled”) — will “you are taking Me” come about. Consequently, Hashem will “bequeath *yesh* to those that love Me [Him].”

[This is akin to the idea in halachah that a true “servant,” as defined by the Torah’s standards, has no independent existence; his entire being is “the existence of the master.”]⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See fn. 53 above.

⁵⁸ See *Chiddushei HaRashba* on *Kiddushin* 23b; also see at length *Hemshech* 5666 p. 326 ff.

This is also the allusion implied by the subject matter of the previous mishnahs — “beehives” and “honeycomb” — for the *avodah* of a Jew, when conducted for its own sake, is signified by likening Jews to “bees.” As the midrash says:⁵⁹ “My children were like bees... just as **all** that a bee collects, it collects on behalf of its owner, so, too, **all** the mitzvos and good deeds that Jews collect, are collected for their Father in Heaven.”

As explained in *Likkutei Torah*,⁶⁰ this form of *avodah* stems from the awareness that “the ultimate objective in Man’s creation is not just for the sake of the person himself. Despite his ascent {through the *avodah* performed in this world} being truly wondrous, this alone is not the ultimate objective. Instead, the objective is {the enhancement of} Hashem’s glory.” This is similar to the statement of our Sages,⁶¹ “I was created to serve the One who formed me.”

8.

BEIS SHAMMAI VS. BEIS HILLEL ON THE SOUL’S DESCENT

On this basis, we can also explain the relevance of this mishnah to the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding honeycomb {in the previous mishnah}. To preface: The above quotation (from *Likkutei Torah*) emphasizes that a person does, in fact, reach an incredibly wondrous height through his *avodah* conducted below {in this world}. It is just that “this alone is not the ultimate objective.”⁶²

Therein lies the difference between the opinions of Beis Shammai (who maintain that “we focus on the potential”) and Beis Hillel (who maintain that “we focus on the actual”) — they are in disagreement as to what extent this concept (of personal achievement) is of significance.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Devarim Rabbah*, sec. 1, par. 6 (cited by *Likkutei Torah* of the next fn.).

⁶⁰ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Re’eh*,” 28d (ff).

⁶¹ End of *Kiddushin*.

⁶² See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 247 ff (and fns. 52, 54 ad loc); vol. 20, p. 284, fn. 30, and citations there.

⁶³ Note *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 21, p. 17.

If “we focus on the potential state” — that everything should primarily be regarded according to its “potential” state — it would emerge that the soul’s descent below (its “actualization”) brings no (**new**) advantage to the soul over its state of being before its descent. The **primary** element — its “potential” to carry out the *avodah* below — existed **in** the soul before its descent below.

Furthermore, in this instance, the {soul’s fulfillment of its potential} “in actuality” is not even required to “prove” that the soul’s “potential”⁶⁴ for conducting *avodah* below would come to fruition. After all, it is certain that every soul will ultimately fulfill its mission in this world. As it says,⁶⁵ “No one is banished from Him.” Moreover, and this point is also key, the soul’s destined fulfillment is already known to Heaven.

According to Beis Shammai, it turns out, there is no room to say that this wondrous ascent reached by a person {through his *avodah*} adds anything new to the soul, so it should descend below **in actuality**. That the soul does indeed descend below is (not entirely for the subsequent ascent of the soul, but) only “**to collect for its Owner,**” to fulfill **Hashem’s** intention — Hashem desired an abode in the **lower realms**. For this, it would not suffice for the “potential” to create this abode to be contained by the soul, Instead, the **lower realms** must be transformed into an abode for Hashem. The action must be executed **in** the lower realms. Consequently, souls must actually descend below.⁶⁶

In contrast, Beis Hillel maintains that “we focus on the actual.” It follows that the soul’s descent below does bring some advantage (as well) to the soul (which it lacked beforehand) — for it is specifically through the soul’s descent that its potential abilities come to be **realized**. (According to Beis Hillel, **this** {“actualized state”} is the key element of every objective.)

Therefore, Beis Hillel maintains that despite the main focus of the soul’s descent being “for Hashem’s honor” — “I was created to serve the One who

⁶⁴ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 79, which states that this is what Beis Shammai would consider the significance of “actuality.”

⁶⁵ *Shmuel* II 14:14. — cited in the Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah* ch. 4, end of par. 3; *Likkutei Amarim*, “*Tanya*,” end of ch. 39.

⁶⁶ For more on this discussion see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 20, p. 284.

formed me” — to fulfill the plan for “an abode in the lower realms,” and **this** needs to be the person’s goal when conducting his *avodah*. Nevertheless, a person’s *avodah* below **also creates something new for him**.

9.

EASIER TO NOT HAVE BEEN CREATED

The distinction mentioned above between the positions of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel also adds further clarity to their dispute⁶⁷ —

These (Beis Shammai)⁶⁸ maintain: It would have been preferable for Man not to have been created rather than to have been created. The others (Beis Hillel) maintain: It was preferable for Man to have been created rather than not to have been created. A vote was taken, and it was decided that it would have been preferable for Man not to have been created rather than to have been created. But now that he has been created, Man should examine his behavior.

Likkutei Torah there⁶⁹ explains the meaning of this teaching of our Sages: They do not claim that it would have been “**good** for Man not to have been created” since the soul’s descent surely brings it benefit, by leading it to “an infinitely great and wondrous ascent.” Rather, this teaching means that “it would have been **preferable and easier** for Man not to have been created.” This is because “the ultimate objective of his creation” is “not so that he works for his own interests and to receive a reward.” Rather, “the ultimate objective of his creation” is only “to serve the One who formed him.” Since this is an incredibly difficult *avodah*, it would have been “preferable and easier for him” not to have been required to do so.

⁶⁷ *Eruvin* 13b.

⁶⁸ The **first** “these” straightforwardly refers to Beis Shammai, consistent with the opening sentence, “...Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagreed.” (See also *Radbaz*, “*Hilchos Maaser Sheni*,” ch. 6, par. 3; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 2). This is especially compelling since, in a number of places, Rebbi prioritized the opinion of Beis Shammai over that of Beis Hillel (*Ritva*, *Eiruvin* ad. loc.; see *Chagigah* 16a, *Tosafos*, s.v. “*shnayim*”).

⁶⁹ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Re’eh*,” 29a.

This then begs the question: What was Beis Hillel’s consideration that led them to claim that “it is **preferable (and easier)** for man to have been created rather than not have been created”?

The explanation: According to Beis Shammai, it was indeed obvious from the outset that the entire purpose of the soul’s descent below is (not for (the ascent of) the **soul** but) only “for Hashem’s honor.” As mentioned above, the soul’s “potential” would be sufficient to bring about its ascent. The soul would not require an “**actual**” descent. It would be obvious, therefore, that “it would have been preferable for Man not to have been created...” — as the descent below brings **him** nothing **new**. It is only for Hashem’s honor.

However, according to Beis Hillel, one could conceivably claim that Man’s creation was a good thing from our perspective. Had he not been “created,” he would not have any connection to the “infinitely great and wondrous ascent.” Because of this, the **delight** the soul derives through its ascent is greater than the pain of its descent below. So much so, it was “preferable to have been created” (being aware of the wondrous ascent (the bliss) that the soul would achieve thereby, despite its present pain) than “to have not been created” and not relate at all to the wondrous ascent.

Nevertheless, “a vote was taken, and it was decided that it would have been preferable for Man not to have been created rather than to have been created.” Although the soul will achieve “the infinitely great and wondrous ascent” in actuality through its descent, **this must not** be a person’s motive for serving Hashem. He must conduct his *avodah* selflessly, without consideration of a reward. Instead, the person's sole motive should be “to serve the One who formed him.” He should think neither of himself nor his spiritual standing. Consequently, “it is preferable and easier for Man to have been created than not to have been created.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ In light of this explanation, *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid*, interprets the Gemara’s continuation “now that he has been created, he should examine his behavior” to mean — that he should know that he was created (not for his own elevations, but only) to serve the One who formed him.

10.

MENTIONED IN PASSING

This is also the connection between the mishnah about “honeycomb” and the final mishnah, “in the Future, the Holy One will bequeath...”:

The Mishnah first cites the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel about whether “we focus on the potential state” or “the actual state.” On this basis, one might assert that the opinion of Beis Hillel would be that the person’s subsequent ascent (and reward) is the primary reason (or at least a reason of equal importance) for his descent below;

The Mishnah {therefore} continues — similar to the incident when “a vote was taken, and it was decided...,” mentioned above: “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: In the Future, the Holy One will **bequeath... yesh** to those who love Me”: All authorities (in the previous mishnah), including Beis Hillel, agree that the purpose and objective of the *avodah* conducted by the soul below is (not its reward and ascent, but rather) similar to the {intention behind a} bee’s production of honey that it “collects on behalf of its owner” — it is to fulfill Hashem’s intent. This is expressed by the idea that the soul, so to speak, becomes a single entity with the *yesh hamuchlat* and the “Continuous Existence.”

Nevertheless, this doesn’t mean that the soul receives no reward or ascent, for this also occurs. Therefore, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi cites the continuation of the verse as well⁷¹ (which follows the words “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me”) — “and I shall fill **their** storehouses,” alluding to the stores of the **tzaddikim** (in this world):⁷² Since Hashem “does not withhold the reward of any creation,”⁷³ the soul also receives a form of reward (as a created being).

⁷¹ Which is seemingly (a) unrelated to his statement and (b), furthermore, **contradicts** it, as it explicitly states that there is an **additional** reward besides the 310 worlds.

⁷² *Tosfos Yom Tov* ad loc (citing from *Bartenura* on *Avos* 5:19).

⁷³ *Mechilta* (and Rashi) on *Shemos* 22:30; cited in *Likkutei Torah*, “*Re’eh*,” 28d.

However, the idea that “I shall fill their storehouses” is not conveyed by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in his actual teaching (“In the Future, the Holy One will bequeath... and fill their storehouses”). Instead, this idea is mentioned only in passing when citing the verse, “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me.” This is because the subject of the actual statement is the **primary perfection** in the Future Era. It is only to also allude to the soul’s (literal) **reward**, which it receives **secondarily** and is of no significance in the face of the *yesh hamuchlat*, that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi also cites the conclusion of the verse, “and I will fill their storehouses.”

11.

AND IN THE END...

Furthermore, we may say this:

As known,⁷⁴ in the Future Era, the halachah will be decided like the opinion of Beis Shammai. One possible explanation for this reversal (based on the earlier discussion) is the following:

Presently, the halachah follows the opinion of Beis Hillel because, in this era, a person is keenly aware of his existence. Consequently, he needs to be told that his *avodah* **also** elevates him. However, in the Future Era — when “the glory of Hashem will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of Hashem spoke,”⁷⁵ and Jews will actually be a single entity with the *Yesh Hamuchlat* and the “Continuous Existence” — a person’s own existence will be entirely of no importance. The only motive of a Jew will be “to bequeath *yesh* to those who love Me.”

For this reason, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi himself, who discusses the Future Era — and notably, this teaching is recorded as the **conclusion** of the Mishnah (signifying a state of completed *avodah* — the ultimate state of

⁷⁴ *Mikdash Melech* on *Zohar*, vol. 1, 17b; *Likkutei Torah*, *maamar* “*VaYikach Korach*,” end of ch. 4.

⁷⁵ *Yeshayahu* 40:5.

tzaddikim) — only mentions that “in the Future, the Holy One will **bequeath** to each and every tzaddik....”

However, since the study of Mishnah does take place in the world, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi also cites the conclusion of the **verse**, “I will fill their storehouses” — that Hashem will also fill the storehouses **of the tzaddikim**.

— From talks delivered on Yud-Tes Kislev and Motzaei Shabbos *parshas Vayeishev* and *Mikeitz*, 5738 (1977)