

Rabbi's Article II

Don't 'Swallow' Anyone!

In *Ethics of Our Fathers* (-Chapter 3, Mishna 2) our sages teach us "Rabbi Chanina, deputy to the kohanim, would say: Pray for the integrity of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his friend alive." Our sages teach us (-Baba Kama 30a), "One who wants to be pious should observe the matters... of (tractate) *Avot* ([*Ethics of Our*] *Fathers*)." Meaning, tractate *Fathers* is not about obligatory laws¹, but about, "matters of piety." This Mishna, however, seems to be speaking of obligatory laws (a. One is obligated to protect his own life and that of his friend, and b. it is an obligatory mitzva to pray for your life)?!

Additionally, why the terminology, "swallow his friend alive," and not the regular "kill" or "steal" -if the Mishna is speaking (also) of theft"? Lastly, the Jew has many laws concerning not, "swallow his friend alive." How then can we say that, "One who wants to be pious," needs "the fear of its authority," not to do so?!

Our Mishna then goes on to teach, "Rabbi Chanina son of Tradyon would say: Two who sit and no words of Torah pass between them... But two who sit and exchange words of Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them, as is stated (-Malachi 3:16), 'Then the G-d-fearing conversed with one another, and G-d listened and heard; and it was inscribed before Him in a book of remembrance for those who fear G-d and give thought to His name.'" What is its connection to the opening of our Mishna, when, seemingly, it belongs in the next Mishna, which states, "Rabbi Shimon would say: Three who eat at one table and do not speak words of Torah..."?

The Explanation: Being of, "matters of piety," we must say that we are not speaking of one stealing, or hurting the life, of another. Rather, he desires 'but' to have the other person's "alive (life; identity and actions)," be "swallowed," within his own. And it is precisely his virtues ("piety") in Torah-study and mitzva-observance that obligates him to "swallow" the other --who may be lacking in Torah-study, and slipping in his mitzva-observance, into his own identity, being to the advantage of the other that he be swallowed into his own pious identity! --See (-Kesubos 96a), "Anyone who prevents his student from serving him, it is as if he withheld from him kindness... He even removes from him the fear of Heaven," and (-ibid 111b), "(Deuteronomy 4:4), 'But You who cleave to the L-rd your G-d, are alive every one of you this day.' But is it possible to cleave to the Divine Presence? One who... to benefit Torah scholar -Rashi: Through his cleaving to a Torah-scholar he will merit to live."

Being that we are speaking of a pious Torah-scholar, who's thinking is of true intellect, hence, the Mishna, guides him to know that intellect will not suffice (-as mentioned above, *Talmudic logic* supports this thinking!). Rather, he must, "Pray for the integrity of the government (lit. *Kingship*)." Why will this help? Because, reflecting upon, "government (lit. *Kingship*)," leads to one's reflecting upon an awe for the *King of kings, the holy One, blessed be He*. Our sages teach (-Brochos 58a), "Royalty on earth is like royalty in the heavens." Meaning (-Zohar, Vol I, 197a) that when "Royalty on earth" is complete, it is only because within it is revealed the true source of royalty, "Royalty in heaven." And being that we are speaking of a Jew on the level of, "matters of piety," hence, when he prays for, "government (lit. *Kingship*)," he definitely sees its true source, "royalty in the heavens -King of kings, the holy One, blessed be He." This, in turn, will subdue his feeling of superiority over others, being that (-High Holiday Prayer), "He (G-d) is immutable, and treats small and great alike." For, before G-d, the greatest of the great do not 'take up space,' just like the smallest of the small.

Nevertheless, being that the *Evil Inclination* is a, "craftsman" in its craft, hence, simply reflecting upon, "royalty in the heavens -King of kings, the holy One, blessed be He," is not sufficient. Eventually, the "craftsman" will cool-off the effect of this reflection, weakening the "fear of its authority," until ending it altogether. Therefore, the Mishna directs us to, "Pray for the integrity of the government," that G-d, of His grace, freely help us, in His goodness and kindness, that we recognize and feel the, "royalty in the heavens." For (-Sukkah 52b), "(A person's [evil] inclination overcomes him each day and seeks to kill him...) and if not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who assists him, he would not overcome it."

The Mishna then goes on to speak of, "Two who sit... words of Torah pass between them," for the 'litmus test' whether one has nullified his feeling of superiority to the other is when his Torah-study is in a manner of, "Two who sit"! The ultimate experience of Torah-study is when one reaches the understanding (-Jeremiah 9:22-23), "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the strong man boast of his strength, nor the rich man boast of his riches. But let him that boasts exult in this, that he understands and knows Me," and (-Maariv Prayers), "For they are our life and the length of our days, and in them we walk day and night." Hence, when this person has his, "words of Torah," be in a fashion of, "Two who sit," as equals, this is the truest proof that he has subdued his sense of superiority over the other. Thus, he merits to, "But two who sit and exchange words of Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them," in which the, "royalty in the heavens," in itself is revealed --and not just as it is revealed within the "royalty on earth".

With this, we can appreciate the Mishna's proof from the verse, "Then the G-d-fearing conversed with one another, and G-d listened and heard; and it was inscribed before Him in a book of remembrance for those who fear G-d and give thought to His name." The reason why his, "words of Torah," lead to, "the Divine Presence rests amongst them," is because, "the G-d-fearing conversed with one another," who, "Pray for the integrity of the government (royalty in the heavens)," causing, "Two who sit," as equals, the opposite of, "would swallow his friend alive."

1. For example, the opening Mishna of this chapter states, "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression..." in which the emphasis is that for the pious, just not sinning isn't enough. Rather, the pious reflect upon that which keeps them from even coming to the realm of any closeness to sinning.