



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Pirkei Avos | Rabbi Chananyah

A Plethora of Mitzvos

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## 1.

### WHAT IS THE CONNECTION WITH *PIRKEI AVOS*?

Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya said: The Holy One<sup>1</sup> wanted to confer merit to the Jewish people; therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in abundant measure, as it says,<sup>2</sup> “Hashem desired for the sake of His righteousness that the Torah become great and glorious.”

Although its place is at the conclusion of tractate *Makkos*,<sup>3</sup> this *mishnah* is learned customarily after learning any chapter in *Pirkei Avos*. The reason for this, as Rashi explains:<sup>4</sup>

Because it serves as a pleasant conclusion, everyone is accustomed to learn it at the end of every chapter, since *kaddish* is not recited after the learning of *Mishnah*, only after the learning of a homiletic exposition.<sup>5</sup>

Still, since all Torah matters are precise in the extreme (furthermore: “A Jewish custom is itself Torah”),<sup>6</sup> and especially considering that several commentators on ***Mishnah*** also incorporate this *mishnah* in their commentary on *Pirkei Avos* where they explain it, we understand that this *mishnah* is germane to *Pirkei Avos*.

Likewise, before learning any chapter in *Pirkei Avos*, the custom is to recite the *mishnah*, “All of Israel have a portion in the World to Come...,” found in tractate *Sanhedrin*.<sup>7</sup> The common denominator between these two *mishnahs* (recited before and after learning any chapter of *Pirkei Avos*, respectively) is that both underscore the stature of the Jewish people:<sup>8</sup> In the *mishnah*, “All of

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<sup>1</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*HaKodesh Baruch Hu*”; more commonly translated as “the Holy One, Blessed is (be) He.” For the sake of simplicity and readability, however, the translator has rendered as “the Holy One.”}

<sup>2</sup> *Yeshayahu* 42:21.

<sup>3</sup> {*Makkos*, ch. 3, *mishnah* 16.}

<sup>4</sup> At the conclusion of tractate *Avos*.

<sup>5</sup> {In the original, “*aggadah*.”} See *Magen Avraham* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 54, sub-par. 3; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, sec. 4.

<sup>6</sup> See *Yerushalmi*, *Pesachim* ch. 4, *halachah* 1; et al.

<sup>7</sup> Beginning of ch. 11 (90a).

<sup>8</sup> See *Derech Chaim* by *Maharal*, in his commentary on the beg. of *Avos*, explaining, “All Israel.”

Israel,” it states that “they are the branch of My planting,”<sup>9</sup> and in the *mishnah* of “Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya,” that the multiplicity of Torah and *mitzvos* is because of the Jews: “Hashem wanted to confer merit to the **Jewish people; therefore,** He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundant measure.”

We need to explain: As known, *Pirkei Avos* comprises teachings that convey lessons and practices, and promote fine character traits, even pious practices.<sup>10</sup> In this context, of what relevance is the subject of Jewish virtue?

## 2.

### *BARTENURA'S APPROACH*

We will understand the relevance by first prefacing with the explanation of our *mishnah*:

*Bartenura* explains:<sup>11</sup>

*Therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundant measure:* {by giving them} for example, the body of laws concerning reptiles and vermin. The reward of the Jewish people is thereby magnified, by shunning these creatures, although people would not have eaten them regardless, since people find them repulsive.

[We could apply similar reasoning to Torah and its study. Hashem also incorporated content that could have been conceived of independently, through human intellect. Yet Hashem did so in order to increase our reward for learning these matters, too.]<sup>12</sup>

According to this interpretation, however, we are confronted with the following problems: (a) The phrase, “in abundant measure,” is troublesome because according to the above interpretation, it turns out that conferring merit to the Jewish people is not the reason for Hashem giving the Jewish people an

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<sup>9</sup> {*Yeshayahu* 60:21.}

<sup>10</sup> {In the Aramaic original, “*milsah de'chasidusa.*”} See *Bava Kama* 30a.

<sup>11</sup> In his commentary on the end of tractate *Makkos*. Similarly, in the commentary of Rashi (*Rivan*) on the *Mishnah* in *Makkos* 23b. And *Meiri*, ad loc.

<sup>12</sup> Similar to *Chulin* 66b.

“**abundant measure**” of Torah and *mitzvos* (in general), but just some specific *mitzvos*. (b) The wording “**confer merit** to the Jewish people” is difficult because according to the interpretation of *Bartenura*, the *mishnah* should have used wording that conveys the idea of reward, such as, “increase their reward,”<sup>13</sup> or something similar.

### 3.

#### RAMBAM’S APPROACH

*Rambam*<sup>14</sup> explains the *mishnah* as follows:<sup>15</sup>

When a person observes any one of the 613 *mitzvos* fittingly and appropriately, without mixing in any worldly, ulterior motive, but does so exclusively for the sake of Heaven, with love... through its performance, he merits to receive {reward in} the World to Come. To that end, Rabbi Chananya states that since there are numerous *mitzvos*, a person, during his lifetime, will certainly perform at least one of them wholly<sup>16</sup> and completely. And through that *mitzvah*, his soul will be enlivened.

On this basis, the diction of the *mishnah* makes sense: “He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in **abundant measure.**” Precisely because of the plenitude of Torah and *mitzvos*, a person will fulfill (at least) one of them perfectly. That’s why “He gave them in abundant measure,” because “the Holy One wanted to confer merit.”

Still (aside from the fact that according to this interpretation the difficulty remains as to why the *mishnah* says, “to **confer merit** to the Jewish people,” and doesn’t use a term denoting *reward*, as discussed), the core of the interpretation is problematic:<sup>17</sup> According to *Rambam*’s interpretation, it turns out that the multitude of *mitzvos* is not intrinsically advantageous; it is only a

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<sup>13</sup> In the words of *Tanchuma*, “*Shemini*,” sec. 8; *Yalkut Shimoni*, loc cit. (*remez* 536): “in order to bestow a good reward to Israel for fulfilling the *mitzvos*.”

<sup>14</sup> In his *Commentary on Mishnah*, end of tractate *Makkos*; see *Halkkarim* {by R. Yosef Albo}, “Discourse Three,” ch. 29; *Midrash Shmuel* {by R. Samuel de Uçeda}, end of tractate *Avos*.

<sup>15</sup> See also *Arizal*, “*Shaar Hamitzvos*,” at the beginning.

<sup>16</sup> {“In its designated format,” alt., “as formulated.”}

<sup>17</sup> Also, this interpretation does not explain why **Torah** was increased.

means (a strategy to ascertain the performance of a single *mitzvah*) by which a Jew is assured of fulfilling one *mitzvah* “wholly and completely.”

#### 4.

##### OTHER NUANCES

Other questions that need to be answered:

- a) In his dictum, Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya emphasizes: “The Holy One wanted to **confer merit to the Jewish people**,” whereas the supporting verse, “Hashem desired for the sake of His **righteousness**,” emphasizes that the abundance was because of the **righteousness of Hashem**?<sup>18</sup>
- b) The verse only speaks about Torah, to become “great and glorious,” whereas Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says, “therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in abundant measure”?
- c) Why is the diction of this *mishnah* different from that of its Scriptural source? In the *mishnah*, it says, “the Holy One **wanted**, רצה,” but the prooftext uses a different verb, “Hashem **desired**, חפץ.”

[True, “the diction of Scripture is distinct, and the diction of our sages is distinct.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, we do find in a number of places that when the sages expound a verse, in their wording, they use the same terminology of the verse. To illustrate (from the same wording, employed in this prooftext, used elsewhere {when speaking about Torah and *mitzvos*}):<sup>20</sup> “A person should forever study in a place where his heart **desires**, חפץ, for it says,<sup>21</sup> “but his **desire**, חפצו, is in the Torah of Hashem.” “From seeking your

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<sup>18</sup> {In the Hebrew original, צדקה, translated as “His righteousness,” the pronoun is ambiguous. The question in the main text is based on *Radak* on *Yeshayahu*, loc cit., who interprets “his” as referring to the righteousness of Hashem; see, however, *Rambam’s “Commentary on Mishnah*,” and *Bartenura* on tractate *Makkos*, loc cit., who understand “his” as referring to the righteousness of Israel.}

<sup>19</sup> *Chulin* 137b; and see *Tosafos*, s.v. “*shte*” (*Menachos* 94a); *Sdei Chemed*, “Principles,” under the entry for “*Lammed*,” rule 115.

<sup>20</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 19a; see, *ibid*, the preceding discussion of the *Gemara*.

<sup>21</sup> {*Tehillim* 1:2.}

{business} needs, הַפְּצֵךְ,<sup>22</sup> means that on Shabbos, involvement with your weekday needs {"desires"}, הַפְּצִיךְ, is prohibited. However, needs {"desires"} of Heaven, הַפְּצֵי שָׁמַיִם, {i.e., matters pertaining to *mitzvos*} are permitted."<sup>23</sup> And several other instances.<sup>24</sup>]

d) The *mishnah* says, "therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in **abundant measure.**" The simple meaning of the word *abundant* is an abundance in number and **quantity**. In contrast, the wording of the proof-text is "that the Torah become **great** and **glorious,**" implying **qualitative** magnitude and strength.

## 5.

### THE COMPLEXITY OF *MITZVOS*

The gist of the explanation for all this:

The abundance of Torah and *mitzvos* about which the *mishnah* speaks is not an abundance in the simple sense of the word (and as used in the *Commentary on Mishnah* {by Rambam}). That is, the *mishnah* is not addressing why there is a large number of *mitzvos* — 613. Because, after all, there is no reason or basis to presume how many *mitzvos* there ought to be. So concerning any hypothetical number of *mitzvos*, one could ask why there were not less (or not more).

Rather, the *mishnah* is addressing the reason why within Torah and *mitzvos*, there is multiplicity within the same subject.

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<sup>22</sup> {*Yeshayahu* 58:13. The whole verse reads, "If you restrain your walking because of the Sabbath, from pursuing your needs on My holy day, and you call Shabbos a delight, and the L-rd's sacred day honored; and if you honor it by refraining from doing your business, and *from seeking your needs* and from speaking idle words."}

<sup>23</sup> *Shabbas* 113a.

<sup>24</sup> See *Moed Katan* 9b; et al.

Since (and analogous to what) our Sages said, “King David came and established them {all *mitzvos*} on eleven,”<sup>25</sup> it would suffice if this would be the number of *mitzvos*. Similarly, according to Rabbi Saadia Gaon,<sup>26</sup> who taught that all the *mitzvos* are comprised by the Ten Commandments, it should suffice to have these ten **mitzvos**. Naturally, then each of those ten or eleven *mitzvos* would include numerous details, similar to how every *mitzvah* nowadays also includes numerous details.

Regarding this proposed {condensed} organization, *Rambam* explains that were this to have been the case, then it would have been uncertain that a Jew would ever fulfill even one *mitzvah* “wholly and completely.” And perhaps, one may posit, even more: Were a person to transgress a **single** detail of such a {comprehensive} *mitzvah*, then the integrity of the **entire** *mitzvah* would be impacted, despite the person having fulfilled all the other particulars of the *mitzvah*.

## 6.

REVEALING THE ONENESS OF HASHEM

The deeper explanation:

Every *mitzvah* and subject within Torah is different from the next. Sometimes, completely opposite. To start with, we see the overarching difference between **positive** and **negative** commandments. Then there is the difference between *mitzvos* whether they are testimonies, statutes and judgments. Finally, *mitzvos* are divided into 613 distinct commandments, each with its own substance,<sup>27</sup> reason and intent. Similarly, this variability is apparent within Torah, beginning with the four distinct modes of study: *pshat*, *remez*, *drush* and

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<sup>25</sup> *Makkos* 24a. *Chiddushei Aggados Maharsha*, ad loc, “They incorporate a **large** portion of Torah,” but not all of it — and his comments require a great deal of study. See *Tiferes Yisrael*, by *Maharal*, ch. 54; and the explanation of *Tzemach Tzedek (Yahel Or)* on *Tehillim* 15:2 (at the end).

<sup>26</sup> In his *Azharos*, quoted in Rashi’s commentary (*Shemos* 24:12). {*Azharos* are poems written by the *Geonim* and *Rishonim* which list the 613 commandments.}

<sup>27</sup> As understood, too, from the teaching of our Sages (*Zohar*, vol. 1, 170b; see *Makkos* 23b) that the 248 positive commands and the 365 negative commands correspond to the limbs and sinews, which are all dissimilar.

*sod*.<sup>28</sup> Then there are the distinctions of “forty-nine facets<sup>29</sup> of impurity; and forty-nine facets of purity”;<sup>30</sup> seventy facets of Torah;<sup>31</sup> and beyond this — 600,000 interpretations in each one of the above-mentioned {four} modalities of Torah study.<sup>32</sup>

This multiplicity calls for clarification: One Torah with its *mitzvos* was given by One G-d. Their purpose is to elicit and reveal Hashem’s unity and the singularity of His name — the absolute oneness of Hashem. Understandably then, in the divine service of a Jew, with every *mitzvah* observed, this one and only intent and purpose ought to be reflected: to effect a bond and union, as it were, of the one fulfilling the *mitzvah* with Hashem, who is the epitome of oneness. Similarly, when learning Torah, a person intends to unite with the Giver of Torah by understanding His Torah.

Likewise, this idea is also reflected in what Torah and *mitzvos* achieve. They are intended to remove the concealment {of G-dliness} that exists in the world (on account of which multiplicity and divisiveness are so pervasive in the world). Torah and *mitzvos* are intended to transform the “public domain” of the world into a “private domain” of the One universal G-d —revealing the unity of the Holy One in the world.

And since the point of Torah and *mitzvos* is unity, why do they possess so much diversity?

## 7.

“TO CONFER MERIT” — לזכות, A COGNATE OF זיכּוּךְ — “PURIFY”

In answer to this question, the *mishnah* explains, “The Holy One wanted to confer **merit**, לזכות, to the Jewish people; therefore, He gave them Torah and

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<sup>28</sup> {Four interpretive approaches: Straightforward; allusion; homiletic; esoteric.}

<sup>29</sup> {Meaning, in each aspect of Torah (i.e., a circumstance or detail which was not clearly specified by Hashem) there are 49 ways of interpreting it which permit it; and 49 ways which prohibit it.}

<sup>30</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, ch. 4, *halachah* 2; *Midrash Tehillim* 7:8, 12:7; *Zohar*, vol. 2, 15b; et al.

<sup>31</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah* ch. 13, sec. 16; and in several places.

<sup>32</sup> *Shaar HaGilgulim*, Introduction 17; similarly in *Shaar Ruach Hakodesh*, concerning the subject of meditative unifications performed at the grave sites of *tzaddikim*, Introduction 3 (108b).



*mitzvos* in abundant measure.” The word לזכות is cognate to the word זיכוך, refine: Hashem wants not (only) Jews to nullify themselves to G-dliness but (also) to **refine**<sup>33</sup> themselves. The difference between these two processes:

Nullifying oneself to Hashem requires a person to surrender his identity and thereby, cleave to Hashem. Consequently, although man comprises numerous faculties and limbs, possessing, in fact a great diversity – 248 limbs and 365 sinews, nonetheless, this diversity is irrelevant when speaking about nullifying oneself. In this respect, since nullification abrogates and diminishes (a person’s {sense of autonomous} being, and as a result, nullifies) all his personal matters, there is no difference in how this comes about.

In contrast, “refining” a person entails the person himself, his limbs and sinews, becoming refined, becoming one with Divinity. In this context, the multiplicity of (faculties) limbs and sinews is very relevant, since the refinement of each (faculty and) part is contingent upon and commensurate with its respective properties and qualities.

Since Hashem desired to bring about the refinement of Jewish people (“זיכוך,” {understood here as meaning} “to refine”), “therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in **abundant** measure.” It is from this objective to effect refinement that the multiplicity and diverseness in Torah and *mitzvos* arises. For each *mitzvah* possesses its specific character by which it effectuates refinement in a specific corresponding {faculty,} limb or sinew of a person (and likewise, in a particular portion of the world<sup>34</sup>). Likewise, regarding Torah: the different and distinctive facets in Torah all effectuate refinement differently within the various cognitive functions of the mind.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As our Rabbis say (*Bereishis Rabbah*, beg. ch. 44, and sources noted there), “*Mitzvos* were given only to refine created beings.”

<sup>34</sup> See *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 7, sec. 5.

<sup>35</sup> {In the succinct Hebrew original, “*geder ha’sechel*.”}

## 8

### AN ABUNDANCE OF TORAH AND MITZVOS FOR THE SAKE OF GREATNESS AND GLORY

Nonetheless, we need to clarify: On account of the absolute unity of Hashem {which would seem to preclude the possibility of multiplicity and division}, His Torah and *mitzvos* should also not have multiplicity and division. So the fact that Torah and *mitzvos* were given in an “abundant measure,” was only to refine to the Jewish people. It emerges, however, that the abundance in Torah and *mitzvos* constitutes a degradation, as it were, and is not reflective of their essence-character, which is unity and simplicity.

Regarding this supposition, the *mishnah* cites the verse, “Hashem desired for the sake of His righteousness that the Torah become great and glorious.” Meaning, that on the contrary – the multiplicity inherent in Torah and *mitzvos* brings about, as it were, **greatness** and **glory** in the Torah. How so? Because “Hashem desired for the sake of His righteousness.”

## 9

### AN HOME IN THE LOWER WORLD

To elucidate:

Regarding Hashem’s desire “to have a dwelling place in the lower realm,”<sup>36</sup> it has been explained that a true “dwelling place” is made through the inward refinement of man. In other words, a dwelling place is made through a person’s every faculty, consistent with its own makeup and function, merging with G-dliness. [For the real dwelling place is realized when Hashem “inhabits and resides in the Jewish souls... so that *Knesses Yisrael*<sup>37</sup> becomes an abode for His indwelling....”<sup>38</sup>]

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<sup>36</sup> *Tanchuma*, “Naso,” 16; et al.

<sup>37</sup> {Lit., “the community of Israel.” In mystical writings, this term is sometimes used in place of “the Jewish people,” *Bnei Yisrael*,” to also denote the larger, composite body of the Jewish people.}

<sup>38</sup> *Hemshech* 5666, end of p. 668; and see *Torah Or*, “*Mishpatim*,” 76d; *Or Hatorah*, ibid, p. 1267; *Sefer Hamamaarim* 5630, p. 64; et al.

Nonetheless, from the vantage point of this Divine intent as found in His Essence, as it were, the parameters of multiplicity and its opposite are altogether irrelevant. Within His Essence, which is absolute oneness, it is impossible to imagine that anything can be sensed that is outside of Him and His absolute unity. In contrast, within the framework of *hishtalshelus*,<sup>39</sup> the *Ein Sof*-light<sup>40</sup> has been condensed. For although “He could have created the world with just one fiat,”<sup>41</sup> Hashem wanted the world to be created with “ten fiats” (each fiat consisting of a number of words and letters). Doing so provides room for the reality of the universe, together with the multiplicity and division that exist with it. (The verse, “Let us make man...,” using a plural subject,<sup>42</sup> is also, thereby, made possible.) Specifically within this framework of *hishtalshelus*, it is revealed and recognizable that the source of multiplicity is from His unity, and that His intent in having a dwelling place means it being made by people refining each of their particular faculties.

## 10

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *WANTING* AND *DESIRING*

Presently, we can explain the aforementioned difference between the phraseology used by our sages in the *mishnah* and that used by Scripture:

In the Written Law, where Hashem’s name appears in written form,<sup>43</sup> things can be perceived as they are in their source, with their underlying

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<sup>39</sup> {The progressive, chainlike, descent of spiritual light within which creation of this physical world is enabled. See *Tanya* ch. 49, 52; et al.}

<sup>40</sup> {*Ein-sof*, in Hebrew; lit. “without end,” but more colloquially, “infinite.”}

<sup>41</sup> *Avos*, beg. of ch. 5.

<sup>42</sup> {The plural form of this verb, possibly misconstrued as implying a plurality in the G-dhead (rather than understood properly as Hashem, in His Divine humility, conferring with the angelic hosts) is enabled by the very nature of our multifarious world. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 8:8, and also Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:26.}

<sup>43</sup> See *Pesachim* 50a. {The Gemara says that there is a difference between the way Hashem's name is written and pronounced. Hashem's name (*yud kei vov kei*) is written as is, but we pronounce it differently (*Adon...*). The Rebbe explains that there is a difference between the way G-dliness is at its root, in its pure essential form, and the way it's "pronounced" or revealed in the world, when it is concealed to some degree. The Rebbe introduces here a further point, that in the Written Torah, G-dliness is revealed, as it is, so to speak. In the Oral Law, however, G-dliness is already "pronounced," i.e. not in its pristine form.}

purpose. In this source state, the purpose is “for the sake of **His** righteousness,” the righteousness of the Holy One. However, as things egress and are revealed in the Oral Law — analogous to how Hashem’s name is pronounced<sup>44</sup> — the purpose is expressed such that “the **Holy One** wanted to refine, לזכות, the **Jewish people**,” as if they were really autonomous beings. On this level, the refinement, זיכוך, of individual faculties are germane. Hashem wants **to refine**, לזכות, the Jewish people.

This also sheds light on the difference between the verbs “want,” רצה, and “desire,” חפץ: *Want* describes a stirring, the stirring of one’s will, רצון, as it moves (races), במרוצה, towards the object that is wanted. (That is why **this** wording is used regarding “{Hashem *wanted*} to confer merit to the **Jewish people**.”)<sup>45</sup> *Desire* relates to the pleasure inherent in this will, רצון. (Accordingly, “Hashem **desired** for the sake of **His righteousness**.”)<sup>46</sup>

Analogously, this distinction is found in mortal man. A person’s will is exhibited when he is drawn to something external to himself. In contrast, the expression of desire, pleasure, is descriptive of how the person **himself** experiences pleasure.

Based on this {difference between *will* and *desire*; *external* and *internal*} another difference emerges. In the power of will, there are various grades {concerning how forcefully the will is expressed}, commensurate with the degree of connection a person has for these things. Pleasure, in contrast, is delight experienced in the core of the soul. The trigger of the pleasure is immaterial because the pleasure is not bound to its trigger<sup>47</sup> but rather to the soul itself.

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<sup>44</sup> *Pesachim*, ibid.

<sup>45</sup> {The level where something else (the Jewish people) exists is connected with the level of *ratzon*, will.}

<sup>46</sup> {Meaning, that at the level where all that exists is He Himself, "His righteousness," than the proper term to use is "desire."}

<sup>47</sup> {In other words, ordinarily, a (casual) relationship continues between a cause and the effect that is generated. This means that beforehand, the effect was somehow contained within its cause, at least *in potentia*. However, in the case of pleasure, its cause is really just a trigger— not a true cause — for the ensuing pleasure, which is intrinsically bound up with a person’s essence. These concepts are discussed in *Hemshech 5666*, p. 73, and *Hemshech 5672*, ch. 202.}

## UPPER AND LOWER LEVELS OF TORAH

In Torah and *mitzvos*, there are two general planes. There is the plane of Torah as it is found Above, as it stands higher than multiplicity and division. And then there is the plane of Torah as it is drawn into the framework of *hishtalshelus*, and descends below, a process that engenders multiplicity and division in it.

[These two planes are evidenced also in a key difference between Torah and *mitzvos*. Relative to *mitzvos*, Torah represents oneness. As known,<sup>48</sup> Torah is compared to blood. The same blood courses through a person's entire body. *Mitzvos* are analogous to the limbs of a person's body. Each limb is delineated by its own class and structure, and each limb is different from the next.]

Nonetheless, specifically by the Torah being drawn into *hishtalshalus*, into a state of multiplicity and division in order “to confer merit to the Jewish people,” because “Hashem desired for the sake of His righteousness” — on account of the intent and pleasure of His Essence — Torah gains an additional advantage, also relative to its standing on the plane Above. The Torah becomes “**great and glorious**,” even more so than the Torah is Above, in and of itself. (This {augmentation to the exaltedness of Torah} is analogous to what is explained in *Sefer HaBahir*,<sup>49</sup> that King David would **bind** the Torah Above with the Holy One.) In other words, an effusion from *Ein Sof*<sup>50</sup> was drawn into Torah.

On this basis, we can better appreciate the difference in the phraseology used between our Sages and Scripture:

In the Written Law, the Torah Above can be sensed as it exists as a generality, higher than multiplicity and division. Therefore, we also find that in the Written Law “all the commandments, whether they be positive precepts or prohibitory precepts: they are indistinct and are not explicated and revealed and

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<sup>48</sup> *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, 13a.

<sup>49</sup> {Sec. 196 (end of sec. 58).} (See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 222b; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shelach*,” 51a; et al.

<sup>50</sup> {Lit., “Without End,” or in the vernacular, “Infinite.” A Kabbalistic reference to Hashem as He altogether transcends the creative process.}

known....”<sup>51</sup> In contrast, in the Oral Law, the multiplicity and division evinced by *mitzvos* is revealed.

Accordingly, the Written Law explains how the Divine objective, “Hashem desired for the sake of His righteousness,” is fulfilled in the Torah (Above), which transcends multiplicity and division. On this plane, the amplification of Torah is qualitative, “for the Torah to become **great** and **glorious**.”

[More specifically, the verse explains both the expansion of Torah and the expansion of *mitzvos*, as *mitzvos* are subsumed in Torah. To that end, the verse says “great and glorious”:<sup>52</sup> “Great” is the advantage of Torah that is dependent on the observance of *mitzvos*, as it says,<sup>53</sup> “**Great** is Torah study because Torah study leads to performance.” “Glorious” alludes to the intrinsic advantage of Torah, as it stands entirely higher than *mitzvos*, which is the aspect of sovereignty<sup>54</sup> in Torah, as it says,<sup>55</sup> “Through me, kings reign.”]

In contrast,<sup>56</sup> in the Oral Law, it {the multiplicity and division} is expressed openly, accordingly it says, “He gave them **Torah** and **mitzvos** in abundant measure,” as explained above.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Iggeres HaKodesh*, epistle 29.

<sup>52</sup> See “*Laws of Torah Study*,” by the Alter Rebbe, ch. 4, par. 2, 3, where it is explained that Torah possesses two advantages over *mitzvos*. Examine this source.

<sup>53</sup> *Kiddushin* 40b.

<sup>54</sup> See *Gittin* 56b: “And *adir* {“mighty one,” cognate to *yadir*, “glorious”} means only a king.”

<sup>55</sup> *Mishlei* 8:15.

<sup>56</sup> {In this paragraph, the Rebbe answers questions 2 & 4 in Section. 2 above. On the level of Torah, as it descends in *hishtalshelus*, the plurality in Torah becomes apparent even in quantity — unlike the way Torah is above, where the addition is only in quality, discussed two paragraphs above. This is why the *mishnah* uses the term הרבה (which is כמות, quantity) vs. the verse which uses יגדיל, אדיר (which is איכות, quality). Also, at this level, the plurality of *mitzvos* becomes apparent. Therefore, the *mishnah* adds the word “*mitzvos*” although the verse only says, “Torah.”}

<sup>57</sup> This also explains why difference in the names of Hashem used. “**Hashem** {the Four Letter, Ineffable name, called in Chassidus, “*Havayah*”} desired,” and “the **Holy One** wanted”: Regarding the Written Law, which can be sensed as it is found in its source, beyond multiplicity and division, it uses the name of *Havayah*, the name associated with His Essence (*Pardes*, Gate 19; *Guide for the Perplexed*, sec. 1, ch. 61, et passim), and with His unique Name (*Sotah* 38a; *Sanhedrin* 60a; see *Pardes*, *ibid*). In contrast, regarding the Oral Law, which is revelatory and expansive, etc., it says, “the Holy One,” which alludes to *Zeir Anpin* {the Divine attributes} (*Torah Or*, 12d; see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Tazriah*,” 22c; et al).

In this context, we can also understand why it says, “that the Torah *become* great and glorious,” referring to the future (and not “made the Torah great and glorious” {in the past}). Because the greatness and gloriousness of the Written Law, in its supernal source, comes about specifically **afterward**, through the **abundance** of Torah and *mitzvos* being conferred to the Jewish people, meaning, after *mitzvos* are drawn into and revealed by the Oral Law. So the greatness in Torah is achieved in the future – “to *become* **great** and **glorious.**,” From the Written Law, the Oral Law later emerges, (which is previously included in the Written Law in a concealed manner, for as known, everything in the Oral Law is “alluded to in the Written Law”),<sup>58</sup> and its study **brings** action in its wake. {And as a result of this later action, greatness and gloriousness is added to the Written Law, as it exists in its supernal source.}

This explanation also dovetails with the simple meaning of the expression, “to become great and glorious,” namely, in the Future Era.<sup>59</sup> Because this ultimate revelation will take place – in the Future Era, only after the purification process of the Jewish people has been fully realized through the “abundant measure” of Torah and *mitzvos* with which they were given.

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<sup>58</sup> See *Torah Or*, 88c; *Hemshech 5666*, p. 393; et al. And see *Iggeres HaKodesh*, end of epistle 29; and see *Taanit* 9a, which says that even the Books of *Prophets* and *Writings* are alluded to in *Chumash*.

<sup>59</sup> See *Radak* on *Yeshayahu*, loc cit.

DON'T JUST ACT REFINED BUT BECOME REFINED

In light of all the above elucidation, we can also explain the connection of the *mishnah*, “Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says,” with *Pirkei Avos* (which is customarily learned to prepare for the giving of the Torah on the festival of Shavuos):

At the beginning of his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, *Bartenura* says:

Unlike other tractates, this tractate of *Mishnah* is not based on any biblical *mitzvah*. Rather, this tractate consists entirely of lessons on ethics and good character traits. Now, the secular philosophers also composed books, based on conjecture, on the subject of ethics and interpersonal behavior. Accordingly, the *Tanna* introduces this tractate with the *mishnah*, “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai,” to emphasize that the character traits and ethics espoused in this tractate are not the product of conjecture by the sages of the *Mishnah*. Rather, they were all communicated {as part of Torah} at Sinai.

A question may come to mind: Since secular philosophers already composed books on the subject of ethics and good character traits, why was it necessary to convey such teachings specifically at Sinai, as part of the Torah?

The reason is explained when the *Mishnah* says, “The Holy One wanted to confer merit to the Jewish people; therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in abundant measure.” Meaning, Torah and *mitzvos* were intended to **refine** all the faculties (and character traits) of people. And for this same reason, these “character traits and ethics” were conveyed at Sinai as part of the Torah. Because the intention was to teach a person not only **how** to behave socially, “interpersonal behavior,” but mainly, how to effect the refinement and purification of his character. This goal can be achieved specifically when these ethical teachings are included as part of **Torah and mitzvos**,<sup>60</sup> given “in **abundant** measure.” Specifically, under these circumstances, do the teachings

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<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, concerning civil law, *mishpatim*, Scripture says that disputes are to be settled “before *them*” {a Jewish court}, and not before a Gentile court, even if the Gentile courts will adjudicate this matter in a way that conforms with Jewish law (*Gittin* 88b; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” beg., of sec. 26).



of *Pirkei Avos* have the potency to refine a person's character traits and his individual faculties, enabling them to become conduits for G-dliness.

## 14

WHY THE *MISHNAH* "ALL ISRAEL HAVE A SHARE..." COMES FIRST

To elaborate on the Torah's role in refining the character traits and faculties of people:

If we were to suppose that we were speaking about refining the faculties of the {G-dly} soul, then this role of Torah would readily make sense.<sup>61</sup> After all, the source of souls is more sublime than the source of Torah.<sup>62</sup> As our Sages taught<sup>63</sup>, "The {Divine} thought concerning Israel preceded the thought of everything else" (including Torah).

However, since actual deed is of **primary** importance,<sup>64</sup> the *mishnah* here is mainly speaking about the refinement and purification of the natural dispositions of the animalist soul, and the refinement of the limbs of one's physical body. Superficially, a Jew's body is no different from the body of a non-Jew.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, how are we to rationalize that the goal and purpose of Torah, even as it exists on its highest level, is that it is to refine the faculties and character traits associated with one's physical body and animalistic soul?

Therefore, we first study the *mishnah*, "All Israel has a share in the World to Come." Here, the term "World to Come" does not refer to "Gan Eden," but rather to the era after the Resurrection, when souls will re-inhabit bodies. And this pertains to every Jew, because concerning the body, too, it says, "a branch of

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<sup>61</sup> {Because then Torah would be serving a higher end, facilitating the improvement of something loftier than itself.}

<sup>62</sup> {And as such, it is understandable that Torah's purpose is for the Jewish people.}

<sup>63</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4.

<sup>64</sup> *Avos* ch. 1, *mishnah* 17.

<sup>65</sup> *Tanya*, ch. 49.

My planting, the work of My hands in which to take pride.”<sup>66</sup> And as known,<sup>67</sup> Hashem’s **choice** (the truest form of which is rooted in His essence) of the Jewish people is speaking about the body of Jews. Consequently, it is understood that there is nothing surprising about the aim of Torah being “לזכות, to **refine** the Jewish people,” their character traits and physical bodies.<sup>68</sup>

It is specifically this {resultant refinement} that will infuse Torah with the *desire* of Hashem from His Essence, “Hashem desired,” and thereby, the Torah will become “great and glorious.”

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Acharei-Kedoshim*, 5724 (1964)

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<sup>66</sup> {*Yeshayahu* 60:21.}

<sup>67</sup> *Tanya*, ch. 49, and at length in *Sefer HaSichos Torah Shalom*, p. 120, et passim.

<sup>68</sup> See *Toras Shalom*, *ibid.*, p. 123. From amongst the aphorisms of the Alter Rebbe: “One has no idea at all how precious the body of a Jew is to Hashem (*HaYom Yom*, p. 91. {entry for 29 Elul}).” {See *Tanya*, ch. 38; et al.}