Pirkei Avos Gems

CHAPTER SIX

1 The Sages taught in the language of the Mishnah– Blessed is He who chose them and their teachings:

R' Meir said: Whoever occupies himself with Torah for its own sake merits many things; not only that, the [creation of the] entire world is worthwhile for him alone. He is called "friend," "beloved;" he loves G-d, he loves mankind, he brings joy to G-d, he brings joy to mankind. [The Torah] garbs him with humility and fear [of G-d]; makes him fit to be righteous, pious, upright and faithful; keeps him far away from sin and brings him close to merit. From him people enjoy counsel and wisdom, insight and strength, as it says (Proverbs 8:14): *Counsel and wisdom are mine; I am understanding; strength is mine*. It bestows upon him royalty, authority and discerning judgment; the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him. He becomes like a fountain flowing with ever-increasing strength and like an unceasing stream. He becomes modest, patient, and forgiving of insult; it elevates him and exalts him above all things.

4 Such is the way of Torah: Bread with salt you shall eat, water in small measure you shall drink, on the earth you shall sleep, a life of austerity you shall live – and in the Torah you shall toil. If you do this, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you (Psalms 128-2): *"You shall be happy" – in this world; "and it shall be well with you"* – in the World to Come.

MISHNAH 1

FOR ITS OWN SAKE- I.e., to bind his soul to Hashem through studying and comprehending His Torah. Since Torah is the embodiment of Hashem's wisdom and Hashem and His wisdom are one, when we study Torah we become united with Hashem (*Tanya, ch. 5*).

This person studies not for any personal benefit – even the benefit of applying Torah in practice (*see Chatam Sofer on Nedarim 81a*).

The *Baraita* informs this student that despite his abstract approach, if he truly seeks to unite with Hashem through Torah study, the Torah will affect him practically – it will change his character as the Baraita elaborates. He will merit many things that would otherwise require much effort and focus (*see The Rebbe in Biurim*).

For most individuals, it is too difficult to study Torah for its own sake throughout an entire study session. However, one is considered to be studying "for its sake" if each study session is begun "for its sake" (*The Rebbe in Biurim; Tanya ch. 41*).

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פרק שישי

א **שנו** חכמים בלשון המשנה, ברוך שבחר בהם ובמשנתם. רבי מאיר אומר: כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה, ולא עוד, אלא שכל העולם כלו כדאי הוא לו. נקרא רע, אהוב, אוהב את המקום, אוהב את הבריות, משמח את המקום, משמח את הבריות, ומלבשתו ענוה ויראה, ומכשרתו להיות צדיק, חסיד, ישר, ונאמן, ומרקחתו מן החטא, ומקרבתו לידי זכות, ונהנין ממנו עצה ותושיה, בינה וגבורה, שנאמר: לי עצה ותושיה, אני בינה, לי גבורה, ונותנת לו מלכות וממשלה, וחקור כין, ומגלין לו רזי תורה, ונעשה כמעין המתגבר וכנהר שאינו פוסק, והוה צנוע, וארך רוח, ומוחל על עלבונו, ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים.

ד **כך** היא דרכה של תורה: פת במלח תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן, וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל. אם אתה עושה כן, אשריך וטוב לך, אשריך בעולם הזה, וטוב לך לעולם הבא.

MISHNAH 4

THE WAY OF TORAH - This passage addresses a pauper who cannot afford anything more than the bare minimum, who must sleep on the ground for lack of a bed. He should nevertheless continue to study Torah and in the end will be blessed with physical and spiritual wealth (*Bartenura*). Additionally, even one who can afford to live well should live an austere life. This will enable him to devote more time to spiritual matters (*Sforno*) and will condition him for the sublime spirituality of Torah. (*see Maharal*).

Beginning with the *Baal Shem Tov,* the Chassidic masters strongly discouraged fasting and other forms of self-flagellation. People have grown weaker and can no longer function well while maintaining such practices (*see also Lechem Shamayim on this Baraita*). "A small hole in the body creates a large hole in the soul" said the *Maggid of Mezritch* (*Hatamim, p. 664*). One who insists on practicing self-affliction should do so in ways that do not weaken the body, for example: resisting the urge to make a negative or unnecessary remark (*see The Rebbe in Igrot Kodesh, vol. 13 pp. 465-466*).

AND IN THE TORAH YOU SHALL TOIL. Living a life of austerity will not in itself make the acquisition of Torah easy for you. You will still have to toil to attain it (*Midrash Shmuel*).

HAPPY IN THIS WORLD – If you are satisfied with little, you will be happy. But if you seek worldly pleasures, you will never be able to satisfy your desires (HaChassid).

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