

שְׁנָוֹתָן חִכְמִים בְּלִשׁוֹן הַמִּשְׁנָה. בָּרוּךְ שְׁבָחָר בְּהָם וּבְמִשְׁנָתָם.

ו/א

[א] **רַבִּי** מַאיָּר אֹמֵר: כָּל הַעֲסָק בַּתּוֹרָה לְשָׁמָה
זָכָה לְדִבָּרִים הַרְבָּה; וְלֹא עוֹד, אֶלָּא

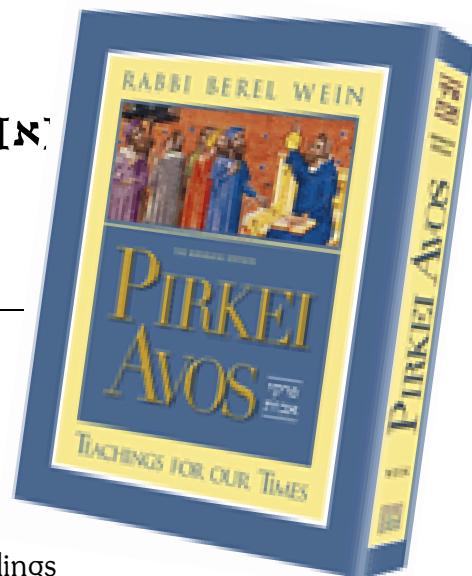
Chapter Six: The Acquisition of Torah

THIS CHAPTER IS NOT PART OF AVOS, PER SE. IT IS RATHER A *la* addition (probably 4th or 5th century CE) of *beraisos*, teachings and rulings of the rabbis that were not included in the Mishnah itself, when it was compiled in its final form by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, around 190 CE.

The style, general message, and contents of this chapter are similar to that of the first five chapters, but the main emphasis of the chapter — almost its exclusive message — regards Torah study, Torah knowledge, and the ways in which this study and knowledge can be made an integral part of our daily lives. Consequently, this chapter is known as *[פרק קניין תורה]* [Perek Kinyan Torah], the *Chapter of the Acquisition of Torah*, its knowledge, systems, attitudes, and values. Torah is a treasure that must be acquired by every individual Jew, but to do so requires effort and sacrifice; it is not free for the taking.

Just as an art collector may have agents scouring the galleries of the world to find the paintings he or she may wish to own, so too must a Jew search for Torah. Our agents in this quest for Torah are our teachers, our parents, our spiritual leaders, our books, our traditions. But above all, once Torah is discovered and found, one must be willing to pay the price demanded in order to acquire it. This chapter discusses both the methods of searching for Torah and the “cost” to acquire it.

The chapter of *Kinyan Torah* follows logically from the final statements in the fifth and last chapter of the Mishnaic tractate of Avos. That last chapter concluded with the statements of Ben Bag Bag and Ben Hei Hei. Those statements respectively dealt with the value of Torah wisdom and study above all else — for everything in life is included in its words and values — and also with the fact that the achievement of its rewards is dependent on the effort expended to know and understand it. As mentioned above, these are the two basic subjects covered in the chapter of *Kinyan Torah*. Thus, this chapter is a natural follow-up to the subject matter of the tractate’s actual conclusion.



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The Sages taught [this chapter] in the language of the Mishnah. Blessed is He Who chose them and their teaching.

1. Rabbi Meir said: Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake merits many things; furthermore, [the

שְׁנָוֶה חֲכָמִים
בְּלֶשׁוֹן הַמִּשְׁנָה

*The Sages
taught [this
chapter] in the
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בָּרוּךְ שְׁבָחָר בָּהֶם
וּבְמִשְׁנָתָם

*Blessed is He
Who chose
them and their
teaching*

בְּלַהֲעֹסֵק
בְּתֹרַה לְשִׁמָּה

*Whoever
engages in
Torah study for
its own sake*

Introduction IT IS NOT ONLY SUBJECT MATTER THAT IS IMPORTANT.

Literary style and language forms also play an important role in the transmission of Torah. The Talmud taught that “one is obligated to teach his students with the same language and expression that he heard from his teacher.” The tradition in many yeshivos, therefore, was to repeat not only the words of the teacher, but his voice inflections and nuances of style as well! The sound of the hauntingly sweet melody of my teacher of Talmud when I was but 11 years old still echoes in my ears. One must always see a mental picture of one’s mentors when teaching Torah to the next generation. Therefore, the language forms of this collection of *beraisos* closely resemble those of the Mishnah. In fact, some of them are reported to us in the name of some of those great teachers of the Mishnah.

BECAUSE OF THIS TYPICALLY JEWISH REVERENCE FOR THE TEACHERS OF the past, the chapter begins appropriately by blessing God Who chose to provide us with the great teachers of the Mishnah and also chose to impart their Torah wisdom to all future generations. This introductory acknowledgment of Divine favor lends an aura of holiness and eternity to their words of wisdom and counsel.

Mishnah 1 THE CONCEPT OF SERVING GOD WITHOUT ULTERIOR MOTIVES or hoped-for reward has been emphasized previously in Avos, as in the teaching of Antigonos Ish Socho in Chapter 1:3. Pious Jews throughout the ages tried to live up to this lofty demand. *Lishmah* is nobility for nobility’s sake alone. In a sense, giving charity silently and anonymously is an example of such a trait in action, for there will be no earthly recognition, although there will be Heavenly reward. But even hope for heavenly reward alone is not quite yet *lishmah*. Therefore, some saintly people went even further. There are many stories and legends of holy Jews who were interested only in serving God, and not in the reward for their good deeds. In order to fulfill the goal of performing a *mitzvah lishmah* at least once in their lifetime, they went so far as to waive their eternal reward for the performance of a commandment and granted that reward to another.

If *lishmah* is the goal in the performance of all other commandments, it is especially desirable in reference to the study and teaching of Torah. Many great works of Torah scholarship were published anonymously, and only after

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שֶׁבֶל הָעוֹלָם כָּלֹו בְּרָאֵי הוּא לוֹ. נִקְרָא רַע, אָהָוב. אָהָוב אֶת הַמָּקוֹם, אָהָוב אֶת הַבְּרִיות, מִשְׁמָחָת אֶת הַמָּקוֹם, מִשְׁמָחָת אֶת הַבְּרִיות. וּמְלַבְשָׁתוֹ עֲנָנוֹה וַיַּרְאָה; וּמְבָשָׁרוֹ לְהִיּוֹת צְדִיק, חִסִּיד, יְשִׁיר, וְגַאֲמָן; וּמְרַחְקָתוֹ מִן הַחַטָּא, וּמְקַרְבָּתוֹ לִידֵי זָכָות. וּנְהַנִּין: מִמְּנָנוּ עָצָה וְתוֹשִׁיחָה, בִּינָה וְגִבּוּרָה, שְׁגָאָמָר: „לִי עָצָה וְתוֹשִׁיחָה, אַנְיִ בִּינָה, לִי גִבּוּרָה.“ וּנְוַתְּנָתָת לוֹ מְלָכָות, וּמְמִשְׁלָה, וּמִקּוֹרְדִין; וּמְגַלְּין לוֹ רְוי תּוֹרָה;

the books attained great fame were the authors finally found out and their names exposed. Two examples of this phenomenon in modern times are Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan and his work, *Chafetz Chaim*, and Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz and his work, *Chazon Ish*. One of the great works of Jewish ethics, *Orchos Tzaddikim*, published in the 14th century, still has no clearly identified author. I imagine that this anonymity is the ultimate expression of *Torah lishmah*.

Torah should be studied for its own sake, even if no practical purpose or result of that study is immediately discernible. For it is the study of Torah itself, without any practical considerations, that supports life on this earth and binds Jews to their Creator in an eternal fashion. Unlike other types of study, where practical results are the criterion for determining the worth of the student — degrees, published works, valuable research, economic progress, etc. — Torah study is its own reward. In many yeshivos, therefore, the idea of studying for rabbinical ordination was looked at askance. In the Lithuanian yeshivos of the 19th and early-20th centuries, rabbinical ordination was never granted by the yeshivah itself, but rather by individual rabbis privately. This system still prevails in many yeshivah institutions, though rabbinical ordination by the institution itself has now become a staple of Jewish life.

IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE, RABBI MEIR'S STATEMENT THAT ALL OF GOD'S creation is worthwhile for the sake of even a single individual who studies *Torah lishmah* is understandable. The Jewish view is that the existence of one worthy person is sufficient to justify the existence of our finely tuned and enormously complex universe. Thus, one who studies *Torah lishmah* not only receives personal merit and achieves many great things for himself, but contributes in a vastly disproportionate manner to the preservation of human life and of the world itself.

שֶׁבֶל הָעוֹלָם כָּלֹו
בְּרָאֵי הוּא לוֹ
*[The creation
of] the entire
world —
all of it —
is worthwhile
for him alone*

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creation of] the entire world — all of it — is worthwhile for him alone. He is called, "Friend, Beloved." He loves the Omnipresent, he loves [His] creatures, he gladdens the Omnipresent, he gladdens [His] creatures. [The Torah] cloaks him in humility and fear [of God]; it makes him fit to be righteous, devout, fair, and faithful. It moves him away from sin and draws him near to merit. From him people enjoy counsel and wisdom, understanding and strength, as it is said: *Mine are counsel and wisdom, I am understanding, mine is strength (Proverbs 8:14)*. [The Torah] gives him kingship and dominion and analytical judgment; the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him;

נקרא רע, אהוב

***He is called,
"Friend,
Beloved"***

ONE WHO STUDIES TORAH SINCERELY AND FOR ITS OWN SAKE BECOMES a friend to all, a beloved person, for the influence of *Torah lishmah* is so pervasive that love of God and love of one's fellow humans automatically exudes from such a person. It is only when knowledge is exploited to achieve other agendas — power, wealth, political gain, personal honor, etc. — that it can result in baseless hatred and negative traits.

ומלבשתו ענוה**ויראה**

***[The Torah]
cloaks him in
humility and
fear [of God]***

STUDYING *TORAH LISHMAH* PROVIDES ONE WITH AN IMMUNITY VACCINE against intellectual and personal arrogance. It is a protective garment that shields one from the base elements of human character. It helps encourage righteous and selfless behavior, trustworthiness and compassion for others. Without it, a great deal of knowledge and wisdom, a good and facile mind, a valid reputation as a scholar, can all too often lead to hubris and arrogance. Righteousness and piety stem from inner holiness and personality strengths. They are not external qualities, nor do they depend upon external dress or manners for vindication. *Torah lishmah* saves one from temptations and sin and brings one closer to attaining eternal merit and reward.

ונהנין מפניו עצה**ותושיה**

***From him
people enjoy
counsel and
wisdom***

SUCH AN EXEMPLARY PERSON IS SOUGHT AFTER BY OTHERS FOR ADVICE and counsel, for a good word and an understanding heart. Jews always poured out their hearts and troubles to the great Torah scholars because they knew that they would find in them an attentive ear and a willingness to help. This very generosity of spirit invests the scholar with power and influence in the community. He is able to judge things realistically and dispassionately. He is sensitive to falsehoods and illegitimate claims. He is aware of the truth and seeks to enforce it in all situations. He is able to fathom the secrets of the Torah, to do what is just and correct, to view the forest and not just the trees. He understands the nuances of the public policies of the Torah, is able to

וְנַעֲשָׂה בְּמַעַן הַמַּגְבָּר, וּבְנַהֲרָ שָׁאִינוֹ פּוֹסְקָן; וְהַנָּהָר
צְנוּעָ, וְאֶרֶךְ רֹוחַ, וּמַזְחֵל עַל עַלְבּוֹנוֹ. וּמַגְדְּלָתוֹ
וּמַרְזְמָמָתוֹ עַל כָּל הַמְּעָשִׂים.

ו/ב

**(ב) אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בכל يوم ויום בת
קול יוצאת מהר חורב, ומקבצת**

read its “x-rays,” so to speak, and not merely judge by superficial impressions or purely literal readings of the law.

SUCH A PERSON IS AN INEXHAUSTIBLE FOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE AND GOOD advice, a powerful spring of sweet water that constantly refreshes others while yet always replenishing itself. He is modest and withdrawn, never seeking public fame, though invariably acclaim will certainly pursue such a holy individual. Because of his modesty, he forgives slights easily, shrugs off disrespectful behavior, and continues the course of pursuing the study of *Torah lishmah*.

The Talmud teaches that overly sensitive individuals “have no life” in this world. This is certainly true of people in public life who, if they take every “constructive criticism” to heart and feel embittered and unappreciated, “have no life” no matter how mighty or wealthy they may be. *Torah lishmah* enables a person to rise above the vagaries and pettiness of everyday life and to focus on the service of God and man. It makes us oblivious to seeming insults and slights and gives us a view of all life from the heights — an aerial view, if you will — that is illuminating and inspiring. It elevates the entire concept of life and living and creates greatness and nobility of character and person. *Torah lishmah* is the ultimate level of Jewish achievement. Even if we do not attain it, we should be aware of its presence and challenge.

וְנַעֲשָׂה בְּמַעַן
הַמַּגְבָּר . . .
וּמַזְחֵל עַל עַלְבּוֹנוֹ
*He becomes
like a steadily
strengthening
fountain . . .
and forgiving
of insult to
himself*

Mishnah 2 HE WAS A FAMOUS SCHOLAR, TEACHER, AND HOLY MAN who lived in the first half of the 3rd century in the Land of Israel. He was a contemporary of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, whose yeshivah in Tiberias in the Galilee was then the main Torah center in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Yehoshua's yeshivah was located in Lod in Judea, west of Jerusalem. His mentors were Bar Kappara, Rabbi Yehudah ben Pedayah and Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. He was known as a person of moderation and peace, he even forbade cursing the enemies of Israel. His reputation as a holy person led the rabbis of the Talmud to state that during his lifetime there was no necessity for the rainbow to appear in the heavens to signify God's covenant with humankind, that He would never again

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
בָּן לְוִי
*Rabbi
Yehoshua
ben Levi*

6/2

he becomes like a steadily strengthening fountain and like an unceasing river. He becomes modest, patient, and forgiving of insult to himself. [The Torah] makes him great and exalts him above all things.

2. **R**abbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Every single day a Heavenly voice emanates from Mount Horeb, proclaiming

destroy the entire world with a flood, as He did in the time of Noah (*Genesis* 9:8-17).

The mere presence of such a human being as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in human society was itself sufficient proof of the ongoing bond between God and His human creatures. Rabbi Yehoshua was well respected by the Roman authorities in Israel as well, visiting the ruling authorities in Caesarea a number of times on behalf of the Jewish residents of Judea.

His devotion to Torah study was unwavering, and he stated (*Makkos* 10a) that those who are engaged in the study of Torah give soldiers fighting a war the strength to stand and prevail in battle. He even saw in the study of Torah the ability to cure one's physical ills. He stated (*Eruvin* 54a) that a person with a headache should engage in Torah study. Even one who feels ill throughout his entire body should concentrate on Torah study. This background of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is sufficient for us to fully understand the idea of the supremacy of Torah he expresses in this *baraisa*.

**בְּכָל יֹם וָלֶת
בַּת קֹל יוֹצָאת**
*Every single
day a Heavenly
voice emanates*

THERE IS A CONSTANT, DAILY ECHO THAT EMANATES FROM SINAI AND informs us of the importance of Torah. All things Godly have eternity built into them. The Divine Torah given on Sinai left its echo for all time in the world we inhabit. It is up to us, however, to hear that sound. Just as there are innumerable frequencies of sound filling the airwaves of the world — they are all present in the room that you are currently sitting in while reading this book — and one has to tune one's radio to the correct frequency of the broadcast one desires to hear, so must one attune one's spiritual ear to hear this echo from Sinai.

This idea was expressed by the great Rebbe of Kotzk, in a comment on God's command to Abraham, *לֵךְ*, *Go forth* from your land to the land that I will show you (*Genesis* 12:1). This message, the Kotzker said, was sent out through the "airwaves" of the world, open to anyone who wished to hear and respond to it. It was the fateful decision of Abraham to tune into that message and act upon it that changed his life and created the Jewish people. So too, this echo of Sinai that bemoans the degradation of Torah is broadcast to all human beings. It is for us to listen and respond to its message.

There is an active form of degradation, a mocking of Torah and its adher-

ו/ב

וְאָמַרְתָּ,, אֹי לָהֶם לְבָרִיות, מַעַלְבּוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה!''
 שֶׁבֶל מַי שָׁאַינּוּ עֹסָק בַּתּוֹרָה נִקְרָא נָזָף, שָׁנָאָמָר:,, נָזָם
 זָהָב בָּאָפֶן חַזִיר, אֲשֶׁר יִפְהָה וּסְבָתָה טָעַם.''' וְאָמָר:,, וְהַלְחָת
 מִעַשָּׂה אֱלֹהִים הַמָּה וְהַמְכַתֵּב מִכְתֵּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא
 חַרְוֹת עַל הַלְחָת'', אֶל תִּקְרָא,, חַרְוֹת'' אַלֵּא,, חַרְוֹת'',
 שָׁאַיִן לְכָ בְּן חֹוְרִין אַלֵּא מַי שָׁעֹסֶק בַּתְּלִמּוֹד תּוֹרָה.

ents — the type of behavior common to the radical Jewish secularists of the 19th and 20th centuries. And there is a more subtle type of degradation that results when the Torah is ignored and treated as being irrelevant to the needs of modern-day society. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi speaks to both types of degradation. He teaches that a Jew who feels the pain of spirit when he sees that the Torah is not observed, studied, raised to the highest priority in life, as it should be, literally hears that echo from Sinai and is tuned to the correct frequency of holy living. Someone who is deaf to that echo, who is not personally challenged by the demands of the Torah and Jewish living, contributes passively to the sad abuse of Torah and its values in everyday human life.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SEEMINGLY ACCEPT THE TORAH IN THEIR LIVES, but only on a superficial and conditional level. They may pay lip service to its ideals and observances, they may even dress the part of observant Jews, but in their inner beings they have not internalized its values and attitudes. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi calls them *rebuked*, i.e., people who are excluded from the company of the truly righteous, because their very insincerity is in itself a rejection and degradation of the Torah.

Someone who truly does not concern himself with Torah and its values in his personal life and dealings with others automatically removes himself from the company of the holy people of Israel. A person whose attachment to Torah is only external and whose piety is merely a sham portrayal for the benefit of others is likened to a pig with a golden bauble in its snout. The Torah — the golden bauble — is degraded by being in the pig's snout, for the pig remains a pig in spite of its beautiful adornment. Similarly, one who does not honor the Torah through study and correct behavior and holy attitudes, automatically dishonors it. For Torah sets standards for living and functioning in family and society. Without adherence to those standards one runs the risk of being the pig with a piece of gold jewelry in its otherwise ugly snout.

נִקְרָא נָזָף
*Is called
 "Rebuked"*

6/2

and saying, “Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah!” For whoever does not occupy himself with the Torah is called “Rebuked,” as it is said: *Like a golden ring in a swine’s snout is a beautiful woman who turns away from good judgment* (Proverbs 11:22). And it says: *The Tablets are God’s handiwork and the script was God’s script charus (engraved) on the Tablets* (Exodus 32:16). Do not read *charus* (engraved), but *cherus* (freedom), for you can have no freer man other than one who engages in Torah study.

שָׁאֵין לְרַבָּן
חוּרִין אֶלָּא מַיִּ
שְׁעוֹסֵק בַּתְּלִמּוֹד
תוֹרָה

*For you can
have no freer
man other
than one who
engages in
Torah study*

THERE IS ANOTHER ASPECT TO TORAH, ITS ABILITY TO CREATE A TRULY free person. Judaism is a staunch defender of personal freedom and autonomous freedom of choice. This requires that there be a defender of man’s ability to make such choices and that man not be enslaved to his passions, momentary whims, or current societal political correctness. That defender is the Torah itself. The very Torah that seems to impose so many restrictions upon our behavior is in reality the vehicle by which one may achieve true personal freedom. For it is the Torah and, paradoxically, its numerous restrictions that provide the very basis for individual freedom. The Torah’s discipline frees us from the slavery of our very nature. Just as all free societies require laws, police, self-discipline, and a sense of purpose in order to prevent anarchy and violence, so too does the individual have to appreciate the necessity of Torah law and restrictions guaranteeing the ultimate freedom of the individual Jew.

We should not allow ourselves to become prisoners of the pursuit of wealth or fame, of the demands of power and avarice. We can be in control of our physical desires and temper them with the investment of holiness in all physical acts and behavior. “Keeping up with Joneses,” “everybody does it,” “be liberated” — such slogans of life may entice us, but ultimately they truly enslave us. They are countered by the opening statement of the Ten Commandments, in which God identifies Himself as the One Who freed Israel from Egyptian bondage so that it should serve Him.

The Torah frees us from the temporary and tawdry, and uplifts us to see the eternal and meaningful things in life. Therefore, it is only through the Torah, its standards and observances, its wisdom and guidance, that the true spirit of freedom can be achieved in one’s life. Torah teaches us that in discipline lies freedom and in adherence to God’s commandments one finds the inner sense of purpose and peace that transcends all human problems and constraints. The “owner of our work” is not necessarily our human boss, but is rather the Creator of us all. Knowledge of that elementary fact of life grants freedom of perspective and eventual freedom of soul and spirit.