

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Avrohom *ben* Emmanuel *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Virtues of Attendance

PARSHAS MATTOS-MASEI 5777

This week’s *parshah* opens in a somewhat unique manner. The first section details the laws of *nedarim* (vows) and begins with an introductory proclamation. While so far this may seem fairly typical, the departure here relates to the individuals being addressed. As the *passuk* states: ... וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ד’... –“And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of B’nei Yisrael, saying: ‘This is the matter that Hashem has commanded...’” (*Bamidbar* 30:2). Most often, the instruction is directed to the people; what accounts for the inclusion here of the tribal elders?

Too Much Involvement

In clarifying this matter, as we shall see, the Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*) offers a most novel interpretation of the entire *passuk*. In laying the groundwork for this exposition, he begins by first examining a teaching of the sage Hillel, as recorded in the Mishnah in Avos (2:5):

אֵין בּוֹר יָרָא חֵטָא, וְלֹא עִם הָאֲרָץ חֲסִיד, וְלֹא הַבַּיִשָּׁן לָמַד, וְלֹא הַקֶּפֶדָן מְלַמֵּד, וְלֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסוּחָרָה מְחֻכִּים.

“A boor cannot be G-d-fearing, nor can an ignoramus be pious; the bashful one cannot become learned, nor can the impatient one teach properly; and all who increase their involvement in commerce do not become wise.”

Now, as one may have detected, it is this latter statement that seems to require some additional elucidation. It seems to be warning against over-involvement in business activity, as such conduct will stunt one’s growth in Torah. Indeed, a number of commentators do in fact understand the Mishnah in this way.

The sentiment is undoubtedly true; and this message is delivered in other statements of Chazal, such as later in Avos (4:10): הָיִי מִמַּעַט בְּעֵסֶק וְעִסוּק בְּתוֹרָה –“Minimize your involvement in business and (instead) engage in Torah study.” But the suggestion that this particular Mishnah should be so interpreted may prove problematic, for the language it employs seems to indicate that a different message was intended. As the Chasam Sofer points out, it does not state that “all” or even “most” who engage in “*sechorah*” (commerce) will fail to become wise in Torah. The exact wording is: לֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסוּחָרָה מְחֻכִּים –“Not all who deal increasingly in *sechorah* will become wise”; the implication being that some (perhaps even most) *will* indeed become wise in Torah despite their involvement in *sechorah*. But as mentioned, the sentiment that over-involvement in other areas will stunt one’s Torah growth is certainly a true and valid assertion. What, then, does our Mishnah really mean?

Getting the Better Deal

Thus, the Chasam Sofer understands that this Mishnah is actually not focusing on business at all. When mentioning “*sechorah*,” the reference is actually to Torah itself. For so it is characterized by Shlomoh Hamelech, who declared: כִּי טוֹב סוּחָרָה מִסוּחַרְקָסָף –“For its commerce is greater than monetary commerce” (*Mishlei* 3:14). Rashi there explains the advantage: When dealing with regular commerce or bartering, the buyer receives the item, while the seller must part with it. But with Torah, both parties can exchange “items” and still

retain them. That is, Reuven learns one topic and Shimon learns a different topic; they can then compare notes and share their learning with the other. The end result is that both become knowledgeable about **both** topics. The engagement in “Torah commerce,” the exchange of Torah knowledge and ideas, yields equal results.

Usually. Recall that the Mishnah implied that there is an exception. Most of the time, such engagement will lead to the acquisition of equal wisdom for both parties. However, this is not true in all instances: “**Not all** who deal increasingly in the *sechorah* of Torah will become wise.” Suppose, explains the Chasam Sofer, that a Torah scholar is scheduled to deliver a *shiur* (lesson). Reuven is torn; on the one hand, his interest in the advertised *shiur* is piqued; on the other, he is inclined to focus on his personal choice of study. He thus once again “makes a deal” with Shimon. “You go to the *shiur*,” he tells his friend, “while I’ll stay here and study by myself. Afterward, you’ll relate to me the *shiur*’s contents, and I’ll share with you what I have learned.”

When they later compare notes, aren’t both parties equally edified? After all, both Shimon and subsequently Reuven learn the identical content of the *rav*’s *shiur*. Actually, the Chasam Sofer asserts, there is a fundamental difference, even if Shimon is a superb teacher and Reuven a very quick study. For unlike Reuven, Shimon heard these words of Torah directly from the *rebbe*, who has the added advantage of “*Shechinah midaberes mitoch grono* – the Divine Presence speaks through his throat,” in a manner reminiscent of our original teacher, Moshe. By the time Reuven hears the *shiur* from Shimon, he receives it only secondhand. Thus, Reuven hears it only from the *talmid* (disciple) and misses out on the more impactful experience that only comes from direct involvement with the *rebbe*. And so, in this instance, Shimon’s growth in wisdom far outshines that of Reuven.

And this, concludes the Chasam Sofer, is actually the lesson of the *passuk* stated in the outset. The term “*el*,” while normally meaning “to,” can also share a definition with the word “*al* – on/about.” And such is the case here. Moshe was indeed addressing the general populace of B’nei Yisrael; but he was speaking *about* the “*rashei ha’matos*,” the tribal elders who were the teachers and *rebbeim* of the people. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר – Moshe was relating to B’nei Yisrael a crucial principle concerning these *rashei hamatos*; namely, he was conveying the same lesson as outlined above. In the future, Yisrael would receive much Torah instruction from them, and Moshe was assuring the people to regard their words as direct communication from Hashem Himself. As the prime teachers of Torah, they likewise had the advantage of “*Shechinah midaberes mitoch gronam* – the *Shechinah* would speak from their throats.” And so Moshe exhorted the people to always consider their instruction as such, as if it had emanated from the mouth of Hashem. The *passuk*, then, encapsulates the elevated stature of the true Torah teachers. זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ד’ – “This is the matter that Hashem has commanded.” The actual word of Hashem is manifest in what the Torah leaders disseminate.

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