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Running to “Light” Mitzvot

The *Mishnah* taught:

Ben Azai said, “Run to a light *mitzvah* and flee from a sin. For a *mitzvah* draws a *mitzvah* and a sin draws a sin. The reward for a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*, the reward for a sin is a sin.”

We shall focus on the beginning of *Ben Azai*’s statement. What is a light *mitzvah* and why should one run to them?

The *Tifferet Yisrael* suggests a number of explanations for the term “light”. The first is that the performance of the *mitzvah* does not require physical exertion; it is simple to perform. The second is that a *mitzvah* can be simple due to its regular performance, e.g. *tefillah*. A *mitzvah* can also be simple because common sense obligates one to perform them, e.g. honouring one’s parents or the elderly. Finally a *mitzvah* can be simple since one gains pleasure from its performance, e.g. eating on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*.

With this in mind, the *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that the *Mishnah* is not just encouraging one to perform these *mitzvot* because, given their “simplicity”, one is likely to perform them anyway. Instead, the *Mishnah* is encouraging one to be cautious in their execution and that they are performed with the correct intentions.

The *Tifferet Yisrael* however continues, that when *Ben Azai* makes reference to running and fleeing, this is because when one is contemplating a specific act, the *yeter harah* will attempt to stifle the performance of *mitzvot* and encourage sins. He explains that this is why we pray to “remove the *Satan* from before us”, preventing us from doing *Mitzvah*, “and from behind us”, pushing us to do the reverse.

The *Ruach Chaim* however explain that while sin makes itself readily available, the same is not true for *mitzvot*. One must pursue *mitzvot* in order that they are made available. The performance of even a small *mitzvah*, as the *Mishnah* continues, brings about another one. The *Ruach Chaim* explains that the imbalance was necessary in order to allow for free choice.

The *Ruach Chaim* provides another explanation of why the *Mishnah* focuses specifically on simple *mitzvot*. One is likely to expend effort which is proportional to the perceived gain. Similarly, if one is focused on reward, one would tend to focus on only the large *mitzvot*. The *Mishnah* therefore teaches that such a focus is flawed. One’s intention when performing *mitzvot* should simply be, because it is the will of *Hashem*. Running to perform simple *mitzvot* demonstrates that one’s focus is on obeying the King’s command.

Till now we have seen that running to small *mitzvot* is either because of resistance (*Tifferet Yisrael*), their scarcity or the message it sends (*Ruach Chaim*). The *Midrash Shmuel* explains that the act of running to a *mitzvah* is itself a *mitzvah*. When the *Mishnah* later teaches: “*schar mitzvah, mitzvah*”, the term “*schar*” does not mean reward, but payment. In other words, that payment made is considered a *mitzvah*. He explains that if one expended financially to perform a *mitzvah* he would have merited twice – once for the *mitzvah* and also for the expense. Likewise, if someone runs to perform a *mitzvah* then energy expended – the effort “paid” – is considered a *mitzvah*.

Yisrael Yitzchak Bankier

Revision Questions

אבות ג': ט"ז – ד': י"א

- What *mashal* does R' Akiva provide for the previous *Mishnah*? (ג': ט"ז)
- Complete the following statement of R' Elazar ben Azarya: (ג': י"א)
 אם אין תורה אין _____ אם אין _____ אין תורה _____
 אם אין חכמה אין _____ אם אין _____ אין חכמה _____
 אם אין בינה אין _____ אם אין _____ אין בינה _____
 אם אין קמח אין _____ אם אין _____ אין קמח _____
- What *mashal* is provided for one whose wisdom exceeds his actions? (ג': י"א)
- According to R' Elazar Chisma which laws are "gufei halachot"? (ג': י"ח)
- What are the *parpr'ot chochma*? (ג': י"ח)
- According to Ben Zoma who is considered: (ד': א')
 - Wise?
 - Brave?
 - Wealthy?
 - Honoured?
- What advice does Ben Azai give regarding one's relationship to *mitzvot* and *aveirot*? What two principles does he bring in support of this advice? (ד': ב')
- Why does Ben Azai say "Do not despise any man and do not deem anything unworthy?" (ד': ג')
- Why does R' Levitas *ish Yavneh* say that one should be very humble? (ד': ד')
- What does R' Yochanan ben Bruka say will happen to one that desecrates the name of Hashem in secret? (ד': ד')
- According to R' Yishmael what will happen to one who learns: (ד': ה')
 - For the purpose of learning and teaching?
 - For the purpose of learning and "doing"?
- Who does R' Tzadok cite when warning against using *Torah* for self aggrandisement? (ד': ה')
- Complete the following statement of R' Yosi: (ד': ו')
 _____ כל המכבד את התורה _____
 _____ וכל המחלל את התורה _____
- From which three things does R' Yishmael say that a person who avoids strict judgement is saved from? (ד': ו')
- What three qualities does R' Yishmael attribute to an overconfident judge? (ד': ו')
- What two warnings do R' Yishmael provide a judge? (ד': ח')
- What does R' Yonatan say regarding on who fixes time for learning despite being in poverty? (ד': ט')
- What four things does R' Meir say regarding learning? (ד': י')
- What does R' Eliezer be Ya'akov say is the result of performing one *mitzvah*? Transgressing one sin? (ד': י"א)
- According to R' Yochanan HaSandler what is the result of a gathering that is *le'shem shamayim*? (ד': י"א)

Local Shiurim

Melbourne, Australia

Sunday -Thursday

10 minutes before *Mincha*
Mizrachi Shul
 Melbourne, Australia

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before *Mincha*
Beit Ha'Roeh
 Melbourne, Australia

Efrat, Israel

Shiur in English

Sunday -Thursday

Rabbi Mordechai Scharf
 9:00am
Kollel Magen Avraham
 Reemon Neighbourhood

ONLINE SHIURIM

Rabbi Chaim Brown
www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/

Rav Meir Pogrow
613.org/mishnah.html

Rabbi E. Kornfeld
 Rabbi C. Brown
<http://www.dafyomi.co.il/calendars/myomi/myomi-thisweek.htm>

SHIUR ON KOL HALOSHON

Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss
 In US dial: 718 906 6400
 Then select: 1 – 2 – 4

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
22 nd December י"ט טבת	23 rd December כ' טבת	24 th December כ"א טבת	25 th December כ"ב טבת	26 ^h December כ"ג טבת	27 th December כ"ד טבת	28 th December כ"ה טבת
Avot 4:12-13	Avot 4:14-15	Avot 4:16-17	Avot 4:18-19	Avot 4:20-21	Avot 4:22-5:1	Avot 5:2-3

