

אֲרֵבַע מִדּוֹת בְּדִיעוֹת:
 נוֹחַ לְכַעוֹס וְנוֹחַ לְרַצוֹת—
 יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהֶפְסְדוֹ.
 קָשָׁה לְכַעוֹס וְקָשָׁה לְרַצוֹת—
 יֵצֵא הֶפְסְדוֹ בְּשִׂכְרוֹ.
 קָשָׁה לְכַעוֹס וְנוֹחַ לְרַצוֹת—הֶסִיד.
 נוֹחַ לְכַעוֹס וְקָשָׁה לְרַצוֹת—רָשָׁע.

5:13. People fall into four categories, based on their temperament:

Easy to anger and easy to appease—
 one's loss cancels out one's profit.

Difficult to anger and difficult to
 appease—one's profit cancels out
 one's loss.

Difficult to anger and easy to appease—
 a pious individual.

Easy to anger and difficult to appease—
 a wicked individual.



GORDON TUCKER

5:13. Like 5:12 and 5:14–15, we are given here a neat two-by-two matrix constructed from two different terms that can be combined in four different ways. Here, the subject is the human disposition with respect to the waxing and waning of anger. The best of these is, of course, to be difficult to anger and easy to appease. Such a person is called a *hasid*, a person of piety (in this case, a kind person whose kindness is a function not solely of natural niceness but, also, of that individual's piety). God is described in certain rabbinic texts in these terms (see, e.g., Midrash Tanḥuma,

Kedoshim §5), and God also is sometimes said to act out of *hasidut*, out of forgiving kindness (a prominent theme in the Selihot liturgy for the Days of Awe). This *mishnah's* teaching is therefore yet another example of *imitatio Dei* presented as a serious aspirational goal.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:13. We turn now from property to relationships, and here too humankind is drawn to life's four extremes and the interstices between them. Those who are **easy to anger and easy to appease** will derive no advantage from their ability to be appeased, and their relationships in the world will always be tainted by the fact that they are given to sudden flaring up (and subsequent subsiding) of anger. The next type on our list, those who are **difficult to anger and difficult to appease**, have a certain advantage insofar as they do not rush to respond emotionally. The first two types described in this *mishnah* suggest a preference for the emotional world over the dryly rational one, in which people always proceed with caution and are thus able to protect themselves and their environment. On the other hand, those who are **difficult to anger and easy to appease** occupy the middle ground between the extremes, where matters are not absolute and people display a special attitude toward their fellows, and these people are pious. It should be noted that such people *can* be provoked, but anger doesn't come on quickly and, when it does arrive, such people know how to seek apology and forgiveness. But truly lamentable are those who are **easy to anger and difficult to appease**, who churn from one bout of anger to the next and have difficulty setting their feet on the firm ground of human kindness toward all living things.

ה:ד

אַרְבַּע מְדוּת בְּתַלְמִידִים:
מַהֵר לְשִׁמוּעַ וּמַהֵר לְאַבֵּד—
יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהֶפְסֵדוֹ.
קָשָׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ וְקָשָׁה לְאַבֵּד—
יֵצֵא הֶפְסֵדוֹ בְּשְׂכָרוֹ.
מַהֵר לְשִׁמוּעַ וְקָשָׁה לְאַבֵּד—חָכָם.
קָשָׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ וּמַהֵר לְאַבֵּד—
זֶה חֶלְקֵי רַע.

5:14. Students fall into four categories:

Quick to learn and quick to forget—
one's loss cancels out one's profit.

Slow to learn and slow to forget—
one's profit cancels out one's loss.

Quick to learn and slow to forget—
a wise individual.

Slow to learn and quick to forget—
this is a bad lot.



GORDON TUCKER

5:14. With a structure very similar to that of the previous *mishnah*, we now turn from the disposition to anger to the question of how easily people learn and how effectively they retain what they have learned. Temperamental dispositions may largely be traceable to innate traits that vary from individual to individual, but we *do* have a certain measure of control over how easily we will get angry or appeased. In this case, however, we are talking about people's abilities to learn and to retain information, over which there is far less control. The *mishnah* implicitly recognizes this, in how it refers to what is in the

least desirable box in the two-by-two matrix—that is, the category of those who are slow to learn and quick to lose what they have learned. Such a person is not called a *rasha* (a wicked person), a label that is applied to people in the previous two *mishnayot*. Instead, no moral label is assigned at all and such a person is simply said to have a *helek ra*, a sorry lot in life.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:14. One's inner tempo determines much of the course of one's life, so it is for good reason that the *mishnah* observes that **students also fall into four categories**. The sages ask questions about attentiveness and concentration, letting us know that every generation in the past has dealt with them and every generation is called upon to decide how to respond and how to improve the rhythms and tempos it passes on to its students. And it is especially fitting that we, who live in a generation whose pace is steadily accelerating toward disaster, should pay attention to the sages' having paused to consider these questions.

We begin with the type of student who is **quick to learn and quick to forget**, and whose **loss cancels out [the] profit**. A person needs time in order to put one's particular skills into practice: time to listen, recognize, internalize, think, respond, and produce. Rapid transmission does not provide ample time to "live with" everything that is transmitted, to converse with new ideas, and so they are forgotten as though they had never been transmitted at all. From this perspective, the Jewish exegetical enterprise is a long process of steeping students in a transmitted tradition, and for an extended period of time—so that something,

no matter how small, of the exalted voices of wise teachers from across the generations will remain with each and every student. The next type of student discussed is one who is **slow to learn and slow to forget**. The very process of struggling will leave a person with something, so one who learns with difficulty will in the end successfully retain whatever actually *is* learned from someone else—even if it is just a single small matter. There is always some sort of entryway along the path toward encountering

another person, and the reward for the effort of passing through that entryway is real. In a third category are those who are **quick to learn and slow to forget**. For such students, others' words become distilled into one's own personality and remain there. And finally there are those who are **slow to learn and quick to forget** whatever may be learned; such students have no receptors to recognize the wisdom of another person, so their own wisdom is continually diminished.

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּנוֹתַי צְדָקָה:
 הַרוֹצֵה שְׂיִתֵּן וְלֹא יִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם—
 עֵינֹו רָעָה בְּשַׁל אַחֲרָיִם.
 יִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם וְהוּא לֹא יִתֵּן—
 עֵינֹו רָעָה בְּשַׁלּוֹ.
 יִתֵּן וְיִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם—הַסֵּיד.
 לֹא יִתֵּן וְלֹא יִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם—רָשָׁע.

5:15. Givers of charity fall into four categories:

The one who wants to give, but who does not want others to give—such a one is miserly with other people's [money].

[The one who wishes] for others to give, but not personally to give—such a one is miserly with one's own [money].

[The one who wishes] to give and for others to give—a pious individual.

[The one who wishes] not to give and for others [also] not to give—a wicked individual.



GORDON TUCKER

5:15. We have seen that an *ayin raah* (literally “an evil eye”) denotes grudging generosity or even its total lack (see commentary to 2:16 above); it is this Hebrew idiom that underlies the phrase translated here as “miserly with.” Here it seems to mean that if one gives charity but does not want others to give as well, one is begrudging the needy the additional charity that could come from others. This observation reminds us that although it is important to give charity, one's giving should be part of a more global commit-

ment to the needy. That would demonstrate most clearly that the giving is motivated by concern for the welfare of the poor, and not simply a concern about fulfilling a personal obligation (or perhaps even garnering the honor that might come from recognition for one's philanthropy). Those who do the reverse, however—who encourage others to give but do not give anything themselves—are begrudging the needy the charity that they themselves could and should give. It is hard to rank these two on the same scale: the first person shows personal generosity but may be responsible for less overall charity going to the needy, while the second is begrudging (and likely personally greedy) but may actually be responsible for more charity being given to the needy, in the end. Neither, clearly, is ideal.

And the remaining two matrix boxes quite rightly belong to the *hasid* (pious person) and the *rasha* (wicked person). Since we have returned in this *mishnah* to characteristics over which we do have control, the one who gives personally and also encourages others to do so is a *hasid*, a pious person, while the one who neither gives charity nor encourages others to give is rightly called a *rasha*, an evil person.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:15. This *mishnah* turns from the types of students, who receive (knowledge) from others, and addresses the question not of taking from others but rather of giving—specifically, **givers of charity**. The first type—the one who wants to give, but who does not want others to give—is someone unaware that the work of giving

must be undertaken in human partnership, together with others, and not solely as a personal effort—and this is part of the mission of the world. An individual can obviously extend help to another privately, but giving *tzedakah*—and in so doing, working toward making the world a better place—rests on the participation of the collective and not just on individuals. An individual who wishes to be the sole benefactor of the needy is likely just campaigning for the admiration of the world, and is not acting selflessly on behalf of the needy—and this is so despite the fact that some specific recipient will, in fact, benefit from the gift being made.

And then there is the inverse of that first type: **[one who wishes] for others to give, but not personally to give.** Such a person effectively exempts oneself from participating in the work of human generosity and walls oneself off in one's own life. The third type is the kind individual, **[one who wishes] to give and for others to give**—such a person recognizes the power of shared generosity and expects it of oneself as well as of others. And finally we have the

mean-spirited miser, **[one who wishes] not to give and for others [also] not to give**—such a person strips the entire world of its vital power of human kindness toward others.

It is significant that the description of the types of students (5:14) is not immediately followed by the description of the types of scholars (that is, those who frequent the house of study, 5:16); instead, this *mishnah* about giving charity appears between the two *mishnayot* about students and about scholars. This is because students should first come to see themselves as active participants not only in the world of study but also in the world of action, where people give and take, and where life happens, where there are workers and poor people and questions of justice—and only then will they be ready to enter the gates of the house of study. Both of these two aspects are necessary in order to participate in the conversation of the nation and of humanity, about what character traits are truly to be valued and how to realize them in life.



אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּהוֹלְכֵי לְבַיִת הַמְּדַרְשׁ:
 הוֹלֵךְ וְאִינוֹ עוֹשֶׂה—
 שָׂכָר הֶלִיכָה בְיָדוֹ.
 עוֹשֶׂה וְאִינוֹ הוֹלֵךְ—
 שָׂכָר מֵעֲשֵׂה בְיָדוֹ.
 הוֹלֵךְ וְעוֹשֶׂה—חֲסִיד.
 לֹא הוֹלֵךְ וְלֹא עוֹשֶׂה—רָשָׁע.

5:16. Those who frequent of the house of study fall into four categories:

The one who goes [to class] but is not personally observant—such a one [at least] gets the reward for attending [class].

The one who is personally observant but does not attend [class]—such a one [at least] gets the reward for observance.

The one who [both] goes [to class] and is personally observant—a pious individual.

The one who neither goes [to class] nor is personally observant—a wicked individual.

5:16. The two elements that create the matrix here are attending to study and putting the study into practice. Again, one who does both is a *hasid*, while one who willfully neglects both is a *rasha*. But somewhat surprisingly, given what we have been taught above in 3:12 and 3:22 (both of which seem to give more weight to good deeds than to wisdom), this *mishnah* is more or less neutral with respect to the other two combinations. We are simply told that the one who goes to study but does not put the study into practice is rewarded for the study and, conversely, that one whose life practices are good but who makes no effort to acquire the learning that supports that way of living is rewarded for the practice. Which reward, if any, might be greater, we are not told. What is clear, of course, is that the most desirable thing is to combine both study and practice, and that is perfectly consistent with 3:12 and 3:22.

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּיוֹשְׁבֵי לְפָנֵי הַכְּמָיִם:
 סְפוּג וּמְשִׁיפָה מְשַׁמֶּרֶת וְנֹפֶה.
 סְפוּג—שֶׁהוּא סוֹפֵג אֶת הַכֹּל.
 מְשִׁיפָה—שֶׁמְכַנֵּס בָּזוּ וּמוֹצִיא בָּזוּ.
 מְשַׁמֶּרֶת—שֶׁמוֹצִיָּאָה אֶת הַיֵּין
 וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַשְּׂמָרִים.
 וְנֹפֶה—שֶׁמוֹצִיָּאָה אֶת הַקֶּמַח
 וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַסֵּלֶת.

5:17. Those who sit before sages fall into four categories:

the sponge and the funnel, the strainer and the sifter.

The sponge—such a one absorbs everything.

The funnel—such a one's lessons go in [one ear] and out [the other].

The strainer—such a one lets the wine pass through and retains [solely] the dregs.

The sifter—such a one separates out the coarse flour and retains [solely] the fine flour.



GORDON TUCKER

5:17. This is the last of the *mishnayot* in this chapter based on enumerated lists, and it breaks from the previous pattern of describing the four ways in which two traits can combine. Here, we are simply given four different ways in which people learn. The *mishnah* explains all four types of learners: the sponge, funnel, strainer, and sifter. The background notion, left unexpressed here but clearly assumed, is that even the best les-

sons are tinged with some of the particular ideas (and even prejudices) of the teacher, not to mention side-anecdotes that are often added in order to make the learning more pleasurable. The “sponge” takes everything in, which would seem laudable—but such a student does so indiscriminately, making no distinctions between what is essential and what is not, between what is objective and what is subjective. (This suggests the image of an overly diligent student taking down the teacher’s jokes as assiduously as the fundamentals of the subject being taught.) But discrimination itself must be done correctly. It is possible to be like a strainer, which holds onto the undesirable parts while letting the desirable parts flow away. The best kind of student is like a sifter, which separates out the coarser material and retains the finer material.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:17. The series of fours concludes in this *mishnah* and the previous one by focusing our attention on the *beit midrash*, the study hall (literally “the house of study”), where the sages sought to encourage the conversation among people that would continue in every generation. There is a place in the *beit midrash* for all individuals—whatever their unique personalities, whatever their particular attitudes toward property and other human beings, whatever their personal learning styles, and whatever their manner of giving (if they give anything at all). In categorizing the four realms of character traits, the sages make an effort to truly know and understand the ways of human beings, just as they do with respect to the ways of the world. There is no personality that is outside of the

discussion. There is no extreme before which the gate is locked. Even scoundrels are given due attention and not ignored. On the other hand, however, matters are not blurred: there is good and there is bad. In all ethical discourse there must be a value-driven stance that fearlessly speaks its truth and promotes the virtue of seeking the good. The language of ethics is a language that fluctuates between opposite poles and thus demands that each individual live up to one's human capacity to distinguish between light and darkness. Above all, ethical discourse needs *all* students—the sponge and

the funnel, the strainer and the sifter—in order to exist and be sustained.

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Ten and seven and four; history and sanctity and ethics. From here, the chapter moves on to the inclusive concept to which all the numbers lead—to the All, to the one infinite unity. Only one who passes through multiplicity and sees the various manifestations of life in the world and in humankind can gain a profound understanding of the power of One.

היה

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה בְדָבָר—
בְּטֵל דְּבָר בְּטֵלָה אֲהָבָה.
וְשֵׂאִינָה תְלוּיָה בְדָבָר—
אִינָה בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם.
אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה
בְּדָבָר? זֶה אֲהָבַת אֲמֹנוֹן וְתָמָר.
וְשֵׂאִינָה תְלוּיָה בְדָבָר?
זֶה אֲהָבַת דָּוִד וַיהוֹנָתָן.

5:18. All love that is dependent on a [specific] condition—when that condition stops existing, the love [too] will stop existing.

But love that is not dependent on a [specific] condition will never stop existing.

What is an example of love that depends on a [specific] condition? Amnon's love for Tamar.

And [what is an example of love] that does not depend on a [specific] condition? David's love for Jonathan.



GORDON TUCKER

5:18. This *mishnah* somewhat abruptly shifts us from the numerical lists to a consideration of two kinds of love. Conditional love will last only as long as the condition obtains, while unconditional love will by definition outlast all conditions. The paradigmatic case of conditional love given here comes from the sordid story of David's son Amnon, half-brother to David's daughter Tamar (2 Samuel 13). We are told that Amnon loved Tamar, but in fact

it was sexual lust that motivated him; this was proven by the fact that as soon as his lust was satisfied (through rape), the so-called "love" turned to hatred and disgust. The *mishnah* identifies the love of David (King Saul's young but charismatic soldier and attendant) and Jonathan (Saul's eldest son) as being on the other end of the spectrum. Whether David's love for Jonathan was entirely free of ulterior motives is hard to say, but it is quite clear that Jonathan's love for David was unconditional. Jonathan, as the crown prince, had everything to lose and nothing to gain by supporting and promoting David within the royal circles. Nothing to gain, that is, except for the true feelings of love themselves.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski conveys the following story of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk that graphically illustrates this *mishnah's* lesson, namely, that we often deceptively cloak our crass self-indulgences in the respectable language of love.⁵ The Rebbe once met a young man who was clearly enjoying a fish delicacy. "Why are you eating fish?" the Rebbe asked. The young man appeared puzzled. "Why? Because I love fish." "Oh, you do, do you?" the Rebbe said. "And is it because you love the fish so much that you took it out of the water where it was thriving, killed it, and cooked it? You do not love the fish, young man. It is yourself that you love, and because the fish tastes pleasant to you, you killed it and ate it." And so it is whenever what we call "love" is actually a means of self-aggrandizement.

5. I heard this story orally from Abraham Twerski, but it can also be found in his book *The First Year of Marriage: Enhancing the Success of Your Marriage Right from the Start—and Even Before it Begins* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), p. 43.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:18.

On that day, you shall lift up your eyes and look around, O mortal, and you shall lift your eyes high and see the world and all that exists within it. And you shall see the heavens and the celestial hosts, along with all the uncountable and immeasurable worlds within them. And all of them are very close to your soul, and every one of them shall offer it blessing. On that day you will love all that exists, and you will love humankind as well. And you will love yourself, for your heart will be filled with love.¹⁰

First is love, which is the ultimate language of unity. Yet not all loves are equal and not all of them can create unity from diverse entities. **Love that is dependent on a [specific] condition**, or on achieving a specific goal, **will stop existing** when that goal is achieved. Such a love is controlling, seeking to rule and own—thus putting it at odds with the ability to love the world more generally. Some people mistakenly think that an individual's love for a nation that seals itself off completely from the world is the most exalted and praiseworthy of spiritual and religious attainments, but that is not the case. The aspiration of each Jew must be to arouse in one's own heart—and in the hearts of all people—an all-encompassing love, for the entire world, that by its nature echoes the Infinite's love for all creatures. And **love that is not dependent on a [specific] condition will never stop existing**,

10. A.D. Gordon, "Logic for the Future." The Hebrew original may be found in *Kitvei Aharon David Gordon, Sefer Sheni: HaAdam V'haTeva* (Tel Aviv: HaPo-eil HaTza'ir, 1951), p. 51; the English translation of the passage was prepared by Martin S. Cohen for publication in this volume.

because love cannot *but* be permanent when people continue, day after day, broadening the love in their hearts and directing it toward all creatures. Such love will never vanish, for that is precisely the ongoing labor that Israel is commanded to cultivate constantly: the effort to walk in the footsteps of God, to love all "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). In line with this, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook wrote, in his book *Musar Avikha*:

Love for all creatures requires much attentive care in order to broaden it appropriately . . . The higher level of love for all creatures must encompass the love of humankind, which must also be extended to *all* of humankind, despite the differences of opinion among religions and faiths . . . it will always be necessary to attain the [most] profound levels of the thought of nations and other collectives, as much as possible, to learn their character and their features, in order to know how to base the love of all God's creatures on a foundation that comes close to the practical. For only beginning with a soul rich in love for God's creatures and for humanity can the love of one's nation and its spiritual and practical greatness stand noble and tall. Jealousy that makes a person see everything outside the boundaries of that individual's own nation . . . as ugliness and impurity is one of the more awful forms of benightedness that causes general destruction to all meaningful spiritual growth, for whose light every refined soul pines.¹¹

11. Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook, *Musar Avikha U-middot HaRaayah* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 5745 [1984/1985]), p. 58.

כָּל מַחְלָקָת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,
 סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם;
 וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,
 אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם.
 אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלָקָת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם
 שָׁמַיִם? זוֹ מַחְלָקָת הַלֵּל וְשַׁמַּאי.
 וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם?
 זוֹ מַחְלָקָת קֹרַח וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ.

5:19. Every dispute [undertaken] for the sake of Heaven will endure in the end, but one that is not [undertaken] for the sake of Heaven will not endure in the end.

What is [an example of] a dispute [undertaken] for the sake of Heaven?

A dispute of [the kind undertaken by] Hillel and Shammai.

And what is [an example of] a dispute not [undertaken] for the sake of Heaven?

A dispute of [the kind undertaken by] Korah and his entire group [of followers].



GORDON TUCKER

5:19. The structure of this *mishnah* is very similar to that of the previous one, except that here we are not talking about the proper form of love but rather the appropriate way to engage in disagreement. Here, the paradigmatic case of controversy “for the sake of Heaven” is that of the manifold differences between Hillel and Shammai on matters of Jewish law. And the paradigmatic case of controversy for a non-heavenly purpose—

that is, for the sole sake of human aggrandizement—is the mutiny of Korah and his cohorts against Moses.

In describing controversies like those of Hillel and Shammai, the *mishnah* uses the words *sofah l'hitkayem*, without saying what the intended meaning of that phrase is. It is often assumed to mean something like “will have enduring value” or “will have constructive consequences.” These are certainly possible meanings here, since the verbal root *kof-yod-mem* has a general meaning of “enduring” or “putting in place.” Such readings, of course, are perfectly consistent with the idea that “good” controversies eventually get resolved in favor of one side or the other (as the Hillel–Shammai controversies were almost all decided in favor of Hillel), and that the value of such controversies is thus that the consideration of conscientiously held diverse views led (and will always lead) to the correct resolution of the controversy. But the most straightforward meaning of *l'hitkayem* is not “will have enduring value” but more simply “will endure.” Respecting this, David Hartman has given a different and highly suggestive meaning to this *mishnah* in his book *Conflicting Visions*: “We must learn that disagreement among Jews is healthy, creative, and impossible to avoid. We must recapture the spirit of the old rabbinic phrase ‘an argument for the sake of heaven must survive.’”⁶ With this stroke, Hartman turns our attention from the value of the outcome of the controversy to the value of the controversy itself. As he puts it, no one should enjoy a monopoly on authenticity. And although it

6. David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities of Modern Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), p. 11.

can be debated whether this was the intent of the author of this *mishnah*, it is certainly true that, though we tell the story of Korah's rebellion each year, the real purpose of the story (ironic, since it is our duty to repeat it) is to justify why Korah has been "written out of the script" of the Jewish narrative. By contrast, each time we encounter Hillel and Shammai in rabbinic literature, the purpose is in no way to read Shammai out of the history of Jewish law but rather to preserve the living quality of the controversy. As the *Mishnah* puts it in another place (at *Eduyot* 1:5), we preserve such controversies because there may come a time when the minority view will present itself as having greater validity.



TAMAR ELAD-APPELBAUM

5:19. But what is it that we are being asked to love? There are some who think that all-encompassing love can be found in the elimination of differences and the unification of all outlooks, but such people bring humankind to a spiritual procrustean bed, desiccating its vitality. The sages intentionally placed this *mishnah* about dispute immediately following the one about love, to teach that a world of love hides in the multiplicity of opinions in human conversation, which are all like the dew that brings life to creation, every drop of which is directed toward a particular blade of grass, which eagerly awaits its arrival.

There can be no unity without diversity. That is why the sages have brought the readers of this chapter through tens and sevens and fours, until they now bring us to the One, to the All. There is no love without the particular individuality of each of two lovers; there is no unity in the human community without the particular

individuality of each nation and culture. For the sages, the *beit midrash* is a workshop for the nation that practices this universal conversation, generation after generation—until someday the conversation's locus will finally broaden and nations will encounter each other, as Isaiah envisioned: "Enlarge the size of your tent; extend the size of your dwelling. Do not stint! Lengthen the ropes, and drive the pegs firm . . . And so shall all your children be disciples of Adonai, and great (*rav*) shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:2, 13). In writing about this verse, Rav Kook developed the idea of *ribbui ha-shalom*. Both the word *rav* and the word *ribbui* come from the same Hebrew root, which conveys the idea of magnitude. However, since a more common way of expressing the idea of magnitude would be with the adjective *gadol*, Rav Kook infers that the use of *rav* in the verse must suggest something else—namely, that the peace itself is somehow multivalent (rather than simply "large" or "great"), and thus given to increasing and proliferating. He writes as follows:

There are those who erroneously believe that world peace will only come about as a result of accepting universally agreed-upon beliefs and opinions, and so they believe that Torah scholars only distance the world from peace by bringing about divisiveness when they see their inquiries regarding various points of wisdom or learning leading to a diversity of opinion and thought. That is an incorrect conclusion, however, because true peace will only come to the world with *ribbui ha-shalom*. And this will come about when every angle of an issue and every conceivable approach to that issue are exposed to thoughtful scrutiny, and each is evaluated according

to its natural worth and its inherent interest. . . . Indeed, the prophet declared that “your children’s peace shall be *rav*” (Isaiah 54:13) and specifically not “your children’s peace shall be *gadol*.” The latter reading [i.e., had the verse said *gadol*] would have suggested that the peace [of future generations] will come about in the context of universal agreement regarding the basic principles of the world . . . and that peace itself can only exist when [the world uses] the same words to express [the same] universally accepted ideas. But truthfully, that [kind of universal agreement] would in fact diminish wisdom and intellectual growth in the world, because the light of the intellect can only truly shine forth [when it is permitted to do so] in all directions and in its fully variegated reality. And this is what the verse cited above implies [by its specific use of *rav*, rather than *gadol*, to describe *shalom*].

Moreover, the traditional midrashic understanding of the verse—reading the word for “your children” (*banayikh*) as though it said “your builders” (*bonayikh*)—points in this interpretive direction as well: it suggests the image of a building constructed of many parts, thus

symbolizing how ultimate truth . . . must be constructed from diverse viewpoints and opinions, all of which are accepted as the words of the living God, all reflecting different styles of analysis, of pedagogy, and of study—each of which is accorded a place in the larger system and is evaluated in that context. For this reason is it wrong to [refuse to consider any talented individual’s would-be contribution to the intellectual growth of the nation] and only proper to allow them to develop and to find their [natural] places in the larger enterprise. If a specific notion is found to contradict other ideas, this can only lead to “wisdom building her home,” as the various notions put forward are analyzed with respect to their inner logic. And this process of discussing opposing ideas in light of each other—and the resultant proliferation of ever-evolving and changing opinions—will lead to rich intellectual growth and expansion . . .

demonstrating that it is simply not possible to bring about peace [in the world] other than through the reconciliation of ideas and influences that [at first] appear to be mutually incompatible.¹²

12. Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook, *Seder Tefillah im Peirush Olat HaRaayah* (1963; repr. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2015), vol. 1, p. 430. The passage quoted by Rabbi Elazar in the name of Rabbi Hanina appears in the Talmud at B. Berakhot 64a and elsewhere. Regarding the notion of wisdom constructing its own home, see Proverbs 9:1.

כָּל הַמְזַכֶּה אֶת הָרַבִּים,
 אֵין חָטָא בָּא עַל יְדוֹ,
 וְכָל הַמַּחְטִיא אֶת הָרַבִּים,
 אֵין מְסַפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה.
 מֹשֶׁה זָכָה וְזָכָה אֶת הָרַבִּים,
 זְכוּת הָרַבִּים תְּלוּיָהּ בּוֹ, שְׁנֵאמַר:
 צְדָקָת יְהוָה עָשָׂה, וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו
 עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל (דְּבָרִים ל:כא).
 יִרְבְּעַם בֶּן נֶבֶט חָטָא וְהַחְטִיא
 אֶת הָרַבִּים, חָטָא הָרַבִּים תְּלוּי בּוֹ,
 שְׁנֵאמַר: עַל־חַטָּאת יִרְבְּעַם אֲשֶׁר
 חָטָא וְאֲשֶׁר הַחְטִיא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
 (מַלְכִים א, טו:ל).

5:20. Anyone who leads many others to virtuous behavior will never [inadvertently] inspire sin, but anyone who leads many others to sin will never be granted the wherewithal to repent adequately.

Moses behaved virtuously and inspired virtuous behavior in many others and [therefore] was their merit accounted to him, as it is said:

“He inspired the righteousness of Adonai by bringing God’s laws to Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:21).

But Jeroboam the son of Nebat sinned and led many others to sin and [therefore] was their sin accounted to him,

as it is said: “For the sins that Jeroboam himself committed and for those that he led Israel to commit” (1 Kings 15:30).



GORDON TUCKER

5:20. Anyone who leads many others to virtuous behavior will never [inadvertently] inspire sin. This teaching seeks to focus us on the actions that are the consequences of our own personal choices, and also on the actions that others will take—either based on our advice or by adopting the model that we present by our own behavior. This statement may assume—intentionally or implicitly—previous teachings about the responsibility that leaders and teachers have, to ensure that their words and deeds do not lend themselves to mischievous misinterpretation. (In this regard, see 1:11, 4:5, and 4:16 above.)

If one inspires meritorious acts by doing them and teaching them, without carelessly leaving unintended and dangerous ambiguities, then any sinful act committed by others will not be accounted to such a teacher, since the model presented was appropriate. Moses is here presented as a paradigm of such a person. That he was seen as such a paradigm sheds additional light on Jacob Milgrom’s understanding of Moses’ sin at the waters of Merivah, as described in Numbers 20. Milgrom asserts that in Moses’ (and Aaron’s) rhetorical question to the Israelites—“Shall we bring you water out of the rock?”—it was use of the word “we” that was the fatal error, because it inadvertently suggested to the people that Moses and Aaron themselves had the power, independent of God, to produce the water from the rock.⁷ Thus was

7. Milgrom’s understanding is based in part on the comments of the twelfth-century French commentator Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor, and others; see *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), pp. 448ff.

Moses punished for his one significant lapse from being a perfect exemplar and teacher of faith. The exception proves the rule, as it were. During the rest of his life, Moses provided nothing but excellent role-modeling of the life of faith. The one time in which sin could possibly be accounted *to* him, it had grave consequences *for* him.

5:20. But anyone who leads many others to sin will never be granted the wherewithal to repent adequately. On the surface, the idea that the wherewithal to repent would be withheld from anyone seems repugnant to the whole ethos of Pirkei Avot, if not that of Judaism itself. A similar problem famously arises out of the biblical story of Pharaoh's heart being hardened by God, and Pharaoh then suffering punishment for the acts of cruelty brought about by his hardened heart. In the case of Pharaoh, however, Maimonides felt it important to explain that God did not maliciously create a situation of duress to entrap a victimized Pharaoh. Rather, he said, Pharaoh's own choice, initially, to remain cruelly indifferent to the sufferings of the mistreated slaves led to his downfall. (This was suggested to Maimonides by the fact that for the first five plagues, the Torah's language is either the soft, passive "his heart was hardened," or, in one instance, a direct "Pharaoh hardened his heart," whereas beginning with the sixth plague, we find the formulation "Adonai hardened his heart." See Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 6:3.) Eventually, Pharaoh's "addiction to cruelty" did what all addictions do—namely, it created the illusion that someone else (in this case, God) was now compelling a certain action. That is always a powerful illusion, but it is an illusion

nonetheless, and one brought on entirely by one's own initial choices.

In our own case here, what shall we say? A passage in the Talmud (at B. Yoma 87a) colorfully posits that the reason for denying the "teacher of sinful behavior" the opportunity to repent is "so that one not be in paradise while one's students are in hell." (The Hebrew word used here for "hell" is *geihinnom*, and we will see this very kind of language in the following *mishnah*.) Indeed, once such a person has induced another to sin and thus to end up in a place of punishment, it does not seem right for the one who brought them to grief to be able to rehabilitate oneself, and to then look down from heaven on the sufferings of the students who were taught to sin. But this still does not comport with the foundational idea that each of us can choose to change our lives—a privilege of which both teachers and students can avail themselves, without any statute of limitation.

Perhaps another way to read this passage is to note the very indefinite quality of the subject of the verb *maspikin*, which is appropriately rendered here in the passive voice: "will never be granted the wherewithal." It thus does not have to be read as an active withholding of the power to repent from on high, but can be taken to signify something much more understandable on a realistic level. One who has taught others to sin has created a community and a fellowship far removed from the virtuous and righteous life. It is not that such a person will be prevented from repenting, should he or she be inclined to do so. Instead, we are here warned that such a person will get no help or impetus from others to do so, precisely because the circle that that person has personally created is one that

promotes mischief and evil, not virtue. There will be little or no prompting or modeling from others. Repentance for such people will perforce entail a monumental effort to extricate themselves from a web of their own creation . . . but it will not be impossible.



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5:20. Those who lead many others to virtuous behavior are those ready to dedicate their lives to the wider community and to seek with them the kind of profound conversations that lead to the One. At the core of the notion of leading others to virtue rests the search for justice and righteousness, since only these can establish patterns of life that leave room for multiple voices and their intertwining. Indeed, any spiritual system that does not take on its shoulders the burden of arranging for law, justice, a language of ethics, and a means for their implementation will never be able to lead anyone to virtue, will never be able to atone for the injustice and division to which it almost inevitably abandons its believers. Spirituality without social and ethical demands is not sustainable and it will lead human history into destruction. Moses therefore stands as a model at the center of this *mishnah*, because this great prophet and lawgiver of Israel chose not to close himself off in a personal spiritual experience of ecstatic communion with God, but instead to devote himself to a life in the public sphere, such that people would learn from his behavior how to invite the Holy One to dwell in their midst.

And this tractate, which began with the words **Moses received [the] Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua**, now returns to the portrait of each generation transmitting the tradition to the next, and relates what is

common to all those who received it and passed it on, from the time of Moses until our own day: all of them devoted their spiritual journey to the collective, but without blurring their own individual identities and without blurring the unique individuality of each person in their communities. This is the secret of the Jewish concept of a *minyan* of ten people standing side by side, each making his or her own voice heard from a different place, yet allowing those voices to intertwine and form what the prophet described as "the fullness of the whole earth" and as "God's glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Or, in the words of the twentieth-century poet and author Abba Kovner:

It is a Jewish thing, one of the most unique aspects of Judaism, to be one person in a *minyan*. To know that the nine need a tenth, and the one needs the nine. It may be that this is the most meaningful thing in Judaism, and there is nothing more uniquely characteristic and Jewish in this "movement" in which I was educated. My prayer is always to be one of the many, that my good words combine with the words uttered by the congregation. Even the individual standing closest to the ark is just the one leading the service and nothing more. There is no meaning to life if it is lived solely for one's own sake. Only in relation to shared experience, to the words that came to you and come from afar toward you, does standing [before God in prayer] have meaning. *One . . . but one in a community.*¹³

13. Abba Kovner, "One Among a Minyan" (Hebrew), in *Al HaGeshet HaTzar: Masot B'al Peh*, ed. Shalom Luria (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat HaPoalim, 1981), p. 121.