

The Dee

Pirkei Avot Project

הוא הִיָּה אומר, אין בור ירא חטא, ולא עם הארץ חסיד, ולא
הבישן למד, ולא הקפדן מלמד, ולא כל המרבה בסחורה
מחכים. ובמקום שאין אנשים, השתדל להיות איש:

He used to say: A brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.

In this Mishna, Hillel identifies a number of criteria which are necessary to maximise our spiritual potential. Rabbi Yisrael Lifschitz, who lived in Europe 200 years ago, explains the traits of the different characters that Hillel mentions.

Even a brute can behave in a righteous way however, he is lacking the correct motivation. He abstains from wrongdoing because he's afraid of being punished and he does good deeds out of habit. We can become better people by cultivating a love and sense of duty to both God and other human beings. An ignoramus can also be righteous and can even have praiseworthy motivation. Nevertheless, one's internal moral compass can only take one so far. To really fulfil our moral and spiritual potential, we must learn Torah and spend time observing the behaviour of Torah sages. These experiences will make an impression on the soul and will inspire us to rise above and beyond the call of duty.

The shy person who cannot learn is a person who doesn't ask a question lest he be seen as ignorant. As a result, he remains ignorant. We are being taught to be more concerned with expanding our knowledge than with how we appear to others. An impatient teacher can ruin the relationship with a student, such that the student has no interest in following the teacher's guidance. A successful teacher relates to a struggling student with love and compassion. Although pursuing a livelihood is important, involvement with business can sometimes detract from a person's wisdom. It's important that a person's mind is focused and one must beware of the potential of business matters to distract from the important pursuit of wisdom.

In the final teaching, Rabbi Lifschitz understands Hillel as urging even average people to be conscious of their strengths and responsibilities when in the presence of less wise individuals. In other words, our responsibilities in this world are determined in part by our environment and the needs of the people around us.

Discussion Points:

What traits of your own can you identify in each of the characters and how can you work on improving them?

When have you seen someone take on a role that no one else was willing to do? Have you ever done so?

How can you use those strengths to help the people around you?

Idea by Rabbi Anthony Knopf

לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה

מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה



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הוא הָיָה אֹמֵר, אֵין בּוֹר יֵרָא חֲטָא, וְלֹא עִם הָאָרֶץ חָסִיד, וְלֹא הַבֵּישָׁן לָמַד, וְלֹא הַקֶּפֶדָן מְלַמֵּד, וְלֹא כָל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסַחֲוֹרָה מַחְכִּים. וּבְמָקוֹם שְׂאִין אֲנָשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לְהִיּוֹת אִישׁ:

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