

The Dee

Pirkei Avot Project

**הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, נִגְדַּ שְׁמָא, אָבֵד שְׁמָהּ. וְדָלָא מוֹסִיף, יִסָּרֵף.
וְדָלָא יִלִּיף, קָטַלָא חַיִּב. וְדֹאשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּתַגָּא, חֵלֵף:**

He [also] used to say: one who makes his name great causes his name to be destroyed; one who does not add [to his knowledge] causes [it] to cease; one who does not study [the Torah] deserves death; one who makes [unworthy] use of the crown [of learning] shall pass away.

In this Mishna, Hillel, as a master teacher, shares four vital insights for learning Torah effectively. He illustrates how Torah study is a delicate balance between humility and confidence; ambition and perspective.

Torah is Life, yet the Talmud (Yoma 72b) warns that if we abuse it, Torah could be poison. Hillel first highlights that the key to healthy Torah study is genuine humility. The Ramban (introduction to Bereishit) teaches that Torah is made up of the names of Hashem. When we study or teach Torah, it should be evident that we are expressing Divine wisdom, not our own. Hillel warns that someone who studies Torah to make a name for themselves undermines Hashem's name and loses the holiness of Torah.

On the other hand, we may hesitate to contribute personal insights, chiddushim in Torah, in case we are off the mark. Hillel balances the need for humility in Torah study with the fact that we are expected to add value to Torah through our insights. Without those, our Torah knowledge might shrink.

Not only should we innovate, says Hillel, but we should feel confident to teach. We all know something that we can share with others. Hillel's teaching is echoed in the Talmud (Sotah 22a): If someone capable doesn't teach, they don't deserve to live.

To stay grounded, Hillel rounds off his lesson with a reminder to prioritise the Torah's "crown", namely Halacha. If we forget to translate what we have studied into practice, we abuse the crown of Torah. Whatever we learn should impact who we are. If it doesn't, Hashem downgrades (chalef) the value of our Torah study.

When we approach Torah study with humility, we accept responsibility to innovate in Torah, share our insights with others and ensure that whatever we learn impacts our lives.

Discussion Points:

- How do we stay humble when others congratulate us on what we teach them?
- What was our most recent personal Torah discovery/insight?
- What would you teach if you had 15 minutes to spend with someone who has never studied Torah before? Why?
- Which parts of Torah do we find most challenging to translate into practice?

לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה
מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה
רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

Idea by Rabbi Ari Shishler of Chabad of Strathavon, South Africa

