

# Shabbos Shemini 5780 - Pirkei Avos, Chapter One

*Although we have just concluded Pesach, we are expected to hit the ground running as we are already only six weeks away from Shavuos. Part of the preparation that takes us from the 'dregs' of Egypt to the 'heights' of Sinai, in such a relatively short time, is the study of Pirkei Avos over the six Shabbosos that span this special frame of time.*

*We have all been awakened to new realities. We have been startled from our comfortable assumptions in life. Coming off from the inspiration of Pesach, longing for the coming of Moshiach and all the remarkable opportunities that await us are foremost on our mind.*

*The Talmud reveals that Moshiach will only come when all the souls in the storehouse called גוף **Body**, will be completed in this world.*

*What is this storehouse called Guf /Body?*

*We have collectively been quite focused on preserving our physical bodies these past few weeks. Might there be something relevant for all of us in understanding this concept in both preserving our health and bringing about the redemption?*

*I share with you one of my favorite shiurim on Pirkei Avos, taken from the very first perek we begin this week. Hope you enjoy and are enlightened!*

*B'Ahava,  
Zvi Yehuda Teichman*

## Healthy Bodies

The Midrash points out that the portion of *Kedoshim* is an expansion of the Ten Commandments, which we are taught is a veritable microcosm of the entire Torah itself. One can find a parallel to each one of the utterances scattered throughout this portion, from the assertion "I am your G-d", down to the last principle, not to covet another's possessions. It is for this reason the Torah instructs Moshe to convey this portion collectively *אל כל עדת בני ישראל*, to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, just as it was given at Mount Sinai to the whole nation.

Rashi quoting the Midrash tells us that the laws enumerated in this portion are classified as: *רוב גופי תורה תלויין בהן*, the majority of the **'body'** of Torah is dependent on them.

Why is the term *גופי תורה*, the 'body' of Torah, used here and what does it signify? Why not simply state the majority of Torah is contingent on these principles? What dimension is added by referring to the *גוף*; the 'body' of Torah.

A great scholar and kabbalist who perished in the Holocaust, Rav Shem Klingberg, may his blood be avenged, makes a remarkable observation.

# Shabbos Shemini 5780 - Pirkei Avos, Chapter One

The Mishna (אבות א יז) quotes Rabban Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel the Elder who acclaims that לא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה, *he hasn't found anything better for the 'body' than silence.*

This sentiment, Rav Shem suggests, mystically alludes to the Second Tablets that housed the Ten Commandments that possess precisely eighty-nine more letters than there were in the First Tablets, the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for body which is גוף. It also has seventeen words more than the first ones which is the numerical value of the word טוב, good.

Rabban Shimon is thus stating that the reason we find לגוף טוב, i.e. that there are eighty nine extra letters and fifteen words more in these Second Tablets, is due to שתיקה, silence, referring to that which we are taught that the first ones didn't survive because they were given, בפומבי, with great pomp and בפרהסיא, publicity, whereas the second ones were given בצניעה, in privacy and quietly.

How does this clever interpretation relate to the greater message that Rabban Shimon taught regarding the physical benefits of silence? Why indeed does he extol its value for the body more than for the soul?

The great Bais HaLevi, Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik of Brisk, questions why the Torah reports about the radiance that emanated from Moshe Rabbeinu only by the Second Tablets and not by the first ones. He explains, based on earlier sources, that there was a fundamental difference between these two Tablets.

The Torah's light prior to the Sin of the Golden Calf illuminated the world with its brilliance. There was no forgetting, no need to toil, it was there fully accessible to all who genuinely sought its warmth. In fact, the entire body of Oral Torah was miraculously engraved upon its very stone and literally shone.

Upon the sin of the Golden Calf, its letters detached and flew off leaving only the Written Torah.

This is the deeper meaning behind the reporting in the Torah that the stones 'becoming heavy in his hands', because the written law bereft of an oral tradition is 'heavily' difficult.

After achieving forgiveness for the nation a new game plan went into place. No longer would the Torah be easily attainable. We would now have to each labor according to our ability in generating the Torah from our efforts and toil. Although it would be a more arduous journey than before, the rewards would that much greater.

Our relationship to Torah before the sin was similar to that of an Ark that contains a Torah Scroll, serving merely as a 'utility' to its holiness. Now, however, because the Torah would be the product of our labor and developed through the dedication of our minds and bodies in overcoming the challenges of a physical world, we would literally become the

# Shabbos Shemini 5780 - Pirkei Avos, Chapter One

'parchment on which the letters are penned', invested with inherent sanctity as a Torah Scroll itself.

Moshe, who through his super human efforts in dedicating himself to the study of Torah, embodied this principle fully, in a sense becoming the Tablets, so to speak, themselves, and therefore now radiated the Torah's brightness from within himself just as the former stone ones did previously.

It was precisely for this reason that these second tablets were hewn by Moshe's human hands alone unlike the first ones that were forged solely by G-d.

It is now the integration of Torah on to the 'parchment'; our bodies, that define our greatness and lights up our lives and the world we live in.

The Second Tablets that represent this new mission and privilege are therefore invested with 'גוף', eighty nine extra letters, extolling the opportunity of our transforming our bodies into the essence of Torah itself, and seventeen additional words to express, oh how it is so good; טוב!

The Holy Kozker explains that this is the deeper meaning beneath the distinction between the two sets of tablets. The first ones were given with great pomp, exclaiming its vital, exciting and brilliant message. The second were given 'quietly', not by shouting out its message, but more subtly by calmly and silently 'living' its credo.

There is no greater guarantor for conveying principles and beliefs than by absorbing its values through living happily and calmly in its teachings.

The שתיקה, 'silence', Rabban Shimon speaks of as 'good for the body', doesn't really mean silence. In the four instances in all of Torah that this word appears, it means calm and relaxed.

וישמחו כי ישתקו (תהלים קז ל) *And they (the seafarers) rejoiced because they (the waves) were quiet.*

Rabban Shimon glorifies the value of one who succeeds in integrating into one's physical being the morals of Torah and absolute faith to the extent that one's body 'lives' Torah, absent of self-interest, removed of anxiety and fear, becoming one with the Torah. Is there anything more calming and soothing to the body than that reality?

Perhaps that is the גופי תורה, 'bodies of Torah', Rashi refers to. In this portion we are given the tools by which to become the 'embodiment' of Torah indeed.

Isn't that the simple understanding of the charge of קדשים תהיו, *You shall be holy?*

By implementing the lesson of the Tablets we can literally become 'holy' as the Torah itself!

# Shabbos Shemini 5780 - Pirkei Avos, Chapter One

If we take the numerical value of 'טוב אלא שתיקה'..., *better for the body than silence*, adding eleven, its total number of letters, it equals קדשים תהיו, *you shall be holy!* (875)

We cannot simply espouse our beliefs; we must incorporate them into a 'living Torah'. Perhaps this is the broader message Rabban Shimon was teaching when he stated: "*All my days I have been raised among the Sages and I found nothing better for the body than silence; not study, but practice is the main thing; and the one who talks excessively brings on sin.*" Living its message rather than simply espousing its teachings is the most effective manner of transmitting it successfully. Talk is cheap and only brings confusion and frustration. When we imbibe its morals in every action we take, it can truly enlighten a world.

The Talmud indeed states: "which is a small passage that רוב גופי תורה תלויין בה, the majority of the body of Torah is contingent on', that which is expressed in the verse דעהו והוא הוא בכל דרכך (משלי ג ו), *In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.*" (ברכות סג.)

There is an old Yiddish adage that humorously portrays the character of our גוף, our body, claiming that this word is an acronym that stands for:

גוף וויל פאפען - ג-ו-ף - *The body wants to sleep!*

גוף וויל פּרעסען - ג-ו-ף - *The body wants to 'fress'!*

גוף וויל פּארגעניגען - ג-ו-ף - *The body wants pleasure!*

The body instinctively desires creature comforts, but we must work its 'hide', transforming it into the parchment that has Torah etched into its very fiber!

The Talmud says that the son of David, the Moshiach, will only come when יכלו כל הנשמות 'שבגוף', *all the souls in the storehouse called גוף, body, will be completed in this world.* (ע"ז ה. רש"י שם)

That is our mission. That is our hope.

May I suggest a slight correction to this Yiddish proverb.

גוף וויל פּאלגען - ג-ו-ף - *The body yearns to adhere!*

גוף וויל פּארען - ג-ו-ף - *The body yearns to travel forward!*

גוף וויל פּרייען - ג-ו-ף - *The body yearns for genuine joy!*

How we live inspired by the Torah's message, transforming our emotions, actions and thoughts into the very parchment the Torah is inscribed on, is our greatest asset in conveying its message and to merit a life filled with exquisite and eternal joy.