

***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah* (2020)**

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**“*Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah*.” [Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 9:3]
“*Good Character Comes Before Torah*.”**

While “*Derech Eretz*” is understood in many ways, we will take it to refer to “*proper behavior*” or “*good character*”.

WHY DOES DERECH ERETZ KADMA L'TORAH?

When a person lacks good *middot* (virtues), no amount of Torah is going to help.

The RAMBAN explains that a person may be a “*naval bi-reshut ha-Torah*”. One may yet be coarse, crude, self-indulgent while claiming to be observant of the Law.

FROM WHERE DO WE LEARN THESE MIDDOT (VIRTUES) FROM?

Most importantly we learn *middot* from G-d's Behavior Towards Us. This includes humility [see RASHI Braishith 1:26; “*And G-d said, ‘Let us make man’*”], *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), being merciful, and offering forgiveness, etc. [see The 13 Attributes of G-d; Ki Thissa 34:6-7]

“*you shall keep the commandments of the L-rd thy G-d, and walk in His ways* [וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּדַרְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל].” [Ki Tavo 28:9]

We also learn *middot* (virtues) from our Avot & Imahot; our Fathers & Mothers.

In the Introduction to Sefer Braishith by Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the *Netziv*) he writes that *Sefer Braishith* is referred to as “*Sefer HaYashar*”, “*The Book of the Upright*”. In Sefer Braishith the stories of our ancestors serve as lessons of how to behave, and also how not to behave.

Sefer Braishith, *The Book of the Upright*, precedes Sefer Shemot, the Book where we receive the Torah: ***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah***.

THE COUNTING OF THE OMER & THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDOT

Since Pesach, during this “*Sefirah Period*” we have been counting for 7 weeks up to the time of Shavuoth and *matan Torah*.

Each week focuses on a different *middah* (virtue): ***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah***

WEEK	MIDDAH
Week 1	CHESED: KINDNESS
Week 2	GEVURAH: JUSTICE, DISCIPLINE, SELF-CONTROL; PATIENCE (Savlanut)
Week 3	TIFERET: COMPASSION; EMPATHY (Rachamim)
Week 4	NETZACH: DILLIGENCE, PERSEVERANCE
Week 5	HOD: HUMILITY (Anavah); CONTENTMENT; MODERATION (Shevil Ha'zahov); GRATITUDE (Hakarat HaTov)
Week 6	YESOD: GENEROSITY (Nedivut Lev); GOOD HEART
Week 7	MALCHUT: SENSE OF DUTY; RESPONSIBILITTY (Achrayut); INTEGRITY; ROLE MODEL; NOBILITY

THE TWO RABBIS OF THE HAGGADAH AND DERECH ERETZ

It is customary to study Pirkei Avot (“*Ethics of Our Fathers*”) during these 7 weeks leading up to Shavuoth and matan Torah [*Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah*].

Two Rabbis prominently featured in the Haggadah are Rabban Gamliel & Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. Interestingly in PIRKEI AVOT both these 2 Rabbis (& ONLY these two Rabbis) make statements about “*Derech Eretz*”:

[1] Rabban Gamliel; Pirkei Avot 2:2

“Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world [תלמוד תורה עם דרך], for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin. Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever. And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.” [Pirkei Avot 2:2]

רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עוון וכל תורה שאין עימה מלאכה סופה בטילה וגוררת עוון וכל העמלים עם הציבור יהיו עמלים עימם לשם שמיים שזכות אבותן מסייעתן וצדקתם עומדת לעד ואתם מעלה אני עליכם כאילו עשיתם

[2] Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah; Pirkei Avot 3:21

“Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah used to say: Where there is no Torah there is no דרך ארץ; and where there is no דרך ארץ there is no Torah. Where there is no wisdom

there is no fear of G-d, and where there is no fear of G-d there is no wisdom. Where there is no knowledge there is no discernment; and where there is no discernment there is no knowledge. Where there is no food there is no Torah; and where there is no Torah there is no food. [Pirkei Avot 3:21]

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה
אם אין חכמה אין יראה אם אין יראה אין חכמה אם אין דעת אין בינה אם אין
בינה אין דעת אם אין קמח אין תורה אם אין תורה אין קמח

From this Pirkei Avot, we learn that ***Derech Eretz is a pre-requisite for Torah, as well as a consequence of Torah study.***

What we are calling “*Derech Eretz*” may be a pre-requisite for Torah study. BUT Torah study provides guidance in how to acquire and deveop these *middot* and how to employ them.