

them and drive them away from the land’.

We can now understand the message that Balak sent to Bilaam. Because ‘I know that whomever you bless is blessed’, which you must accomplish by making use of a moment of Divine Favor, therefore I can presume

that ‘whomever you curse is accursed’ can also be accomplished by making use of a moment of Divine Stringency, and therefore you can at the very least curse them so that ‘I will be able to strike it and drive it away from the land’

דער שמשון פרשתנו אות א

AVOT SHIMSHON • PIRKEI AVOT

Chapter 6

Mishna 5

A life of measured simplicity is the path to the greatest acquisition of Torah

“This is the way of the Torah: you shall eat bread with salt, drink water in measured amounts, you shall sleep on the ground, live a life of hardship, and in Torah you toil.”

The word the *Mishnah* uses for “bread” is *pat* (פת) rather than the usual *lechem* (לחם). The term *pat* refers to a small piece, as in the verse (*Vayikra* 2:6): “You shall break it into pieces” (“*Patot otah pitim*”). This teaches us that even if a person does not have a whole loaf of bread, but only small pieces — meaning, his sustenance is minimal — he should still not be distressed, for that is the way of the Torah: “you shall eat bread with salt.” Similarly, “drink water in measured amounts,” meaning he afflicts himself by drinking from a small vessel that does not quench his thirst all at once, and he thus drinks with some difficulty.

Now, the hardship of bread is understandable, as it comes from poverty. But why must one also afflict himself in the way he drinks water, when even the poor have access to water? And why must he “sleep on the ground,” when even the poorest person has a bit of straw to lie on? Therefore, the Tanna adds, “live a life of hardship,” teaching that this is truly the path of Torah — not only lack and poverty, but hardship as well. Thus, even when one can obtain more water, it is preferable to drink only a little, to experience some discomfort.

A grammatical note

One may wonder why the Tanna changes the verb form and says, “and in Torah you toil (*ata amel*)” — in the present tense — rather than “you shall toil” (*taamel*) in the future, as he said before: “you shall sleep on the ground.”

This can be explained by saying that “and in Torah you toil” is a kind of promise — one that is fulfilled immediately. If a person adopts the lifestyle of Torah described by the Tanna — bread with salt, etc. — he is assured of heavenly assistance, and all his effort will be

devoted solely to Torah; Torah will be present for him at all times. As we learn (*Avot* 3:5): “Whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, the yoke of government and worldly burdens are removed from him.”

Mishna 7

The Torah gives life to those who teach it or bring innovation to it

“Great is the Torah, for it gives life to those who do it — both in this world and in the World to Come, as it says (Mishlei 4:22): ‘For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.’”

This requires precision: if Torah study is greater than all other *mitzvot* (as stated in the *Mishnah*, *Pe’ah* 1:1), why does the Tanna say “to those who do it” (*oseha*) and not “to those who learn it” (*lomdeha*)? Furthermore, how does the verse “For they are life to those who find them” imply that Torah gives life specifically to those who do it?

It can be answered based on the *Midrash* (*Devarim Rabbah* 8:4) on the verse “For they are life to *lemotzehem* (למוציאיהם) ‘those who find them’”: some interpret the term *lemotzehem* (למוציאיהם) as *lemotzi leacherim* (למוציא לאחרים) ‘those who bring them out for others’), that is, those who teach them to others. Others interpret it as *lemamtzi otam* (לממציא אותם) ‘those who invent them’), that is, those who innovate and produce new and original ideas in the concepts of the Torah.

This clarifies that the life that Torah gives is acquired only when a person reaches one of these levels: either he teaches Torah to others, or he creates new insights in Torah — in which case the Torah becomes known as his Torah due to his toil.

That is why the Tanna said specifically: “It gives life to those who do it.” The Torah gives life when one does something active with it — either by teaching it to others (thereby creating another Torah scholar), or by innovating within it through one’s own ideas. This also explains the proof from the verse “For they are life to those who find them,” which refers precisely to *doers* — those who teach or bring innovation, expanding Torah and creating more wisdom in the world.



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