

OUR QUESTIONS

- 1** The Chain of Transmission of Jewish Tradition detailed in this Mishna is an important foundation for the credibility of Torah. Shouldn't it have been included as the introduction to the first Mishna in Tractate Brachos? Why did the Rabbis wait to include it before Tractate Nezikin? (much later in the tractates of the Mishna)
- 2** The Mishna states that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai. We understand that Sinai is a euphemism for G-d. Why not just say G-d and what do we learn from the use of Sinai instead?
- 3** Also, isn't it more appropriate to say G-d gave the Torah to Moses, rather than Moshe received the Torah from G-d/Sinai? What do we learn by putting the focus on Moshe and his "receiving" the Torah?
- 4** The Mishna begins by Moshe "receiving the Torah," but instead of continuing with the same language, "Joshua received the Torah," it switches to "Moshe transmitted or passed it to Joshua." Why the switch in subject and substituting the word transmitted for received?
- 5** Why does the mishna have to stress that the Rabbis said three things? Isn't it more important what they said rather than the number of things that they said?
- 6** Do the three things that they said relate to one another in any way?
- 7** It sounds like the Mishna is addressing judges or leaders. Does it have anything to teach the common man/woman?

COMMENTARY BY RABBI MORDECHAI ROTTMAN

“Moses received the Torah at Sinai and gave it over to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They gave the courts of Israel three pieces of all-important advice: Judge slowly and carefully, establish many students, and make a fence around the Torah.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Instead of changing morality to fit man, the Torah encourages man to fit morality. As man adapts to the moral structure of the Torah, he continues to grow and develop ethically and morally, elevating his physical nature while striving towards an infinite connection to eternity.

One of the many things that is taught to us in the first Mishna in Chapter One is the chain of transmission that passed on the Torah from G-d to the Jewish People throughout the ages. In this Mishna, we have the beginning of the chain. The chain is then continued in the following paragraphs as well.

The insertion of this information in the first paragraph leads us to a question. Why did the sages choose to record the transmission process in the Book of Ethics? The Book of Ethics is well into the six orders of the Mishna (the 39th of 63 tractates). It would appear to have been more appropriate to have written the chain of transmission, which grants the entire Mishna its validity, at the beginning of the very first tractate.

The answer given is a very relevant one, especially in our day and age of changing mores and values.

The Book of Ethics, which deals with the basics of human relationships and values, is actually a most appropriate place to bring down the chain of transmission. Why? To remind us that the ethics and values that are found in the Torah are not just good ideas, but are also commandments, just like Shabbat and kashrut.

While other cultures present a changing set of values, the values of the Torah are immutable.

A society that establishes its own set of mores and then prides itself on its morality is very similar to the archer in the following story told by the famous Magid of Dubno.

A man was wandering in the forest when he came upon another man who was holding a bow and arrow in his hand. About 200 yards away there were a number of trees, each tree had a circle drawn in the trunk and an arrow directly in the center of the circle.

The first man was quite impressed with obvious marksmanship of the archer and he said admiringly, "That's rather amazing! You must practice an awful lot to achieve such a high degree of accuracy!"

"Not at all," replied the second man, "it's really quite simple. First I shoot the arrow at the tree, and then I draw the circle around the arrow, that way every arrow is always right on target!"

INSIGHT

Our own sense of right and wrong can be prejudiced by our personal desires and the world we live in. Man can justify almost anything. In Judaism even our basic ethics are G-d given. This prevents us from altering them in the face of cultural changes.