

OUR QUESTIONS

- 1** What is the significance of mentioning that Shimon HaTzadik was from the “remnant of the great assembly”?
- 2** What is conveyed by using the phrase, “He used to say,” rather than just telling us what he said?
- 3** What does the use of the word “stands” convey in the phrase “the world stands” upon three things?
- 4** With the answer to #3 in mind, how does each of these three things provide a pillar upon which the world stands?
- 5** What relationship(s) do these three things have with one another and how do they mutually work to fulfill their purpose?

COMMENTARY BY RABBI MORDECHAI ROTTMAN

MESSAGE:

The purpose of Creation is for man to utilize every facet of his existence to get closer to G-d.

Shimon HaTzaddik received the Torah from them, (the men of the Great Assembly). He used to say, “The world stands on three things. Torah, Avodah, and Gemilut Chasadim.” We must realize that the sayings in Pirkei Avos are not mere “tidbits of wisdom” from the ancient sages, something that one could say about adages of Confucius or the like. The words in Pirkei Avos are words of infinite profundity and truth, words that must be taken with utmost seriousness.

What Shimon HaTzaddik is telling us is that these three things are not just “good ideas,” but that the **survival** of the entire world depends on the fulfillment of these things.

The world **stands** on these three things....

Since these three things are so important, it would stand us in good stead to understand exactly what each one refers to.

Torah – refers to the study of Torah.

Avodah - refers to prayer.

Gemilut Chasadim - refers to performing acts of loving kindness.

To understand why these three things are so important for the existence of the world, we must understand what the purpose of the world is.

The Torah teaches us that the purpose of the world was for man to develop a relationship with G-d, the infinite Creator of the universe. How does man develop a relationship with G-d? By utilizing his free will to connect to Him through the three vehicles of human self-expression, Thought, Speech, and Action. The three things mentioned in the Mishna correspond to these three forms of self-expression.

Torah - Speech Prayer - Thought Gemilut Chasadim - Action

Relating to G-d in these three ways connects man to G-d, forming a lasting bond with the

Infinite. Let's see for ourselves the significance of each one.

TORAH - SPEECH

The reason why the study of Torah is so significant is because it is only through the study of Torah that we learn what it is exactly that we have to do to develop a relationship with G-d. Through this Divinely-given system of truth, we can know what is favorable in his eyes and what is not. If man were to attempt to arrive at a formula for connecting to the Divine himself, he could easily concoct any number of "commandments" that would actually only be products of his own subjective nature.

The Chief of the S.S. and Police in Lublin, Odlio Globocnik, is quoted as making the following statement in reference to the infamous work of the S.S. "If a generation is ever so spineless and weak-kneed as not to understand our great task, then National Socialism shall indeed have been in vain. I am, on the contrary of the opinion that bronze tablets should be laid recording that we had the courage to carry out this great and so necessary work." Without a system of morality from G-d, even murder can become a "great and necessary work."

PRAYER - THOUGHT

If man does not take the time to crystalize his thoughts on G-d, he will never achieve the clarity necessary to devote himself fully to Torah. Vague ideas do not provide a strong enough framework with which to support a life of dedication to spirituality and a reining in of physical passion. Hence, the necessity for prayer which is the vessel for thought.

GEMILUT CHASADIM - ACTION

Thoughts and speech must culminate in action. The gemara says of one who studies yet does not apply his knowledge on the level of action, "Better he was not created!" It is only through action that there is complete merging between the mind and the soul. Learning without action creates a sort of "spiritual schizophrenia." The longer one puts off realizing his convictions in a physical sense, the more distance he places between himself and his ideas. Eventually, a callousness sets in, an insensitivity to the power that his very own convictions generate. The result will be increased difficulty in achieving a close relationship to G-d with each passing day.

Shimon Hatzaddik is telling us that since the purpose of the world is for man to form a relationship with G-d, this means relating to Him in Thought, Speech and Action. Therefore, the entire existence of the world stands upon man involving himself with his Creator on these three levels.