

CHAPTER 1, MISHNA 4

THE MODEL HOME



יוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרִידָה וְיוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם. יוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרִידָה אָמַר, יְהִי בֵיתָךְ בֵּית נְעֻד לְחֻכְמַיִם, וְהָגִי מִתְּאֲבֶק בְּעַפְפֵר רַגְלֵיהֶם, וְהָגִי שׁוֹמְתָה בְּצֵמָא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם:

Yose ben Yoezer, man of Tsreida, and Yose ben Yochanan, man of Jerusalem, received from him. Yose ben Yoezer says, "May your house be a meeting house for Sages, sit at the dust of their feet and drink their words thirstily."



FILL IN YOUR OWN QUESTIONS ON THE MISHNA ABOVE BEFORE PEEKING AT OUR QUESTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE!

OUR QUESTIONS

- 1** Our mishna is focusing upon relating to great Rabbis/Leaders, learning from them and taking care of their needs. The first aspect discussed is hosting meetings for our leaders to presumably discuss issues facing the Jewish Community. The Mishna puts a stress on our “homes” in this mishna by saying your home should be a meeting place for leaders. Why our homes, instead of our offices or clubs etc.?
- 2** Also, presumably this directive of the Mishna will be carried out by the wealthier Jews among us with the nicest houses. Does the mishna mean to convey anything to the rest of us, outside of aspiring to buy a nice house!?
- 3** The second directive exhorts us to “sit at the dust of their feet,” presumably to learn Torah from them? The mishna uses a strange term for sit, misabek, which literally means to wrestle, and is reflexive, which connotes with oneself? What is this word coming to convey and why the imagery at the “dust of their feet”?
- 4** The last phrase mentions drinking thirstily of their words? The imagery for Torah conjured up here is water. What is the similarity between Torah and water and why does the mishna add thirstily? Why would I drink if I wasn't thirsty? Isn't the thought obvious and hence unnecessary?
- 5** What is the relationship of the three ideas to one another?

COMMENTARY BY RABBI MORDECHAI ROTTMAN

SYNOPSIS

A man's home should be an oasis of spirituality, a fortress of light in a world that often seems dark. One way to maintain that spiritual feeling in the home is to use your home as a place of gathering for Torah study and Torah scholars who will teach you, your family and your friends the wisdom of Torah. We must keep in mind, however, that the key to Torah wisdom is humility, the attribute that encourages us to learn that which we do not know. Keeping this in mind will allow us to gain maximally from our esteemed guests.

A Deeper Look:

The connection between studying Torah and humility is found in a number of places in the Torah. For example, the Torah is compared to water. Just as water always seeks the lowest level, so too with Torah. Our sages tell us that it was for this reason that Mt. Sinai was a relatively small mountain, teaching the Jewish People that bigger is not necessarily better.

Another example is the ark in the Holy Temple which contained the Torah. The proportions and structure of the ark were all permeated with lessons in humility, teaching those who wish to study Torah that the key to becoming an "ark" which "houses" Torah is to be humble. How so? The ark was the only vessel in the Holy Temple whose dimensions all contained halves. "Two and one-half cubits length, one and one-half cubits width, and one and one-half cubits height." A half, by its very definition, is part of something greater. Knowing that there is something greater than ourselves is the key to humility.

For this reason, a Torah sage is always called a "Talmid Chacham," meaning a "Wise Student." No matter how much Torah one studies, he is always a student, a part of something greater.

The ark itself was constructed of three boxes, an exterior one of gold, a middle one of wood, and an interior one of gold. Once again the message resonates with humility: While a scholar who represents the Torah must appear honorable to the outside world, (the exterior and interior boxes), in his heart he must always be humble (the middle wooden box).

True Torah scholars have always been models of humility.

One of the great Torah leaders in the 19th century, Rabbi Israel Salanter was giving a lecture to a room full of students. At one point, a young student raised a difficult question on the validity of one of the arguments the great rabbi was using to present his discourse. The room was hushed as the great rabbi stood thoughtfully stroking his beard, all eyes upon him, waiting to see how he would handle the difficult question.

"You are right," he said to the young student. "As a matter of fact, I now realize that my entire lecture contained a faulty premise." And with that, the great Rabbi Israel closed his books and left the podium.

True humility indeed!

SUMMARY

Bringing Torah into our home is a good way to ensure that our home maintains a spiritual quality. Yet, we must remember that the key to Torah wisdom is humility. By fulfilling the words of this Mishna we will not only elevate ourselves, but we will illuminate our home and family with the light of Torah.

In the words of R. Yossi b. Yoezer, we find important advice on one of the factors that create the proper environment in a Jewish home. **R. Yossi b. Yoezer says, "Let your home be a meeting place for the sages, sit in the dust of their feet, and drink their words with thirst."**

To understand what R. Yossi is saying, we must understand what sages do when they meet. Hopefully, not discuss the stock market! At least not the sages that R. Yossi had in mind. When sages - Torah scholars - get together, they study Torah. That's the way it's always been and that the way it should be today.

The message here is that a man should strive to have his home permeated with Torah and the light that spreads forth from its words.

A home which is filled with words of Torah is a home where the Torah will be observed. A home which is devoid of Torah will be filled with other things, some of them having a negative spiritual influence on the members of the family that reside there. Not only will these Torah scholars that you invite to your home discuss Torah, but they will practice it there as well. By bringing the scholars to your home you are presenting for your family a live example of Torah living.

The commentators say that there are two ways that a person's home can be a "meeting place for the sages." One way is by literally having the sages meet in your home. Perhaps through organizing classes for yourself and your friends and inviting them to come down and speak.

The other way is to have Torah **books** in one's home, (and of course, to learn from them!)
Second best to having Torah scholars actually in your home, is studying their words.

Any experience can be either a success or failure depending on the attitude one has during the experience. Someone who goes into a potentially wonderful experience with a negative attitude is bound to come away with negative impressions. Therefore, the Mishna goes on to teach us the proper attitude one should have while studying Torah. The Mishna says, "mis'abek b'afar rug'lei'hem." The word "mis'abek" means - to wrestle, and the words, "b'afar rug'lei'hem," means in the dust of their feet.

What kind of an attitude is being implied here? The answer is that while one is **obligated** to question vigorously the words of Torah until he understand them, (wrestle) , he still must do so with humility, (the dust of their feet). One must not approach the study of Torah with arrogance, for then he will not see the truth within it. Torah is compared to water - just as water flows to the lowest point , so too do the truths of Torah go only to the most humble.

The last part of the Mishna also refers to the proper attitude one should have when studying.

"And drink with thirst their words." Thus, when one studies, he should do so with enthusiasm. The external state of a person has a way of influencing his internal state. One should study Torah as if it is going to turn him into a millionaire! Unfortunately, many people read the daily paper with more excitement than they have when they study Torah. Strange that it should be that way, given the fact that 99% of the information in the paper has very little to do with them, while Torah contains instruction for living from the Master of the universe. The message of the Mishna is clear, Torah should not be left in the synagogue. It should be brought home and made a constant part of our lives.