

# CHAPTER 1, MISHNA 5

## OPEN UP YOUR HOME - BUT NOT TOO WIDE

“ יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, ?הי ביתך פתוח לרונה, ויהיו עגלים בני ביתך, ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה. באשתו אמרו, קל וחומר באשת חברו. מכאן אמרו חכמים, כל זמן שאדם מרבה שיחה עם האשה, גורם רעה לעצמו, ובוטל מדברי תורה, וסופו יורש גיהנום:

Yose ben Yochanan, man of Jerusalem, says, “May your home be open wide, may the poor be members of your household and do not increase conversation with the wife.” They so stated with regard to his wife, all the more so with the wife of his friend. From this, the sages said, “Any time that a man increases conversation with the woman, he causes evil to himself and neglects the words of Torah; and, in his end, he inherits Gehinam (hell).”

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

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# OUR QUESTIONS

- 1** The first phrase of this Mishna builds upon the idea sketched in the previous mishna of using your home for hosting and mitzvot. We are directed to have a home that is “wide open.” “Open” implies that our homes should be places where guests are welcome and frequent. What does revach, “wide” open add?
- 2** The second phrase extends this concept to include “poor people” and it could literally be interpreted as “make poor people members of your household.” Does the Mishna direct us to “adopt” poor people or does it mean something else?
- 3** The mishna warns us of the danger of speaking excessively with woman. Why does the mishna specifically use the word “sicha” regarding speech, and why the adverb excessively?
- 4** Why does the mishna go on to draw a logical inference to a friend’s wife? Would I have thought otherwise?
- 5** The mishna cites a pretty strong statement of the Rabbis regarding this behavior. What can we learn from the three aspects of their statement?
- 6** Also, what does the last part of the Mishna --regarding how much men and women speak together - have anything to do with the first topic of the Mishna, having guests in the home?

### SYNOPSIS

**A Jewish home is home of hospitality -- a home where even the most downtrodden guest can feel wanted and happy! Even so, a man cannot ignore his other responsibilities. A complete man is one who knows how to find the proper balance between his personal life and his social life, fulfilling both with prudence and harmony.**

#### **A Deeper Look:**

This Mishna continues with another essential idea for a Jewish home. **“Let your home be open for wayfarers,”** says R. Yossi b. Yochanan. A proper Jewish home must be one in which hospitality is practiced.

This all-important concept in Jewish living was introduced to the Jewish People by their father Abraham. Our tradition says that Avraham had a tent with four openings, one in each direction. That way, people would feel welcome no matter which way they were coming from.

An insight into the **quality** of hospitality to which the Mishna is referring is evident from the next line in the Mishna. **“Let the poor be like your own family members.”**

Not only are we supposed to be concerned with the physical needs of our guests, but we must be sensitive to their emotional needs as well. This is why the Mishna says that even the poor should be treated like members of your own household. Treat them like family! A guest who is treated like a stranger feels uncomfortable and is probably not enjoying your hospitality very much anyway.

Our history is replete with many stories relating to hospitality, many of which highlight the true spirit and purpose of the mitzvah.

One story is told of the great tzaddik, Reb Yisroel, who was traveling incognito through Poland. Although he was well known as a great master of Torah in his own town, he hid his identity when travelling to avoid attracting unwanted attention.

During a ferocious snow storm, he stopped off at an inn, owned by one of the local Jewish

residents. Much to his surprise, the owner of the inn refused to allow him to come in. "I am expecting the very important Rabbi of Piltz and his entourage," said the inn owner. "I do not have room for you." "Please," the great but disguised tzaddik implored. "Please don't turn me away in this weather, I have nowhere to go! There must be some corner of the inn available to me." "Sorry," the innkeeper replied. "I can't have you laying all over the floor when my most exalted guest arrives." Once again the hidden tzaddik entreated the innkeeper. Once again the innkeeper refused. Finally, the innkeeper allowed him to enter, begrudgingly allotting him the darkest corner of the cold inn floor.

No sooner had the hidden tzaddik laid down to rest, when a great commotion was heard.

"Our esteemed guests, the great Torah sage the Rabbi of Piltz and his entourage have arrived!" the people called. The door opened up and in strode a most distinguished looking man along with his most trusted disciples.

The innkeeper sat the Rabbi of Piltz down at the table that had been laid out specially for the occasion. Steaming hot food was placed on expensive china dishes, graced with polished silverware and crystal goblets.

Just as the great Torah sage was about to begin eating, he noticed the forlorn figure of the hidden tzaddik in the darkest corner of the inn.

"Who is that?" he asked the inn owner, pointing to the figure of the man curled up for warmth on the floor. "Just a simple traveler," the innkeeper explained. The Rabbi of Piltz leaned over to get a better look when he recognized the face of the tzaddik Reb Yisroel.

"Reb Yisroel!" he exclaimed. "The great Reb Yisroel!" The Rabbi of Piltz jumped out of his seat and ran to kiss the hand of the hidden tzaddik whom he recognized from a previous visit to Reb Yisroel's village. He helped Reb Yisroel to his feet and dusted off his clothing as he fervently shook his hand.

The innkeeper who was witnessing this spectacle was turning a deep red as he realized that the person whom he had treated so rudely was actually a great tzaddik.

With tears streaming from his eyes, he approached Reb Yisroel and begged his forgiveness. "I... I... I...didn't know..." stammered the inn keeper tearfully... "I forgive you," said Reb Yisroel, "but please remember, even if I had not been Reb Yisroel, but rather the abject character you thought

I was, you would have still been held accountable in heaven for the way you treated me. The mitzvah of welcoming guests is also for the poor and unknown. They are especially in need and require kind and warm hospitality. If you only honor the people who give you honor, then you do not understand the basic premise of this most important mitzvah.”

The innkeeper learned his lesson and from then on he treated each guest with equal respect and courtesy.

## **SUMMARY**

**Treating guests like family does not mean asking them to do the dishes after the meal! It means treating them with the same love and warmth that you would treat members of your own family.**

**TIP: KEEPING THINGS INFORMAL - HELPS PEOPLE FEEL AT HOME.**

## POSTSCRIPT BY R. SIMCHA BARNETT

The second half of the Mishna instructing us not to speak excessively to one's wife is hard to understand on face value. It is important to appreciate that the Torah view is that women are powerful, unique and in many ways more naturally spiritual than men. The commentators are therefore all viewing the Mishna from this point of departure.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the Hebrew term used for "speak" in the Mishna is "sicha," which is usually understood as idle conversation. What the Mishna is getting at is that speaking excessively about mundane and less serious matters with one's wife, shortchanges her and may contribute to their not being able to achieve higher goals in life, like those spoken about in the first part of the Mishna. It may even eventually contribute to them falling down a slippery slope into negative behaviors.

If the way a person converses with his wife can cause him to veer from his goals and even to fall into the negative, how much more damage can come about with this type of interaction with other women?

Another idea that I heard to help understand this Mishna is that it is focused in part upon doing chessed and opening up one's home to others. Women may be more guarded when it comes to this type of kindness, because they are often the ones responsible for seeing to it that the needs of their family are met. Since they take this job very seriously, they may be more cautious when it comes to sharing with those outside their homes. In this instance, the Mishna is guiding the husband to inspire his wife with higher ideals (words) and not to overly indulge in mundane, materialistic conversation which may only strengthen this natural inclination.