



Chapter 3 Mishna 3

There will be Reward at All Costs

“From where is it derived that even one who studies Torah alone, Hakadosh Baruch Hu assigns him reward? It is derived from the verse (Eicha 3:28): ‘Let him sit alone and be silent, for He has laid it upon him.’”

We must reflect: what is this coming to teach us? Could anyone think that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not reward someone who studies Torah on his own? Why do we need a verse to teach this? Furthermore, why did the Tanna (sage of the Mishnah) say “*assigns him reward*” instead of simply “*gives him reward*”?

It can be explained that one might have thought that someone who studies alone does not receive reward, since the *Gemara* (*Makkot* 10a) applies to such a person the verse (*Yirmeyahu* 50:36): “A sword is upon the *badim* (lit. ‘impostors’), and they shall become foolish.” The word *badim* (בדים) refers to those who learn alone, as in Hebrew *levadim* (לבדים) means ‘alone’. The Maharsha explains that someone who studies without a companion to correct him may come to permit what is forbidden, and is thus a sinner. However, all of this applies only to someone who *refuses* to learn with others. But someone who regularly studies with others and only studies alone when he has no one to learn with — just to maintain consistency in his learning and not waste time — must be cautious not to issue halachic rulings from his own reasoning, so as not to err.

Since the primary reward for Torah study lies in the *chiddushim* (new insights or interpretations) one contributes (*Tanna Devei Eliyahu*, end of chapter 10), and this person, learning alone, avoids innovating for fear of error, one might think he does not deserve reward. Therefore, the Tanna stated that *nonetheless*, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu assigns him reward*,” because even without innovation, the very fact that he keeps his study steady and doesn’t waste even a moment makes him deserving of reward. That is why the Tanna precisely used the phrase “*assigns him reward*” — to imply that the main reward for one who studies alone is for his *consistency*, even though he does not receive the full reward of one who contributes novel Torah insights.

Chapter 3 Mishna 4

An “Infinite” Table

“Three who ate at one table and spoke words of Torah over it — it is as if they had eaten from the table of the Omnipresent, as it says (Yechezkel 41:22): ‘And He said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem.’”

We must understand why it says “from the table of the Omnipresent” (*shulchano shel Makom*) and not “from the table of Hashem” (*shulchano shel Hashem*). (Hashem is called *Makom* — the Omnipresent — because He is the “Place” of the universe, and there is no place where He is not present.)

This can be clarified based on what the Shach wrote on the Torah (*Parshat Terumah*, under “*U’bZohar kohanei*”) — that the *Lechem Hapanim* (Showbread) on the Table at the *Beit HaMikdash* was sacred, and the *kohanim* (priests) would eat it in order to weaken the force of the *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination), which is called *hatzfoni* (הצפוני) “the northern one”, and therefore the Table was positioned on the north side. Just as the priests weakened the *Yetzer Hara* through the Showbread, so too, every person can weaken the *Yetzer Hara*, which lies *tzafun* (צפון) hidden in his heart, by speaking words of Torah at his table.

Therefore, the Tanna precisely said “as if they had eaten from the table of the Omnipresent” (*Makom* — lit. “Place”), alluding to the specific place where the Table stood — in the Sanctuary, on the northern side — which had the power to subdue the *Yetzer Hara*. This teaches us that we too, through physical eating, can sanctify ourselves and subdue the hidden *Yetzer Hara* within us, if we speak words of Torah at our table, just like the priests who ate physical bread and were sanctified through it.

Additionally, the reason it is called “the table of the Omnipresent” (*shulchano shel Makom*) can be explained according to the Maharsha (*Berachot* 40b): “A place that holds physical things has limits and cannot hold more than its capacity. But a place that contains spiritual matters has no limit and can hold more and more spiritual content”. The Tanna wished to allude that at the table of the Omnipresent there is always space to add more spirituality and holiness. Thus, when a person speaks words of Torah at his table and draws spirituality and holiness upon it, his table becomes “the table of the Omnipresent” — a place with capacity to receive ever more holiness.

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