

רבי אומר: איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם? כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם; והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות, והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה; והסתכל בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עברה: דע מה למעלה ממך: עין רואה ואזן שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין.

רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר: יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ, שיגיעת שניהם משפחת עון. וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטלה וגוררת עון. וכל העוסקים עם הצבור, יהיו עוסקים עמהם לשם שמים, שזכות אבותם מסייעתן וצדקתם עומדת לעד. ואתם, מעלה אני עליכם שכר הרבה כאלו עשיתם.

is very near, for *the earth is full of His glory* (Yeshayahu 6:3). The physicality of this lowly world in no way impedes Him. Indeed, *He knows what is in the dark* (Daniel 2:22) — i.e., the secrets of your heart. For as our Mishnah states, He is *a seeing eye and a hearing ear*. The human eye and ear respectively see and hear only because light and sound enter them from an external source. A human being, therefore, cannot see or hear things that are far away, or very faint. By contrast, God’s “eyes” and “ears” see and hear **intrinsically**. He therefore sees and hears all that you do, even if you are alone and hiding.

In a similar vein, the Mishnah concludes: *...and all your deeds are recorded in a book*. Unlike a human being, whose hand can only write if muscles are used to make repetitive, tiring motions, God’s “hand” needs to do nothing at all; your deeds *are recorded*, as it were, on their own...

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Be careful with government officials, for they befriend people only for their own interests. They appear as friends when it suits them, but do not remain faithful in difficult times.

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He used to say: Do His will as if it were your own will so that He may do your will as if it were His will. Nullify your will before His, so that He may nullify the will of others before your will.

Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community; and do not trust in yourself until the day of your death. Do not judge your fellow until you are in his place. Do not say something that cannot be understood but will be understood in the end. Do not say: When I have time I will study, because you may never have the time.

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## MISHNAH 2–4

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Consider the following questions on Mishnayos 2–4:<sup>2</sup>

1. The statement that *Torah study is good together with an occupation* suggests that it is merely good but not necessary. However, that is not true, for one without the other is obviously incomplete.
2. By saying that *Torah study is good together with an occupation*, Rabban Gamliel implies that an occupation is

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2. The Alshich discusses Mishnayos 2, 3 and the first half of 4 in his commentary to *Vayikra* 13:7–8.

הוּו זְהִירִין בְּרִשׁוֹת, שְׂאִין מְקַרְבִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם אֶלָּא לְצַרְךָ עֲצָמוֹ,  
נִרְאִין כְּאוֹהֲבִין בְּשַׁעַת הַנֶּאֱתָן, וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת  
דְּחִקוֹ.

הוא היה אומר: עשה רצונו כרצונה כדי שיעשה רצונה כרצונו.  
בטל רצונה מפני רצונו, כדי שיבטל רצון אחרים מפני רצונה.  
הלל אומר: אל תפרוש מן הצבור, ואל תאמן בעצמך  
עד יום מותך, ואל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע למקומו, ואל  
תאמר דבר שאי אפשר לשמוע שסופו להשמע. ואל תאמר  
לכשאפנה אשנה, שמא לא תפנה.

the main thing (and it is “good” to have Torah, too). But the opposite is true, and the Mishnah should therefore have stated, “An occupation is good with Torah study.”

3. The statement, *Any Torah study that is not combined with work...*, is problematic, for it implies that Torah study is the main thing, while the opening line of the Mishnah implies the opposite (see preceding question). The statement should have been expressed, “Any work that is not combined with Torah study...”
4. Why does Rabban Gamliel use the phrase דָּרְךָ אֶרֶץ (*occupation*) in the opening sentence, but switch to מְלָאכָה (*work*) in the next sentence?
5. Rabban Gamliel states that *the exertion needed for them both causes sin to be forgotten*. By whom? If it refers to the Heavenly court—why, nothing is forgotten by Hashem! (Furthermore, what would be gained if it **were** “forgotten” by Hashem, so long as the sin itself is not erased?) If it means that the sinner himself will

forget his sin—why, to the contrary, it is proper for a sinner to always remember his sins, as King David said, *My sin is before me constantly (Tehillim 51:5)*.

6. Rabban Gamliel states that if Torah study is not combined with work, this *will lead to sin*. What sin is he concerned about?
7. What is the connection between the preceding clauses of the Mishnah and its next teaching about those who work on behalf of the community?
8. Rabban Gamliel warns that a person who works on behalf of the community should do so for the sake of Heaven. Why would we think that such a person might **not** be acting for the sake of Heaven? Furthermore, this statement implies that there is a special need to act for the sake of Heaven when engaged in communal matters that does not exist when engaged in non-communal matters. What might this be?
9. Instead of saying, *All who work on behalf of the community should work “with them” for the sake of Heaven*, it should have written more concisely, “All who work on behalf of the community should work for the sake of Heaven.”
10. The Mishnah implies that the fact that *the merit of [the community’s] fathers helps [the community]* is the reason that the activists must work for the sake of Heaven. What is the connection?
11. The Mishnah says that *[the community’s] righteousness endures forever*. Does this have to be pointed out? Why would one think that it would **not** endure forever?
12. The Mishnah continues: *As for you, I will reward you abundantly*. Why is it that until this point Rabban

Gamliel speaks in the third person, but now switches to second person?

13. The switch to second person implies that until now someone different was being addressed. But isn't all of Rabban Gamliel's advice directed to the same audience?
14. What is the meaning of *I will reward you abundantly "as though" you had accomplished it*? Isn't the Mishnah speaking of people who **actually** accomplished things?
15. Who is the speaker in the phrase, *I will reward you abundantly*? On the one hand, rewards come from Hashem, not from human beings, so it is evident that these words are Hashem's. On the other hand, the statements that precede and follow this one were made by Rabban Gamliel. Why is Hashem's statement interjected here in the middle?
16. Mishnah 3 begins by saying, *Be careful with government officials*. It seems clear that this must be a continuation of Mishnah 2, for had it been a new topic, it would have begun with the words, "He used to say." But how is it connected to Mishnah 2? Furthermore, what does it mean to be "careful" with such people, and how will doing so address the problem that *they befriend people only for their own interests, etc.*?
17. What is the relationship of Mishnah 4 to Mishnah 3?<sup>3</sup>

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3. Although Mishnah 4 begins with the words *He used to say*, the Alshich presumes that it is connected in some way to the Mishnah that precedes it.

18. After saying, *Do His will as if it were your own will*, what does Rabban Gamliel add by saying, *Nullify your will before His*?
19. The Mishnah continues: *...so that He may nullify the will of others before your will*. Why are other people being introduced into the discussion?
20. The thrust of this last clause would appear to contradict the fundamental principle that every human being has the freedom to choose good or evil. How could the will of one person be set aside for the will of another?

### ⚔ *Two Types of Jews* ⚔

THERE ARE TWO types of Jews being addressed by Mishnah 2. One type comprises the majority of Jews, who spend most of their time on their occupation and a limited amount of time on their Torah study. The second type comprises exceptional individuals who are involved in learning Torah night and day. When the Mishnah teaches that *Torah study is good together with an occupation*, indicating that an occupation is one's primary pursuit, it is speaking to the first type. [This answers Question 2.] When it teaches that *any Torah study that is not combined with work will eventually fail, etc.*, it is speaking to the second type. [This answers Question 3.]<sup>4</sup>

Answer to  
question 2

Answer to  
question 3

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4. In Question 2, the Alshich wrote that “the opposite is true,” seemingly positing that Torah study is the main thing — for everyone. The explanation may be that Torah is the most important thing for everyone, but it is not the main thing (in terms of time or effort) for most people.

Those who are involved primarily with their occupations are appropriately described as being involved in *דְּרַךְ אֶרֶץ* (lit., *the way of the land*), for this term connotes a life-path steeped in the “earthiness” of existence in this world.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, those who make Torah study their primary pursuit and spend just a little time earning their daily bread are appropriately described as doing *מְלָאכָה*, which simply means *work*. [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to question 4

### ⚡ *The Right Balance* ⚡

WHEN RABBAN GAMLIEL advises that *Torah study is good together with an occupation* — speaking to the first type of Jew — he does not mean that it is just “good” to have set times for learning Torah. That is indeed a necessity.<sup>6</sup> Rather, what he means is that it would be good to study Torah “**together with** an occupation,” i.e., to be thinking about Torah and reviewing one’s learning not only when taking a break from work, but also while actually engaged in one’s occupation.<sup>7</sup> [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to question 1

Rabban Gamliel explains why this is good: *For the exertion needed for them both* — Torah and work as one — *causes sin to be forgotten*. There is a principle (*Avos* 4:2) that any transgression a person has committed will bring another in its wake. This means that the impure spiritual force (an

5. The Torah in *Bereishis* 9:20 similarly calls Noah, who worked the land, an *אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה*, *a man of the earth*. The opposite of the term *דְּרַךְ אֶרֶץ* would be *דְּרַךְ שָׁמַיִם*, *the path of the heavens*, which connotes a path of spirituality.

6. See *Shabbos* 31a.

7. Of course, this is assuming that one’s work will still be performed properly. Cf. *Choshen Mishpat* 337:19.

“angel”) created by a transgression<sup>8</sup> will cause one to sin again.<sup>9</sup> But through the combined exertion of pursuing a livelihood and studying Torah (which permeates the whole body with sanctity — the spiritual opposite of the forces of impurity), the impure force is utterly weakened. The existing transgression is “forgotten,” in the sense that the impure spiritual force that it generated is drained of its ability (“forgets”) to pull one to sin again. This is similar to the idea expounded in *Rosh Hashanah* 16b that the sounds of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah serve to confuse and disorient the *Satan* so that he forgets to prosecute the Jewish people for their sins.<sup>10</sup> [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to  
question 5

When Rabban Gamliel then states that *any Torah study that is not combined with work will eventually fail and lead to sin* — speaking to the second type of Jew — he is making the point that this kind of Jew should not think that he can simply study Torah without devoting some time to earning a livelihood, and rely totally on Hashem to provide him with sustenance. This is a mistake, for Torah that is not accompanied by **some** work — at least enough to provide the bare minimum of one’s material needs — *will eventually fail*. This is what the Rabbis teach in *Tanna D’vei Eliyahu (Parashah 14)*: “One might think that a person can sit idle [and not do anything to provide for himself]. The Torah therefore states: *...in order that Hashem, your Lord, will bless you in all the*

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8. See *Iyov* 33:23 and *Shabbos* 32a.

9. See further, the Alshich to Mishnah 4:2.

10. Tosafos ad loc. (citing *Aruch*) explain that the *Satan* thinks that the shofar sounds he is hearing are the ones that herald the End of Days and thus signify, as it were, his own demise (see *Yeshayahu* 27:13 and 25:8).



*work of your hands that you undertake* (Devarim 14:29). You may not rely on blatant miracles and think that Heaven will supply you with food or give you a hidden treasure. You must **do** something, and then “God will bless the work of your hands.”

If this essential element is missing, not only will your efforts in Torah eventually fail, but they will actually *lead to sin* — specifically, the sin of desecrating Hashem’s Name (חילול ה’)! For there will be people who say: “We know that the study of Torah is the greatest mitzvah. Indeed, the Sages teach that one benefits from the fruits (the ‘interest’) of this mitzvah even in this world.<sup>11</sup> And we see how this man does not pause in his learning, studying day and night — yet he is starving. Where, then, are the rewards promised in this world for his Torah study?!” Furthermore, the Torah scholar himself will harbor thoughts against Hashem [and thus sin himself], not understanding that just because Hashem supplied the Generation of the Wilderness with manna to enable them to study Torah without having to work does not mean He will do so for individuals in our day.

In summation: The individual is required to make some efforts toward earning a livelihood, and God will then bless those efforts. But he cannot rely on miracles; God will not help a person who makes no attempt to help himself. [\[This answers Question 6.\]](#)

*Answer to question 6*

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11. While the “principal” remains intact for him in the World to Come (see Mishnah *Pe’ah* 1:1; *Shabbos* 127a). By contrast, most mitzvos earn reward for a person only in the World to Come.

## ☞ *The Community vs. the Individual* ☞

Answer to  
question 7

THE MISHNAH THEN goes on to speak of working on behalf of the community, in order to teach us that everything we have said so far applies only to individuals and individual needs. When it comes to working for the community, different rules apply. [This answers Question 7.] With respect to the community, miracles happen — obvious and open miracles — even without the community making efforts on their own behalf. How? Through their own merits, combined with the merits of their forefathers.<sup>12</sup> However, this occurs only when the community's activists devote themselves to their task solely for the sake of Heaven; it is only if their intent is pure that *the merit of their fathers* will help the community. [This answers Questions 8 and 10.] The Mishnah may thus be read as follows: *All who work on behalf of the community* should not think that the same rules (regarding when miracles happen) apply to both communities and individuals. Rather, they *should work with them for the sake of Heaven* and rely completely on Hashem, and He will take care of whatever the community needs to be done.

Answer to  
questions  
8 and 10

Furthermore: In connection with an individual, the Sages teach (*Shabbos* 32a, *Ta'anis* 20b) that it is improper to rely on a miracle. Firstly, a miracle may not occur. Secondly, even if

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12. The Alshich writes that we find a source that such miracles can occur for a community in the story of Yosef and his brothers. When the brothers returned the money that Yosef's servant had secretly placed in their sacks, and expressed astonishment as to how it came to be there, Yosef said to them: *Your God and the God of your father has put a hidden treasure in your sacks* (*Bereishis* 43:23). That is: In *your merit* (i.e., the merit of the community comprising the ten brothers) and in *your father's merit* (i.e., the merit of their father Yaakov), God has done a miracle for you.

it does occur, it comes at a price: a reduction in one's storehouse of merits.<sup>13</sup> However, when it comes to a community, one may be assured that a miracle will be done for them, and their merits will not even decrease as a result. Thus the Mishnah stresses that *their righteousness endures forever*. [This answers Question 11.]

Answer to  
question 11

The Mishnah then interjects a statement from God because at this point in Rabban Gamliel's teachings, those who work on behalf of the community are likely to be in need of His reassurance.<sup>14</sup> [This answers Question 15.] For they may well wonder: If Hashem does miracles for the community, and its success is therefore not a direct result of our efforts and input, then we will not be deserving of any reward! Hashem tells these people not to fear: "Even though this is all true, nevertheless *I will reward you abundantly as though you had indeed accomplished it* by your own efforts and through your own merits." [This answers Question 14.]

Answer to  
question 15

Answer to  
question 14

The reason the Mishnah switches here to second person is that it is following the Biblical model of using the third person when people are acting improperly, but utilizing the second person after they have repented. An example of this phenomenon is *Mishlei* 1:22–23: Beginning in third person, it states, *Scoffers desire mockery for themselves, and fools hate knowledge*. But then, when speaking of the same people after they have improved their ways, it switches to second person — reflecting the fact that they are now closer to God: *Repent, [listen] to my*

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13. That is, one will "use up" some of one's mitzvah-credits in exchange for the miracle.

14. This appears to be the Alshich's intent here.

Answer to  
question 12

Answer to  
question 13

*reproof! Behold, I will bestow My spirit upon you; I will make My words known to you.* Our Tanna does similarly: Beginning in third person, he says, *All who work on behalf of the community should work with them for the sake of Heaven* — for he is giving instruction to those who are not acting in this manner, telling them not to work for the sake of achieving prestige but rather for the sake of Heaven. But then, when speaking to those who do act in this manner, he switches to second person and says, *As for you, I will reward you abundantly, etc.* [This answers Question 12.] Indeed, a “different audience” is being addressed in the latter statement than in the earlier one. [This answers Question 13.]

### ≡ Faith in People vs. Faith in God ≡

MISHNAH 3 BEGINS by saying, *Be careful with government officials.* This is connected to Mishnah 2, for it is particularly important that people “work on behalf of the community for the sake of Heaven” when dealing with governments. It is very easy to fall into the trap of relying on kings and officials instead of on Hashem. You give them a gift or do them a service at a time when you do not need their help and, in return, they promise to fulfill all your future requests! But if you rely on your close relationship with them, you will be disappointed, for as the Mishnah continues, *they befriend people only for their own interests* — i.e., when they need your help. When you need **their** help, they will not return the favor. Yes, *they appear as friends* when accepting your gift, *but they do not remain faithful* to their promises *in your difficult times.* Rabban Gamliel therefore warns: *Be careful when dealing with government officials* to “work for the community for the sake of Heaven,”

i.e., relying only on God. Then He will help by compelling governments to act toward you in a favorable manner. [This answers Question 16.]

Answer to  
question 16

Now, there are two types of community activists. One type acts within the community which he seeks to serve; the other type acts outside the community, interacting with government officials on the community's behalf. Mishnah 2 discusses the first type; this is why it says, *All who work on behalf of the community should work "with them" for the sake of Heaven.* [This answers Question 9.] Mishnah 3 is speaking of the second type — where it is much more critical that the activism be undertaken for the sake of Heaven. This is why Mishnah 2 sufficed with a **directive** ("*should*" *work with them for the sake of Heaven*), while Mishnah 3 speaks much more strongly, issuing a **warning** (*Be careful* — הִזְהָרוּ, literally, *be warned* — when it comes to dealing *with government officials*). Do not rely on the gifts or services you have previously given to them; rely only on Hashem, for as stated earlier, *they befriend people only for their own interests, etc.*

Answer to  
question 9

### ✧ Hashem Does Our Will When We Do His ✧

ONE MAY WELL ask: I understand that when a community is involved, God will intervene so that governments will act more favorably than they otherwise would have. After all, great are the merits of an entire community, and of their forefathers, both qualitatively and quantitatively! But what of an individual who needs something from the government? Even if his motivation is for the sake of Heaven, and he sincerely trusts in Hashem — an individual does not have those kinds of merits! What should he do?

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Hillel used to say: A brutish man cannot fear sin; an ignorant man cannot be pious, nor can the shy man learn, or the impatient man teach. He who engages excessively in business cannot become wise. In a place where there are no men strive to be a man.

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Moreover he saw a skull floating on the surface of the water and he said unto it: Because you drowned others they drowned you; and those that drowned you will eventually be drowned.

Answer to  
question 17

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To address this question, Mishnah 4 states: He used to say that there is one thing you can do that will get you the results you seek: *Do His will as if it were your own will*. To the extent that you do so, He will *do your will as if it were His will*, i.e., He will do as you wish. [This answers Question 17.]

However, there are actually **three** levels of people who do God's will. A person on the lowest level says, for example: "If I go early this morning to a certain place, I'll make a nice profit on a deal. But what can I do? God wants me to go to shul!" So he goes to shul — but not willingly. He is not doing God's will "as if it were his own." The Mishnah teaches that you should reject this approach; instead, you should *do His will as if it were literally your own will* — what you yourself really want to do. This is the second level.

But there is a third level: where you feel so close to Hashem that you wish only to do what He wants. Your own will is null and void; it's like it simply doesn't exist — for of what importance is what Man wants compared to what his Creator wants?! The Mishnah thus continues: If you want God to

הוא הִיָּה אֹמֵר: אֵין בּוֹר יֵרָא חֲטָא, וְלֹא עִם הָאָרֶץ חֲסִיד, וְלֹא הַבֵּישׁוֹן לָמַד, וְלֹא הַקִּפְדוֹן מִלְּמַד, וְלֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסַחֲוֵרָה מִחֲכָיִים, וּבְמִקּוֹם שְׂאִין אֲנָשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ.

אִף הוּא רָאָה גְּלַגְלַת אַחַת שְׂצָפָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. אָמַר לָהּ: עַל דְּאִטְפַּת, אִטְפוּנָה, וְסוּף מְטִיפִיךְ יִטּוּפוּן.

*nullify the will of others* — namely, government officials — *before your will*, neutralizing their free will on your individual behalf, you must *nullify your will before His*. [This answers Questions 18 and 19.]<sup>15</sup>

The qualification that our Mishnayos make by speaking exclusively of nullifying the will of kings and government officials — and not of other people — is a necessary and correct one, for it is indeed a fundamental principle that every human being has the freedom to choose good or evil. But as *Mishlei* 21:1 teaches: *Like streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of Hashem; wherever He wishes, so He directs it*. Kings and high officials are an exception. Their free will can indeed be abrogated if we have: (i) the merit of an entire community, acting for the sake of Heaven; or (ii) the merit of an individual who has utterly nullified his own will before the will of God. [This answers Question 20.]

15. By mentioning *others*, the Mishnah is not introducing new people into the discussion (Question 19), for *others* are the government officials discussed in Mishnah 3.