

1

Akavya ben Mahalalel says: Consider three things and you will not come to sin. Know from where you come, to where you are going, and before Whom you will have to give an account of yourself in the future. From where do you come? From a putrid drop. To where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. Before Whom will you have to give a reckoning and an accounting in the future? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.

2

R' Chanina the deputy high priest says: Pray for the welfare of the government, for if not for fear of it, people would swallow each other alive.

MISHNAH 1 AND MISHNAH 2, PART I

Consider the following questions:¹

1. Why does the Mishnah have to tell us the number of things that one needs to consider?
2. Why does the Mishnah use the phrase, וְאִין אֶתָּהּ בָּא לְיָדַי עֲבֵרָה (literally, *and you will not come to “the hands of” sin*), instead of the simpler וְלֹא תַחַטָּא, and you will not sin, or וְלֹא תַעֲבֹר עֲבֵרָה, *you will not commit a transgression*?
3. The word *Know* requires explanation, for it implies that previously unknown ideas are being taught. But surely

1. These questions relate to Mishnah 1 and the first part of Mishnah 2. The continuation of Mishnah 2 appears on p. 102.

The Alshich discusses these Mishnayos in his commentary to *Vayikra* 16:2–3.

עֲקֵבִיא בֶן מַהֲלָלַיִל אוֹמֵר: הַסֵּתֶכֶל בְּשֵׁלֶשֶׁה דְּבָרִים וְאִין אֶתָּה
 בָּא לִיְדֵי עֵבֶרָה. דַּע, מֵאִין בָּאתָ, וּלְאֵן אֶתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וּלְפָנַי מִי אֶתָּה
 עֲתִיד לֵתֵן דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן. מֵאִין בָּאתָ? מִטְּפָה סְרוּחָה. וּלְאֵן אֶתָּה
 הוֹלֵךְ? לְמָקוֹם עֶפֶר רַמָּה וְתוֹלְעָה. וּלְפָנַי מִי אֶתָּה עֲתִיד לֵתֵן
 דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן? לְפָנַי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא סָגַן הַכֹּהֲנִים אוֹמֵר: הָיִי מִתְּפִלָּל בְּשִׁלּוּמָה שֶׁל
 מַלְכוּת, שְׂאֵלְמָלֵא מוֹרָאָה, אִישׁ אֶת רַעְהוּ חַיִּים בְּלַעַן.

we are already familiar with the ideas mentioned by Akavya ben Mahalalel!

4. Having told us to consider *from where you came*, *to where you are going*, and *before whom you will have to give an account of yourself in the future*, why does Akavya need to spell out the answers? Are these things not obvious and known to all?
5. Akavya could have condensed his teaching by omitting his second sentence and writing simply: “Know from where you came: from a putrid drop. And to where you are going: to a place of dust,” etc.
6. Since the Mishnah’s answer is a substance, not a location, the expression *from where you came* seems to be incorrectly worded. It should have said, “...from **what** you come.”
7. *What* does Akavya mean by the phrase, *To a place of dust, worms, and maggots*? Clearly, the intent is to humble Man’s haughty spirit by reminding him of what will happen after he dies. But if Akavya is referring to the grave itself (i.e., the ground), which is made of *dust*, then why does he also mention *worms* and *maggots*? A grave is not made of those things! On the other hand, if

he is referring to the fact that Man's body will **turn into dust, worms, and maggots**, then he should mention only worms and maggots, which are more degrading than dust (and will thus have a more profound effect on Man's haughtiness), and leave out dust altogether. And if he insists already on mentioning that Man will turn into all three, they should be mentioned in the correct order, for first worms and maggots consume the body and only later does it turn into dust.

8. Why does Akavya not follow Ben Azzai,² who adds a fourth thing to consider, viz., that "you are going to a place of darkness and gloom"?³
9. Akavya seeks to prevent people from "coming to sin." But he would seem to be defeating his purpose by speaking of Man's insignificance as he does. A listener could conclude that he might as well sin, because God would not bother judging someone as lowly as he.
10. Why does Akavya speak only of avoiding sin, when the Torah teaches that to attain perfection one must *turn from evil and do good* (Tehillim 34:15)?
11. Akavya asks: *Before Whom will you have to give a reckoning and an accounting (דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן) in the future? Why does he not just say an accounting (חֶשְׁבוֹן)? What is the significance of a reckoning (דִּין)?*
12. How is Mishnah 2 connected to Mishnah 1?

2. *Kallah Rabbasi*, Ch. 6; see also *Derech Eretz Rabbah* Ch. 3.

3. In his discussion below, the Alshich notes that he disagrees with the view of the Abarbanel in *Nachalas Avos* who writes that Ben Azzai's addition is included in and encompassed by Akavya ben Mehalalel's phrase, *a place of dust, worms, and maggots*.

❧ *Memory as the Basis of Prevention* ❧

THE PURPOSE OF Akavya ben Mehalalel's teachings in our Mishnah is to prevent people from succumbing to sin. In general, sins fall into three categories:

1. Sins that come from the desire for physical pleasure.
2. Sins that stem from pride and ego, whereby a person sees himself as better than others and arrogantly declares, *There is no Divine Judge* (see *Tehillim* 10:4).
3. Sins that come from stubbornly clinging to false beliefs.

Akavya addresses the potential offenders and says:

- a) If a person bears in mind that his origins are *a putrid drop*, he will be unlikely to get caught up in the pursuit of physical pleasures, for it is obvious that the benefit derived from such pursuit will not be better than the material from which one's entire physical being came to be.
- b) A person in the second category might not be helped by remembering his origins, for he may think, "True, we all came from similar origins, but now I am greater than others in several ways, so why should I not consider myself superior?" Such a person should consider that he is going *to a place of dust, worms, and maggots*, i.e., his body will decompose and his grave will become a place filled with those things. How can one act arrogantly when remembering that?⁴

4. The argument appears to be that a person will not be arrogant if he remembers that not only his beginning but also his end will be (at least to a great extent, if not fully) the same as that of his fellow man (see further in text).

The Sages teach (*Bava Basra* 17a) that worms and maggots do not attack the bodies of the most righteous people, although their bodies do eventually become dust.⁵ The Mishnah therefore mentions *dust* first, because no one in the world will escape that fate. It then mentions *worms and maggots* that are the fate of **most** people.⁶ Akavya thus makes the point that even if a person is better and more righteous than his peers, there is **still** no room for arrogance and pride, for even a perfect *tzaddik* will become dust. [This answers Question 7.]⁷

5. The Alshich writes that this is illustrated by the story of R' Achai bar Yoshiya, which is recounted in *Shabbos* 152b: A group of workers accidentally dug up R' Achai bar Yoshiya's grave and discovered that his body had not deteriorated at all. However, since the Torah decrees (*Bereishis* 3:19), *For you are dust, and to dust shall you return*, the Gemara concludes that R' Achai's body would indeed turn to dust, but at a future point in time — specifically, just before the Resurrection of the Dead would take place (and he would then be resurrected).

6. The second possibility mentioned in Question 7 is thus the correct one: The Mishnah mentions all three as examples of substances that bodies turn into. And dust is mentioned first — even though it is the last stage in the body's decomposition — because it is the most universal, as worms and maggots affect most people but not all.

7. Later in his commentary to our Mishnah, the Alshich adds that the reason Akavya ben Mehalalel wrote, *To where are you going* (in the present tense) instead of "To where will you go" is to indicate that dying (and ultimately becoming *dust, worms, and maggots*) is an ongoing process that begins when one is born. Thus, *you are going* there already, in the present moment. This is also the reason that Akavya does not say that you are to know "what you will become in the grave" but rather "where you are going," i.e., right now. (By contrast, Akavya speaks of knowing *from where you came* — in the past tense — because a person comes into the world at a set moment in time which is obviously in the past.)

c) Akavya then addresses those in the third category and reminds them that it is *the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He* before Whom they will have to give *a reckoning and an accounting in the future*. Akavya thus says to them: Even though you are sinning only in your thoughts (by having false beliefs) and not in your deeds — which would not be so terrible in the realm of interpersonal transgressions⁸ — in relating to God, these kinds of thoughts are a serious matter indeed.⁹ Furthermore, it is possible to hide from other people your negative opinions and thoughts about them, but you cannot hide your thoughts from Hashem, “Who investigates the heart and examines the thoughts of Man.”¹⁰ Indeed, this is why Akavya, in speaking here of Hashem, uses the Name “the Holy One,” for it is because Hashem is holy that nothing is hidden from Him.¹¹ Akavya is saying that if a person remembers that he will have to give an accounting before God for his thoughts as well as his deeds, he will abandon his false beliefs.

This is the thrust of the Mishnah in general. We will now examine the Mishnah phrase by phrase to answer our questions.

8. By this the Alshich presumably means that in general, the category of sins *בין אדם לחברו* encompasses only actions, not thoughts.

9. False beliefs about God are a violation of the most fundamental aspects of our faith.

10. See *Yirmeyahu* 17:10.

11. “Holy” means separate (*Vayikra* 19:2, Rashi) — Hashem’s existence is far removed from our ability to comprehend (Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:10). As the omnipotent and omniscient Creator (i.e., “holy”), nothing is hidden from Him.

Our Mishnah says *Consider three things* in order to emphasize that one need consider **only** these three things (which relate to the inferiority of a person's physical self) to be afforded protection from sin. The one added by Ben Azzai ("you are going to a place of darkness and gloom") is irrelevant,¹² for it does not relate to Man's inferiority, only to the emptiness of the place Man is going — and this does not diminish the person, just as a pearl is not diminished if it happens to be lying in a humble place or in the dark. [This answers Questions 1 and 8.]

If you consider *these three things*, the Mishnah says, אֵין אֶתָּהּ בָּא לַיְדֵי עֵבֶרָה, literally, *you will not come to "the hands of" sin*. This is to be understood as follows: *Avos* 4:2 states, *One transgression generates another transgression*. As we explain there, when a person commits a sin an angel is created which becomes, as it were, a "prosecuting attorney."¹³ This angel is a dynamic force and it joins with the *yetzer hara*,¹⁴ their combined efforts leading the person to commit another, similar sin.

Our Mishnah is saying that considering *these three things* will do more than just help prevent one from coming to sin in the first place. Even if a person has already **committed** a transgression — and that transgression¹⁵ now has power over him — thinking of these three things will help him escape its clutches and not be drawn into a further transgression. When

12. I.e., recalling this will not help prevent a person from sinning.

13. See *Iyov* 33:23 and *Shabbos* 32a, and see *Avos* 4:11. See also *Alshich*, *Avos* 2:4, above.

14. Which is also an angelic force. (The Gemara in *Bava Basra* 16a identifies the *yetzer hara* with the *Satan* and the Angel of Death.)

15. I.e., the angel created by that sin, in conjunction with the *yetzer hara*, as just explained.

the Mishnah says *you will not come to “the hands of” sin*, what it means is that a person will not fall into the clutches of the transgression **that he already committed**; he will be able to escape further sin. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
question 2

❧ *Wrong Conclusions* ❧

AKAVYA’S POINT IS that a person will not come to sin if he is cognizant of the three things mentioned in the Mishnah. But if Akavya had stated only his opening lines (*Consider three things and you will not come to sin. Know from where you came, to where you are going, and before Whom you will have to give an account of yourself*), without adding further explanation, his point would not have been clear. A person might indeed consider these three things and draw the exact opposite conclusion from the one Akavya had in mind:

- 1) From where do I come? Why, I come from a drop of liquid that is made from the finest blood [i.e., fluid] a human being has, which comes from the brain and contains within it [the basis for] all my limbs.¹⁶ It is not putrid at all!
- 2) To where am I going? Why, I am going to a place of eternal light, a place of great joy, for every Jew has a share in the World to Come, and even my body will enjoy great pleasure there due to its connection to my soul!¹⁷

16. The Alshich appears to be basing himself on *Niddah* 31a, which states that the bones of the fetus are formed from the father’s seed (*Niddah* 31a). [While the Alshich did not have our contemporary knowledge of medicine, his reference to the brain is very interesting: The anterior pituitary gland, together with the hypothalamus, both of which are parts of the brain, produce the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) which controls the production of human seed.]

17. At the time of the Resurrection of the Dead, the body will be reconstituted

- 3) Before whom will I have to give an accounting? Why, obviously it will be before Hashem, Who is merciful and will surely have compassion and understanding for a human being such as myself whose physical nature caused him to sin.

Akavya therefore purposely uses the word Know in his second sentence to make his point very clear: In order for a person not to come to sin, he needs to know a few things that he may not have understood before regarding the three specific issues listed in this sentence — because he may have had the misconceptions described above. [This answers Questions 3 and 5.]

Answer to
questions
3 and 5

To make sure people do not make these mistakes, Akavya spells out very carefully:

- 1) *From where do you come? From a putrid drop.* Do not focus on the fact that the droplet from which you were formed is a high-quality material at the moment it leaves the father's body. Focus rather on the moment of your conception, at which time the droplet had begun to putrefy inside your mother's body.¹⁸ This also explains why Akavya said, *Know from where you come*, and not “from what you come”: He is alluding to the fact that while human beings might come from an exquisite substance, nevertheless, because of where it is, that substance is no longer so exquisite at the moment of actual conception. This interpretation finds support in the words of Ben

and the soul will join with it once again. See at length above, introductory Mishnah to *Pirkei Avos*.

18. See *Berachos* 60a. The Alshich also references *Temurah* 31a: “But as for a chick from an egg, when does it grow? When the egg becomes putrid.”

Azzai:¹⁹ *From where did he come? From a putrid [drop of] moisture, from a place that the eye is not able to see — a clear reference to the mother’s womb. [This answers Question 6.]*

- 2) *To where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots.* Do not focus on the joy of the World to Come, which is a spiritual delight that the body shares only because it is connected to the soul. Focus rather on the nature of the physical part of yourself, which is what causes you to sin.
- 3) *Before Whom will you have to give a reckoning and an accounting in the future? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.* Do not think that because Hashem is merciful He will not scrutinize your actions. You should not focus on how He executes judgment [i.e., leniently], only on the fact that He is the King — i.e., the One Who makes the laws.²⁰ When you think of God in these terms, you will not come to sin, for you will realize that actually, Hashem does not allow you to get away with anything, as the Gemara says: *Anyone who claims that the Holy One, Blessed is He, disregards sin — his life will be disregarded (Bava Kamma 50a).* You should focus further on the fact that He is the King over all kings on earth and that He is holy, as discussed above.²¹

19. *Derech Eretz Rabbah*, Ch. 3.

20. The Alshich notes that this is why we speak of Him as “the King” during the Ten Days of Repentance. (For example, we conclude the third blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* with the words *הַמֶּלֶךְ הַקְדוֹשׁ*, *the holy King*, in place of the usual ending, *הַאֱלֹהִים הַקְדוֹשׁ*, *the holy God*.)

21. In category (3) above, the Alshich wrote that God’s holiness is connected with the fact that nothing is hidden from Him. As to the significance of the

In summation: Akavya begins by saying that you have to “*Know*” *where you come from, etc.*, because you may well have misconceptions about these points. He then continues and elaborates on the correct perspective for each point separately in order to make it crystal clear: *From where do you come? From a putrid drop. To where are you going? etc.* [This answers Question 4.]

Let us now address our remaining questions: Why does Akavya say that a person is to remember *before Whom he will have to give a דין והשבון* (translated heretofore as *a reckoning and an accounting*) when he dies? Why does he not suffice with the word *השבון*? *The answer is that the word דין*, which literally means *judgment*, should be understood here as *laws*. The Gemara in *Niddah* 30b states that a child in its mother’s womb is taught the entire Torah by an angel.²² Akavya is saying that when a person dies, he will be asked about all the laws of the Torah, and about the consequences of transgressing them.²³ He will thus be reminded of the laws he contravened — and will be

fact that God is the King over all kings — the Alshich has just stated that this means that God makes the laws. However, a few lines hence the Alshich adds that the fact that Hashem is the King over all kings also means that unlike a king of flesh and blood, who sends his subordinates to investigate his subjects’ behavior, Hashem judges us Himself.

22. The Gemara states that just before the child is born, the angel strikes him on his mouth and causes him to forget all that he has learned.

23. The Alshich apparently assumes that after a person dies, he will once again know all the laws of the Torah — and he will have to recite those laws, thereby serving as his own prosecutor in the Heavenly Court. (Of course, a sin that he committed inadvertently, e.g., because he did not remember that something was prohibited, would not be punished with the same severity as one committed intentionally.)

punished.²⁴ [This answers Question 11.]

We also raised the difficulty that Akavya may be defeating his own purpose in reminding Man of how inconsequential he is, for a person may react by thinking that if he is so insignificant, Hashem does not care about his conduct. But the answer is that Akavya is speaking only of the insignificance of Man's **material and physical** aspects, which cause him to sin. It is obvious that Man's **soul** possesses infinite value and significance.²⁵ [This answers Question 9.]

Answer to
question 11

Answer to
question 9

24. The phrase *you will have to give* תתן וְהָשִׁבוֹן לְךָ thus means: *You will have to state the laws* [of the Torah which you learned before you were born — and now know again], *and give an accounting* [for your violations].

25. The Alshich adds that this could serve to explain why Akavya uses the word “you” so many times in our Mishnah: He is alluding to the physical and material elements of the person.

Alternatively, the Alshich suggests that by saying “you,” Akavya is referring to the body and the soul together. The point, however, is the same: Since your soul is involved as well, you cannot minimize the significance of yourself or of your actions. Your body and soul work in partnership, and they will be judged together. See the parable of the cripple and the blind man in *Sanhedrin* 91a–b. [In short: A king had an orchard of fig trees, and he stationed two guards to protect it, one lame and the other blind. Neither could take the figs by himself, for the blind one could not see the figs and the lame one could not walk to get to them. The lame one climbed on the blind one's back, and working together, they got to the figs and ate them. When the king sought to judge them, each claimed that he could not have taken the figs. The king therefore placed the lame man on the blind man's shoulders and judged them together. In like manner, on the Day of Judgment the body and soul will each claim that it could not have sinned: the body by itself lacks life, and the soul by itself lacks the physical ability to commit a sin. Hashem will therefore place the soul back into the body and judge them together.]

In his commentary to *Tehillim* 15:4, the Alshich quotes our Mishnah and writes that while physically Man is similar to the animals (that of course are not judged by God for their actions), he is spiritually unique and must understand that his actions are therefore indeed deserving of being judged.

R' Chananya ben Teradyon says: If two people sit together and there are no words of Torah between them, it is a session of scoffers, as it states, “He has not sat in the seat of scoffers” (*Tehillim* 1:1). But if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) rests between them, as it states, “Then those who fear Hashem spoke with each other, and Hashem listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who fear Hashem and mention His Name” (*Malahchi* 3:1). This verse tells me only about two people; how do we know that even if one person sits and occupies himself with Torah, the Holy One, Blessed be He, determines a reward for him? For it states, “Though he sits alone and is silent, he has received [reward] for it” (*Eichah* 3:28).

As to why Akavya speaks only of avoiding sin but not of doing good — Akavya never claimed that avoiding sin represents human perfection. He is merely focusing on the first step in achieving perfection, which is to turn from evil. [This answers Question 10.]

Answer to
question 10

— *Interpersonal Sins* —

IN MISHNAH 2, R' Chanina comes to argue with Akavya ben Mahalalel: Akavya teaches that if a person considers the three things enumerated in Mishnah 1, he will not sin — neither against God, nor against his fellow man. However, according to R' Chanina, Man's consideration of his humble origins, his humble end, and the accounting he will ultimately have to give before the Divine Judge, will not suffice to stop jealousy or to curb desire for what others have. Nor will it prevent hatred and feelings of rivalry.

רבי חנינא בן תרדיון אומר: שנים שיושבין ואין ביניהן דברי תורה - הרי זה מושב לצים, שנאמר (תהלים א, א): "ובמושב לצים לא ישב." אבל שנים שיושבין ויש ביניהם דברי תורה - שכנה שרויה ביניהם, שנאמר (מלאכי ג, טז): "אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וישמע, ויכתב ספר זכרון לפניו ליראי ה' ולחשבי שמו." אין לי אלא שנים. מנין שאפלו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה, שהקדוש ברוך הוא קובע לו שכר? שנאמר (איכה ג, כח): "ישב בדרך וידם כי נטל עליו."

Only fear of government can stop Man from committing sins that stem from those emotions – i.e., sins that are *bein adam lachaveiro*. [This answers question 12.]

Answer to
question 12

MISHNAH 2, PART II

Consider the following questions:²⁶

1. What is the significance of R' Chanina ben Teradyon's phraseology, and there are no words of Torah between them ... and there are words of Torah between them? He could have simply stated, "... and they are not (or are) occupied with Torah."
2. Why does R' Chanina say, it is a session of scoffers? How can the absence of Torah discussion be called "scoffing" when no actual scoffing is taking place?²⁷

26. The Alshich explains our Mishnah in his commentary to *Vayikra* 16:3.

27. The entire *Tehillim* 1:1 verse reads: *Praiseworthy is the man who has not*

3. Why does he call this a *session of scoffers* and not simply say that “these people **are** scoffers”?
4. The cited verse (*Tehillim* 1:1) does not seem to support R’ Chanina ben Teradyon’s point, for it indicates only that one should not sit with scoffers; it makes no mention of sitting without discussing Torah.
5. The verse from *Tehillim* is not speaking of two people but of one (**he** has not sat...). How, then, does it prove that **two** people who sit together and do not learn are considered scoffers?
6. *Instead of writing the repetitive clause, But if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, R’ Chanina could have stated more concisely: “But if there are words of Torah between them.”*
7. *The Tanna states: The Shechinah rests (שְׁרִינָה) between them. He could have stated: “The Shechinah is with them” or “The Shechinah is between them.” What is the significance of the word rests here?*
8. The *Malachi* verse does not prove that *the Shechinah rests between them (i.e., on earth)*, for when it says that Hashem “*listened,*” that could mean that He listened from heaven.²⁸
9. Why does R’ Chanina ben Teradyon cite the second half of the *Malachi* verse (“*and a book of remembrance was written, etc.*”)?²⁹

walked in the counsel of the wicked, and has not stood in the path of the sinners, and who has not sat in the seat of scoffers.

28. As we find elsewhere in *Tanach* (*Melachim I* 8:32ff) that Hashem listens from heaven.

29. The Alshich’s question appears to be that it should have only been

10. When R' Chanina speaks of what will happen *if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them*, why does he mention only that *the Shechinah rests between them* and not the other positive consequences listed in the *pasuk* in *Malachi* that he cites as his proof-text (viz., that Hashem listens and hears, and that it is written in a book of remembrance)? And if you answer that the *pasuk* is speaking specifically of *those who fear Hashem*, while R' Chanina is speaking of **any** two people who learn, then the *pasuk* cannot even serve as proof that the *Shechinah* rests between them!
11. R' Chanina continues: *This verse tells me only about two people; how do we know that even if one person sits and occupies himself with Torah, etc.* Now, this phraseology (*only about... even if*) would be appropriate if R' Chanina were saying that whatever is accomplished by two people learning Torah, the same is accomplished *even if* just one person learns. But this is not the case: R' Chanina has just said that two people learning causes *the Shechinah to rest between them*. However, now he says that when one person learns, something **different** happens: *the Holy One, Blessed is He, determines a reward for him*. This being the case, instead of saying, *How do we know, etc.*, R' Chanina should have stated simply, "**However**, if only one person sits and learns, Hashem determines a reward for him."

Even if you answer that R' Chanina wishes to speak

necessary to quote the earlier part of the verse, as this is enough to prove R' Chanina's point that the *Shechinah* is present when two people learn together.

in positive terms rather than negative ones,³⁰ he still could have omitted the entire introductory phrase, *This verse tells me only about two people*, as it is superfluous.

12. Why do we require Scriptural proof that if one person learns Torah, God determines a reward for him? Is it conceivable that a person would **not** be rewarded for studying Torah? And why does R' Chanina use the word *determines* (קוֹבֵעַ) rather than *gives* (נוֹתֵן) or *allots* (קוֹצֵב)?
13. How does the *Eichah* verse prove that Hashem *determines a reward* for an individual who learns Torah? Certainly there is no proof if one takes the word יָדָם literally, for it means *and is silent*, which could imply that the person being discussed is sitting still and **not** learning Torah.

≡ *The Power of Two* ≡

R' CHANINA BEN Teradyon finds the language of *Tehillim* 1:1 (his proof-text) difficult: On the one hand, if the point of the *pasuk* is that one should not sit with scoffers, it should say, “Praiseworthy is the man who ... has not sat with scoffers” rather than, *who has not sat in a “seat” of scoffers*. On the other hand, if the point of the *pasuk* is that one should not even sit in a place (a “seat”) where scoffers have sat (i.e., in the past, even though they are not there presently), then we must ask: What is wrong with doing so?

30. Saying, “However, etc.,” would imply that one person learning is being compared negatively to two people learning.

R' Chanina concludes that the *pasuk* is to be understood as follows: It is speaking of a place where two (or more) people are sitting who are **not** presently scoffing at anything. [This answers Question 3.]³¹ But the scoffing is ready and waiting to occur — because these people are not exchanging words of Torah, and only negative things can possibly emerge from such a group of people. [This answers Question 2.]³² *Tehillim* 1:1 comes to praise the individual who does not sit with such a group. [This answers Question 5.]³³

As to how we know that *Tehillim* 1:1 is referring to people who are not exchanging words of Torah, this is clearly indicated by its context, for the *pasuk* that follows it, namely *Tehillim* 1:2 (not quoted in our Mishnah), contrasts the individual described in verse 1 with an individual whose *desire* is solely the Torah of Hashem. [This answers Question 4.]

Now, one might say that in contrast to two people who sit together but are not learning (referred to as sitting in “a seat of scoffers”), two people who sit together and **are** learning deserve to get some reward — just not such a large one as having the *Shechinah* rest between them. Perhaps the *Shechinah* is present only when there are ten people learning together, as *Tehillim*

31. This is why the verse refers to a “seat” of scoffers rather than to actual “scoffers” (see preceding paragraph in the text). And for the same reason, R' Chanina speaks of a “session” of scoffers — i.e., of time spent together that will lead to scoffing (see further) — rather than of actual “scoffers” (Question 3).

32. The absence of Torah can thus indeed be called “scoffing” (Question 2), because it is certain that scoffing is going to occur.

33. To clarify how this answers Question 5: The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* is indeed speaking of two (or more) people — when it mentions *the seat of scoffers* (in the plural). It praises the individual (*he*) who *has not sat* in a place (*the seat*) occupied by those *scoffers*, i.e., by the people who do not discuss Torah together.

82:14 states, *The Almighty is found in the assembly* (בְּעֵדוּת) of Hashem.³⁴ R' Chanina ben Teradyon therefore emphasizes, *But if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, the Shechinah rests between them* — to teach that this small number of people do indeed merit the Presence of Hashem. And the phrase *sit together* is used to teach that the *Shechinah* does not join them only after they have begun learning; it is present even *before* they start (i.e., from the moment they *sit down together* to learn), for Hashem knows that their intent is to study. This idea is further conveyed through the word שְׁרוּיָהּ (*rests or is at rest*), which connotes “having arrived previously” — i.e., before their actual learning session began [and being **currently** *at rest between them* — that is, **after** words of Torah have actually been exchanged].³⁵ [This answers Questions 6 and 7.]

Answer to
questions
6–7

As proof for this teaching, R' Chanina then quotes the **entire pasuk** from *Malachi*, for it is only its second half that proves that the whole verse is talking about people who are speaking words of Torah.³⁶ [This answers Question 9.]³⁷

Answer to
question 9

34. In Scripture, the word עֵדָה refers to a group of ten people. See *Bamidbar* 14:27, where the question, עַד מָתַי לְ"עֵדָה" הִרְעָה הַזֹּאת, *How long shall this evil "assembly" exist*, refers to the Ten Spies. See *Megillah* 23b.

35. By contrast, if R' Chanina had expressed himself, “the *Shechinah* is with them” or “the *Shechinah* is between them” (see Question 7), the implication would have been that this occurs only after *words of Torah* were exchanged *between them*.

36. The Alshich apparently means as follows: The first half of the *pasuk* uses the phrase *spoke to each other*. But this phrase by itself could be understood as referring to speech that is unrelated to Torah. It is the phrase *mention His Name* used at the end of the *pasuk* which clearly refers to Torah study (and which teaches that the entire *pasuk* is referring to Torah study).

37. Further in his commentary, the Alshich writes that the verse’s second half, *a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who fear*

≡ Listening vs. Hearing ≡

WE KNOW THAT the words *הַקְשִׁיבָה* (*listening*) and *הַאֲזִינָה* (lit., *giving ear*) refer to hearing something that is nearby, while the word *שְׁמִיעָה* (*hearing*) generally refers to hearing from far away.³⁸ Yet our verse in *Malachi* states: *וַיִּקְשֹׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע*, *Hashem listened and heard*. But after saying that “Hashem listened from close by” (*וַיִּקְשֹׁב*), what sense does it make to say that “He heard from far away” (*וַיִּשְׁמַע*)?

The explanation is as follows: The word *וַיִּקְשֹׁב* indeed means listening “from close by” — as Hashem is close to those who study Torah [who are the subject of the *pasuk*]. The use of this word thus serves to reinforce the point made above, that even before two people actually begin to study together, Hashem’s Presence (the *Shechinah*) is already *at rest* (*שְׁרוּיָה*) between them, *listening* for the sounds of their Torah study to begin. [This answers Question 8.] But the word *וַיִּשְׁמַע* here does **not** connote hearing “from far away” as it usually does.

Answer to
question 8

Hashem and mention His Name, is to be understood as saying that this *book* is to be written exclusively for people who not only *fear Hashem* (a phrase that applies to people even before they have begun to learn) but also *mention His Name* (i.e., actually engage in learning). It is possible that this is another aspect of the Alshich’s answer to Question 9: R’ Chanina may have quoted the end of the *pasuk* in *Malachi* in order to teach this lesson.

38. As the Sages have noted (*Sifrei* to *Devarim* 32:1), this serves to explain the difference between how Moshe and Yeshayahu, respectively, address the earth and the heavens: In *Devarim* 32:1, Moshe says, *Give ear, O heavens ... and let the earth hear* (*וְהִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ ... וְהִאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם*); while in *Yeshayahu* 1:2, the prophet says, *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth* (*שְׁמַעוּ שָׁמַיִם וְהִאֲזִינוּ אֶרֶץ*). Moshe was closer to heaven than to earth [so *הַאֲזִינָה* is used in connection with the heavens, and *שְׁמִיעָה* is used in association with the earth], while Yeshayahu was closer to the earth than he was to the heavens [so the opposite terms are used].

Rather, it means simply that Hashem actually *hears* them only after they have in fact begun to learn.³⁹

⌘ R' Chanina's Choice of Words ⌘

IN QUESTION 1 we asked why R' Chanina ben Teradyon uses the phraseology, *and there are words of Torah between them*. One possible answer is that he is teaching us that to merit the Presence of Hashem it is not necessary for them to be so involved in study that one would refer to them as being “occupied” with Torah. It is sufficient that in some sense they could be described as having “words of Torah between them.”

Another explanation could be that it is obvious that if two knowledgeable people are engaged in Torah debate they merit the Presence of Hashem. By expressing himself in terms of words of Torah being “between them,” R' Chanina is teaching us that even if only one of the two is knowledgeable, and he is the only one talking (while the other is listening), nevertheless since there are words of Torah “**between them**” the *Shechinah* is indeed present. [These are two answers to Question 1.]⁴⁰

Two
answers to
question 1

39. The Alshich adds that a *pasuk* in *Yeshayahu* (65:24) is to be understood along similar lines: וְהָיָה טָרָם יִקְרְאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה עוֹד הֵם מְדַבְּרִים וְאֲנִי אֶשְׁמָע, *It will be that before they call out, I will answer; while they yet speak I will hear*. Even before the Jews pray, Hashem “answers” them and decrees that their requests be fulfilled. But it is only after they are actually “speaking” that the words *I will hear* are appropriate.

40. As the Alshich writes further in his commentary, this approach also helps explain the wording of the *pasuk* in *Malachi* cited by the Mishnah. The *pasuk* says: אִזְּזוּ נְדַבְּרוּ יְרָאֵי ה' "אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ" וַיִּקְשֹׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמָע, *Then those who fear Hashem spoke "a man to his friend," and Hashem listened and heard*. I.e., even if only one person does the talking while the other just listens, Hashem is present.

Let us now address Question 10:⁴¹ Why does R' Chanina write only, *But if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, the Shechinah rests between them* — which is supported by the first half of the *Malachi* verse — and not make mention of the *book of remembrance* mentioned in the second half of the verse?⁴² The answer would appear to be that he wants to bring out the point derived from the first half of the verse, that even **before** the two parties actually started learning, the *Shechinah* is already between them (as explained above). He therefore does not speak of the *book of remembrance*, which is written only **after** two parties have actually begun learning.⁴³ [This answers the first part of Question 10.]

Answer to the first part of question 10

But we remain with the question: If the *pasuk* from *Malachi* cited as R' Chanina's proof is speaking only about those who fear Hashem, how can R' Chanina say, *But if two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, etc.*, which seems to refer to **any** two people, even if they do **not** fear Hashem? The answer is that R' Chanina does not mean to imply that at all. As we know from *Tehillim* 111:10, רֵאשִׁית חֵכְמָה יְרֵאָתָה — *the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God*. And as *Pirkei Avos* 3:9 states: *Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his*

41. The Alshich's tenth question is comprised of two parts. We present here our own understanding of the answer to the first part (which the Alshich does not state explicitly), followed by the Alshich's answer to the second part.

42. Actually, in Question 10 the Alshich asked also why R' Chanina did not mention that Hashem "listens and hears." However, by this point in our discussion it is clear that his statement that *the Shechinah rests between them* is equivalent to the phrase *Hashem listened and heard*.

43. See footnote 37.

wisdom, his wisdom will endure, but anyone whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure. R' Chanina is simply assuming that people are following the proper order, attaining fear of Hashem before beginning to learn — so there is no need to mention that they fear God. [This answers the second part of Question 10.]⁴⁴

☞ *Individuals Are Also Rewarded* ☞

NOW, THE *PASUK* in *Malachi* speaks in the plural of *those who fear Hashem* speaking words of Torah together, and states that Hashem will be present and that He will *listen and hear*. The clear implication is that a person learning Torah by himself will not merit the same reward. However, someone may think it possible that this individual will at least merit the presence of Hashem, even if Hashem will not *listen and hear*. To teach us that this is not correct, R' Chanina says, *This verse tells me only about two people*. It is **only** with two people that Hashem is present, not with one.⁴⁵

44. While the Alshich explains the second half of the verse (see footnote 37), he does not spell out how the first half is to be understood in light of everything he has said. It seems that the first half (*Then those who fear Hashem spoke with each other, and Hashem listened and heard...*) is to be understood as follows: The expression *those who fear Hashem* applies to people even before they have started learning. The verse states that those people then *spoke with each other* (which, in light of the end of the *pasuk*, we understand to mean that they began actually speaking words of Torah; see above, footnote 36) *And Hashem listened and heard*, i.e., He waited nearby, listening for the sounds of their Torah study to begin; and then He heard them after they began to actually learn.

45. This introductory phrase, *This verse tells me only about two people*, is thus not superfluous (see end of Question 11).

However, by expressing its question as, *How do we know that “even if” one person sits and occupies himself with Torah, etc.*, the Mishnah is indicating that in at least one respect, there is indeed no difference between two people learning and just one. When two people exchange words of Torah, they are rewarded not by the presence of an angel, but by the presence of Hashem Himself. And similarly, *even if* one person learns Torah alone, the Mishnah is postulating, it is *the Holy One, Blessed is He* — i.e., Hashem Himself, not an angel — who *determines* a reward for him. [This answers Question 11.] The Mishnah then brings proof from Eichah that since he sits while occupying himself with Torah — i.e., he has settled himself down to learn in a *fixed* (קבוע) manner — Hashem rewards him in kind, by “*determining* (קובע) a reward for him.” The word קובע implies a set, fixed, and permanent reward in the World to Come, while simultaneously hinting to the reason why this person will be rewarded in this manner. [This answers Question 12.]

Answer to
question 11

Answer to
question 12

Another reason R’ Chanina uses the word קובע is that a person might say: If Torah learning is so precious, why do we see individuals engaged in studying Torah who are suffering deprivation and hunger? To this the Mishnah answers: To the contrary, it is an act of kindness on Hashem’s part that He does not reward a person in this temporary, transient world. Rather, He determines (קובע) a fixed and permanent reward for him in the עולם הקבוע, the World that is fixed and permanent, i.e., *Olam HaBa*. [This, too, answers Question 12.]⁴⁶

Another
answer to
question 12

46. As regards the first part of Question 12, it seems that the Alshich is saying that while it is true that no Scriptural proof is necessary that a person is rewarded for learning Torah, Scriptural proof is necessary that the reward is in *Olam HaBa* (rather than in this world). See the Alshich further.

3

R' Shimon says: If three ate at one table and did not speak words of Torah there, it is as though they had partaken of sacrifices of the dead, as it says, "For all the tables are full of vomit and excrement, without the Omnipresent" (*Yeshayahu* 28:8). However, if three ate at one table and said words of Torah, it as though they ate from the table of the Omnipresent, as it says, "He said to me, "This is the table that is before Hashem"" (*Yechezkel* 41:22).

As to how the *Eichah* verse cited by our Mishnah (3:28) proves this: The immediately preceding verse [3:27, not quoted in our Mishnah] states: *טוב לגבר כי ישא על בנעוריו*, *It is good for a man to bear a yoke in his youth*. The Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* 3:9) explains that this refers to the yoke of Torah. It follows that when *Eichah* 3:28 states: *ישב בַּדָּד וְיִדָּם כִּי נִטַּל עָלָיו*, *Though he sits alone and is silent, he has received [reward] for it*, it is referring to a person who is studying Torah. It speaks of one who is studying by himself (*alone*) in order to teach us that even if a person lives in a place where he has no one with whom to study, he should not fear: He can still fulfill the requirement of bearing the yoke of Torah. And it speaks of being *silent* (יִדָּם) because it is addressing a student of Torah who sees that he is living in poverty, and it is stating that he should not fear. Rather, he should fulfill what it says in *Tehillim* 37:7, *Wait silently (דוֹם) for [the salvation of] Hashem ... do not compete with him who prospers*.⁴⁷ He should realize that if he lacks prosperity

47. While the Alshich does not quote the phrase *do not compete with him who prospers*, it seems that this part of the *pasuk* is central to his point, for

רבי שמעון אומר: שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד, ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה - כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר (ישעיה כח, ח): "כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צאה בלי מקום." אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד, ואמרו עליו דברי תורה - כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יחזקאל מא, כב): "וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'."

here in this world, he shall *receive reward* (נטל) in the Upper World — the world that is *over him* (עליו) — not in this world where he is presently located. [This answers Question 13.]

Answer to
question 13

MISHNAH 3

R' Shimon takes the message of the previous Mishnah a step further.⁴⁸ The previous Mishnah states that the Divine Presence will rest among two people who are learning Torah together. R' Shimon now teaches that God is present even when the study of Torah is accompanied by a different activity. Thus, he says that if three people are engaged in eating, God is present if they accompany their meal with words of Torah.

from this phrase it is evident that the word דום (*wait silently*) is addressed to a person who is not prospering. And the Alshich is apparently saying that the similar word ויידם in the *pasuk* cited by our Mishnah (*Eichah* 3:28) is likewise to be understood as addressing a person who is not prospering but living in poverty.

48. The Alshich discusses this Mishnah in his commentary to *Vayikra* 16:3.