

# THE ALSHICH ON PIRKEI AVOS

Timeless wisdom on Pirkei Avos by the Alshich Hakadosh

פרקי  
אבות

פרק א, משנה א

כ"ו ניסן תשפ"ד

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An adaptive translation by Rabbis Avie Gold & Nahum Spirn

## TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION

### Chapter 1, Mishnah 1

1) Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua and Yehoshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets and the prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, create many students, and make a fence for the Torah.

א) משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים למסרו לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. הם אמרו שלשה דברים: הוו מתונים בדין, והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, ועשו סג לתורה.

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why isn't the verb "transmitted" used consistently for the transference of the Oral Law's knowledge that the Mishnah is describing?
2. Why does it say that Moshe received the Torah from a mountain (Sinai) when of course he received it from Hashem?
3. Citing these teachings from the Men of the Great Assembly here indicates that they are connected to the transmission process. What is the connection?

The Mishnah does not say Hashem "gave" the Torah to Moshe, for that would have suggested that God gave it to him alone, when in fact He gave it to every Jew. Every Jew heard the Ten Commandments at Sinai. And not only those commandments, but all 613 commandments that are contained within them, including the entire Oral Torah, all of which is connected to the Ten Commandments. However, each received it according to his individual spiritual level. Thus, it says that only Moshe received the (entire) Torah; only he truly "got" it. And yet even regarding Moshe himself, the Mishnah is careful not to say that Hashem transmitted (מסר) the Torah to him, for this term implies that the recipient received all that the giver had to offer. As great as Moshe was, he was still mortal and finite, making it impossible for him to comprehend the Torah as fully as Hashem does. The term received (קבל) suggests that he, too, received whatever he was capable of. [This begins to answer Question 1.]

Furthermore, even the word received would be inappropriate here if the Mishnah were to say, "Moshe received the Torah from God." That would imply that Moshe was a student receiving instruction from his teacher, which is ultimately a difference only in degree but not in kind – when in fact the difference between Moshe and God was unfathomably large. By saying that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai it was as if to make the point that he did not receive it

directly from God but rather indirectly, via the mountain (even if it was the most of any human being in history). [[This answers Question 2.](#)]

Yehoshua, the prophets, the elders and the Men of the Great Assembly were all capable of receiving all the Torah that the previous generation knew, so the Mishnah uses the term that connotes a complete transfer of knowledge – “transmitted” – just once, in the beginning of the sequence. It then repeated the word מָסַר at the end, to emphasize that when the era of the Men of the Great Assembly was over, this was the point in history where the process of “transmission” ended. The men of the following generations were on too much of a lower spiritual level. [[This completes the answer to Question 1.](#)]

Anshei Knesset HaGedolah understood that there were three factors that could now prevent the Torah from being fulfilled properly, given man’s diminished spiritual and intellectual capacities. Two of the problems regarded the teachers: that they would lack the ability to learn the Torah in its entirety, and could forget the Torah they learned. In either event, they would be unable to pass on a complete version of the Oral law. Regarding the masses, the problem was that being on a lower spiritual level, they would inevitably make mistakes in understanding and retaining the many and varied details of the mitzvos and inadvertently come to transgress the Torah.

It is to address these three specific problems that the Men of the Great Assembly taught three specific things: (1) Be deliberate in judgment [meaning that judges should be careful not to forget what they’ve learned, reviewing all relevant Torah information before deciding on a matter of Jewish law]. (2) Raise up many students, meaning that if you cannot find an individual who can master every aspect of the Torah, many students together will function as a team, with one student mastering what the other cannot, and as a group they will encompass and be able to teach the entire Torah. (3) Make a fence for the Torah, [enacting Rabbinic laws] to protect the masses from violating the Torah inadvertently. [[This answers Question 3.](#)]

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These Divrei Torah are dedicated in memory of Yental Bas Raisal (Jean Silkin) who passed away in March 2024. Having come on the Kindertransport in 1938 with no family, no money or any material possessions she established herself and built a family all of which today are shomer Torah and Mitzvos. She embodied the values of Pirkei Avos of steadfast Emunah, of thinking about others first, of respecting Talmudei Chochmim and recognizing the paramount importance of having a quality secular education as well as a broad Torah education. May these Divrei Torah be a source of eternal merit for her in the next World.

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