



How Wonderful is this Tree

R' Shimon said, if one walks and learns, and interrupts his learning and says, "How wonderful is this tree! How pleasant is this ploughed field!" The *Torah* considers it as if he is liable for his life.

Avot 3:7

The above statement of *R' Shimon* is quite damning. Here is an individual that is learning while travelling – an admirable undertaking. He breaks to marvel at nature, and *R' Shimon* considers criminal. The *Bartenura*, in his second comment explains that the *Mishnah* is stressing that despite breaking to appreciate nature and bless *Hashem*, nevertheless *R' Shimon* is critical of interrupting one's learning.

The *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that the roads were generally dangerous and if one chose to break from learning, which was affording him protection, then he is liable for any harm. This understanding is consistent with the earlier *Mishnah* (3:4), where *R' Chanina ben Chachinai* taught that one who travels alone and does not learn is liable for his life.

Other's explain that it is the interruption, irrespective of the environment, that is criticised. *Kehati* cites the *Rashbatz* who explains that interrupting learning for a trivial matter is a slight on the honour of *Torah*.

The *Meiri* explains that one has a tendency to be drawn after idle chatter and empty matters. The interruption may trigger a downwards spiral that would lead to abandoning learning all together. The comment of the *Meiri* is not that farfetched. Irving Bunim comments that *R' Shimon* was the grandson of *Acher*, one who was "walking on the path", yet diverted to other studies. He suggests that *Acher* may have been in *R' Shimon* mind when providing this teaching.

The *Baal Shem Tov* however explains our *Mishnah* in a very different manner. Citing the *pasuk* from our *parasha*, "*tamim tihiye im elokecha*", he explains that even when one is engaged in *Torah* study, he should ensure that he is still "*tamim*" – completely with *Hashem*.

The *Baal Shem Tov* reflects on our *Mishnah* and asks why it needs to comment that the individual was learning on his way. That fact is obvious, since the *Mishnah* comments that he stopped from his learning. Furthermore, the *Mishnah* continues that the "*katuv*", generally used when referring to a specific verse, considers it as if he is liable for his life, but does not include which verse.

The *Baal Shem Tov* therefore explains that the *Mishnah* is discussing a person how is travelling on the right path, yet he is alone – he is not connecting to *Hashem* in his learning. The *Mishnah* continues that "he learns and breaks from his learning". In other words, it his learning that separates him from *Hashem*. This person finds success in his learning and see it as his own. The subject of our *Mishnah* then comments, "how amazing is this tree, he incredible is this field!" The tree and field are references to himself and his success. We find in this week's *parasha* that a tree can refer to a person - "for the man is a tree of the field". In other words, he reflects on his own greatness. When appreciating the ploughed field, as mention in *Yirmiyahu* (4), he is reflecting on the portion he believes he prepared from himself in the Next World. Consequently, this *pasuk* of *tamim tihiye im elokecha*, the verse he is violating, considers it as if such an individual is liable for his life.

Yisrael Bankier

Revision Questions

אבות ב' י"ב – ג' ט'

- What are the three statements of *R' Yosi*? (ב' י"ב)
- What three things did *R' Shimon* say regarding *tefillah*? (ב' י"ג)
- What three things did *R' Elazar* say regarding learning? (ב' י"ד)
- Complete the following statement of *R' Tarfon*: (ב' ט"ו)
 היום _____, והמלאכה _____, והפועלים _____,
 _____, ובעל הבית _____
- What else did *R' Tarfon* say regarding work? (ב' ט"ז)
- What three things does *R' Tarfon* say regarding the reward for learning? (ב' ט"ז)
- According to *Akavya ben Mehalalel* if one looks at what three things will he not sin? (ג' א')
- Why does *Channinah segan Ha'Kohanim* say that one should pray for the welfare of the government? (ג' ב')
- What does *Chananya ben Tardyon* say regarding two people that sit and do not converse in words of *Torah*? (ג' ב')
- What does he say regarding those that do? (ג' ב')
- What does *R' Shimon* say regarding three people eating together and do not share in words of *Torah*? (ג' ג')
- What does he say regarding those that do? (ג' ג')
- According to *R' Chananya ben Chachinai* what three people are "*mitchayev b'nafsho*"? (ג' ד')
- What does *R' Nechunya ben Hakana* say regarding one that accepts upon himself the "yoke of *Torah*"? (ג' ה')
- According to *R' Chalaftah ish Kfar Chananya*, when how many people learn does the *Shechina* preside amongst them? (ג' ו')
- Complete the following statement of *R' Elazar ish Bartuta*: (ג' ז')
 _____ תן לו משלו _____
- What does *R' Shimon* say regarding one who interrupts his learning to comment on the beauty of a tree? (ג' ז')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
8 September ח' אלול	9 September ט' אלול	10 September י' אלול	11 September י"א אלול	12 September י"ב אלול	13 September י"ג אלול	14 September י"ד אלול
Avot 3:10-11	Avot 3:12-13	Avot 3:14-15	Avot 3:16-17	Avot 3:18-4:1	Avot 4:2-3	Avot 4:4-5

