



Ethics from Sinai

This week we began studying *masechet Avot*; or as it is more commonly referred to as *Pirkei Avot*. As the *Rambam* notes the contents of the *masechet* focus on *chasidut* and *mussar* – ethical behaviour and positive character traits. As the *Maharal* puts it, while not mandated explicitly by any positive and negative commandment, logic and sense obligate their practice and adoption. With this in mind, the opening of the *masechet* gives one pause for thought. One might have expected an immediate listing of some of the fundamental principles or practices. Yet, we first learn about the transmission of the teaching of the *Torah* from *Moshe* up until the *Anshei Keneset Ha'Gedolai*. Why?

The *Bartenura* explains that there are libraries filled with books on ethics. The contents of these works were derived by their respective author's intuition or research and subject to their personal priorities and understanding. So that the reader should not think that this *masechet* is a similar such work and that all the principles contained were simply innovated by the sages that mentioned them, the *Mishnah* opens by explaining that these lessons contained were transmitted from Sinai. Or to put it in the words of Irving Bunim z"l:

...to assure the student that if he seeking the classic Jewish view of ethics, he has come to the right source. Here you will not find cultural borrowing or the product of Persian and Greek influence... Here is indigenous Jewish material faithfully transmitted from its original Divine source.

The *Tifferet Yisrael* takes a different approach to the question. He explains that it was necessary to dispel the notion that one could solely be engaged in the study and performance of *mitzvot* without exerting effort in improving one's character traits. *Chazal* speak of dire consequences of those that adopt that approach. The *Mishnah* therefore teaches from the outset that *derech*

eretz is part and parcel of the *Torah* transmitted from Sinai.

The *Tifferet Yisrael* however offers another explanation based on the teaching: "if there is not *Torah* there is no *derech eretz*." He explains that belief in *Torah* is necessary for meaningful ethical behaviour. Anyone that does not believe in the *Torah* or divine revelation does not believe that his actions and behaviour are being observed. Positive behaviour is engaged for social acceptance or simply because weakness and wanting to live in peace. Negative behaviour is avoided out of fear of repercussion.

In contrast Rabbi Sacks (The Great Partnership) argues that one does not need to be religious to be ethical – claims to the contrary would be "arrogance, not humility, and it is, in any case, simply untrue" (p127). Nevertheless, "Conscience, the voice of G-d within the human heart, would, without religious faith, be more and more easily ignored." (p128)

Irving Bunim notes that while the *Chachamim* teach that *derech eretz* could have been learnt from various animals, the lessons would have been inadequate. In one examples, while he admits that ants do not steal from one another, collectively they are "parasites, pillaging from the labours of others." He surmises that:

Nature is a poor teacher indeed. Without Torah, morality becomes the interest of the powerful, and ethics a pretext for exploitation. "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai." A new light burst upon the world. Many finally perceived the source of decency. Humanity heard the categorical imperative, the ultimate rule of morality.

Yisrael Yitzchak Bankier

Revision Questions

עבודה זרה ה' ג' י"ב

- If a troop of *goyim* enter a city at a time of peace which barrels of wine are forbidden? (ה' ג')
- Is a Jewish professional allowed to collect his *sechar* from barrels of *yayin nesech*? (ה' ג')
- If one is pouring *yayin nesech* from *kli* to *kli* what is the status of the *kli*: (ה' ג')
 - being poured out?
 - being poured into?
- What is the *shiur* of *yayin nesech* needed to make a mixture of *yayin nesech* and another liquid *assur*? (ה' ח')
- Name five items that are *assur bekol shehu*? (ה' ט')
- How would *R' Shimon Ben Gamliel* permit the use of *yayin nesech* that fell into a *bor*? (ה' י')
- What are the three methods of *kashering keilim* purchased from a *goi* and when do they apply? (ה' י"ב)
- How does one *kasher* a skewer? (ה' י"ב)
- How does one *kasher* a knife? (ה' י"ב)

אבות א' א' ז'

- Describe the *mesorah* chain from *Moshe* to the *Anshei Knesset Ha'Gedolah*? (א' א')
- What three things did the *Anshei Knesset Ha'Gedolah* teach? (א' א')
- *Shimon Ha'Tzaddik* taught that the world stands on which three things? (א' ב')
- According to *Antignos Ish Soco*, what is the proper method to serve *Hashem*? (Include both points.) (א' ג')
- What three statements did *Yosi ben Yo'ezer* make with respect to dealings with *Chachamim*? (א' ד')
- What three things did *Yosi ben Yochanan* teach? (ה' א')
- What three things did *Yehoshua ben Perachya* teach regarding important relationships? (ה' ג')
- What did *Nitai Ha'Arbeli* teach and how does it relate to the previous question? (ה' א')

Local Shiurim

Melbourne, Australia

Sunday -Thursday
10 minutes before *Mincha*
Mizrachi Shul
Melbourne, Australia

Friday & Shabbat
10 minutes before *Mincha*
Beit Ha'Roeh
Melbourne, Australia

Efrat, Israel
Shiur in English

Sunday -Thursday
Rabbi Mordechai Scharf
9:00am
Kollel Magen Avraham
Reemon Neighbourhood

ONLINE SHIURIM

Rabbi Chaim Brown
www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/

Rav Meir Pogrow
613.org/mishnah.html

Rabbi E. Kornfeld
Rabbi C. Brown
<http://www.dafyomi.co.il/calendars/myomi/myomi-thisweek.htm>

SHIUR ON KOL HALOSHON

Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss
In US dial: 718 906 6400
Then select: 1 – 2 – 4

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
24 th November כ"א כסלו	25 th November כ"ב כסלו	26 th November כ"ג כסלו	27 th November כ"ד כסלו	28 th November כ"ה כסלו	29 th November כ"ו כסלו	30 th November כ"ז כסלו
Avot 1:8-9	Avot 1:10-11	Avot 1:12-13	Avot 1:14-15	Avot 1:16-17	Avot 1:18:2-1	Avot 2:2-3

