

Teachings of the Maharal

TORAH IS VANITY WITHOUT KINDNESS

Netiv Gmilut Chasadim 2:152 - The Gemara relates that when the Romans seized two great tana'im, Rabbi Elazar ben Parta and Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon [Avoda Zara 17b], the former told the latter, "You are fortunate to have been arrested for only one thing, teaching Torah. Woe is me, for I was arrested for five things." Rabbi Chanina retorted, "You will be saved because your 'offenses' include acts of kindness as well as Torah. Woe is me that I dealt with only Torah." Rabbi Huna said that if one is involved in Torah alone is compared with one who is Godless, as it says, "Many days passed for Israel without a true God, and without a kohen to teach, and without [keeping] Torah" [Divrei HaYamim Bet 15:3]. This means that Torah is a matter of the spirit and does not imply the acceptance of the yoke of Hashem's commandments by just studying it. One is Godless if one fails to fulfill Torah in deed, and its fulfillment is acceptance of His Divinity. Not to say Rabbi Chanina failed to keep mitzvot - he was a famed tzadik - but most of his involvement was in learning, whereas his colleague Rabbi Elazar was heavily invested in acts of kindness. Kindness can be pursued anytime with serious involvement - one need not wait till the poor person knocks on the

door. Comparing himself to Rabbi Elazar, Rabbi Chanina felt himself deficient in acts of kindness.

If one is said to be involved with only Torah, it means to the exclusion of acts of kindness, for the two are generally mentioned together. This is not true for other mitzvot. Even if one does all the commandments but does not do acts of kindness, his learning of Torah is but intellectual activity, and in this there is no divinity, unless attached to deeds relating to Torah, which is gemilut chasadim. Both Torah and gemilut chasadim have a gematria of 611. Torah begins and ends with kindness and both of them are good and connected to each other. The kind person, by giving his God-given bounty to others in need, detracts from his physical nature and acquires virtue. Torah is the acquisition of divine intellect, compared to the thin wick that receives the energy for the light. When he does acts of kindness, his learning of Torah is more than a dry unemotional intellectual exercise, for his good deeds are connected to it, lighting the wick, making one great perfection, and there is nothing better than that. Additionally, his kind acts put him under the wings of Hashem, as it says, "How precious is your kindness, o God! The sons of man take refuge under the shadow of Your wings" [T'hilim 36:8]. Therefore, if one learns Torah without doing acts of kindness, it is as if he has

no God. The two together bring one to walking in His ways.

Mishna tells us, "These are the things whose fruit man enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact for the world to come: honoring father and mother, acts of kindness, early attendance at the house of study morning and evening, hospitality, visiting the sick, providing for a bride, escorting the dead, absorption in prayer, bringing peace between people - and the study of Torah is equivalent to all" [Pe'ah 1:1]. On this, Rava asked Rabbi Nachman [Kidushin 40a] why honoring parents is rewarded with long life and goodness [D'varim 5:16], while about acts of kindness it is written, "He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find righteousness and honor [Mishlei 21:21], and about bringing peace between people it is written, "seek peace and pursue it" [T'hilim 34:16]. Rabbi Abahu said that "pursuit" is found in respect to kindness and seeking peace implying the same reward- length of days. Torah is said to be "your life and the length of your days" [D'varim 30:20]. The reward for sending the mother bird is also "it will be good for you and you will lengthen days [22:7], why is this mitzva not included in the mishna? R' Nachman answered that the list is incomplete. Rava retorted, "You cannot say the list is incomplete if the Mishna begins 'These are the things...'" Rabbi Idi said, take the verse "Tell each

tzadik that it is good" [Yeshayahu 3:10] - does this mean there is a tzadik who is good and another who is evil? The answer is one may be righteous toward heaven and righteous toward people and another righteous to heaven but not to people. "Woe is an evil evildoer" [3:11] - does this mean that some evildoers are not evil? If one is evil toward heaven but good to people one may not be evil.

- Column prepared by Dr. Moshe Kuhr