

Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

## Pirkei Avot – Chapter 2 Mishnah 5

21 Sivan 5774\*

### 1. *Pirkei Avot during the summer months*

Hello everyone. Since Shavu'ot, we personally have been teaching from Pirkei Avot, so we'll devote this evening to the chapter we learnt last Shabbat, the second chapter. From Pesach to Rosh Hashanah, there is a custom to learn one chapter of Pirkei Avot every Shabbat. Thus, we get to go over the entire tractate 4 times during the summer months. We are now in the second repetition and this week (Shabbat parashat Korach), we will be learning the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter.

#### Chapter 2, *mishnah* 5

We're going to learn the beginning and end of the 5<sup>th</sup> *mishnah*. The *mishnah* begins with a saying from Hillel, who according to most commentaries is Hillel the Elder. He says: "A boor is not fearful of iniquity of sin and the simpleton a man of the earth], cannot be a *chassid*" (אין בור ירא חטא ולא עם הארץ חסיד). This is a famous saying. The end of the same *mishnah* reads: "In a place where there is no man [no one there to do what needs to be done, no one to act], you have to be that man [and do what needs to be done]" (ובמקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות איש).

#### The Torah's relativism

What we want to explain about the beginning is that the terms that the sages use can be interpreted in a relative manner. What this means is the pshat, the literal meaning, can be extrapolated and abstracted while not necessarily removing it from the pshat, but relating it to a different scale, a different ruler, as it were. The whole Torah has relativity engraved in it—its interpretation applies to every scale of life, be it from the lowest to the highest, from the smallest to the largest. Here we will see an interesting example on how the meaning of the two terms "boor" and "*am ha'aretz*" is interpreted in relation to one another on two different scales.

### 2. *The Bartenura's explanation on boor and simpleton*

#### The boor and the empty pit

The simplest *pshat* for what the *mishnah's* words mean can be found in the Bartenura. He writes that a boor is someone who is empty from all things. The word boor (בור) has the same letters as the Hebrew word for "pit" (בּוּר) like by Yosef, where the pit was empty of water (והבור רק אין בו מים). The Bartenura makes us think that maybe the two

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\* Notes taken during class by Moshe Genuth. Not reviewed by Harav Ginsburgh

words—boor and pit—are the same. This boor is an empty soul, and he doesn't even know how to conduct simple business interactions, how to conduct himself in society. So he's empty from both Torah and of *derech erez*, the way of the land—knowledge of normal social interaction and how to get along with people. And he is worse than the *am ha'aretz* (the simpleton), as is obvious from the *mishnah's* context.

### The etymological origin of boor

Now he explains where this word boor comes from. He writes that when the Egyptians came to Yosef and begged that he give them food, they said that if you're not willing to give us seed for the fields, then "the land will become desolate" (וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִשָּׂם). The word that means "desolate" (תִּשָּׂם) is translated in the Aramaic into boor, וְאֲרָעָא לֹא תְבוּר. That is the origin of this word boor. So a person who is a boor is like an unplowed field. In Hebrew, the term for a desolate field is שָׂדֵה בּוֹר. Interestingly, the word for "pit" (בוֹר) appears a few *mishnayot* later regarding Rabbi Eliezer Ben Horkanos who is described as a, "plastered pit that does not lose a drop" (בוֹר סוּד שְׂאִינוּ מֵאֵבֶד טֶפֶף).

### Thinking and plowing

If one imagines for a moment what we have just learnt, it's that a person is like a field that needs to be plowed. If you don't plow the field even if you sew seeds, nothing will grow. Actually to plow (לְחַרֵּשׁ) in Hebrew refers to deep thought, like plowing furrows in your mind. The more you think the more furrows are created in your brain. By holy intuition, the Hebrew language knows this, because to think is described as plowing, and it's understood that the mind should have many furrows in it.

### Yitzchak plows the field with prayer

Now, regardless of whether we read the word as pit (בוֹר) or boor (בוֹר), it equals the same of course, 208, which is the value of Yitzchak (יִצְחָק), which equals 8 times *Havayah*. Yitzchak has a special affinity with the notion of a field. He called the holy site of the Temple, a *sadeh*, a field: "And Yitzchak went out to speak in the field" (וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׂוּחַת (בְּשָׂדֵה). Each of the Patriarchs initiated one of the daily prayers, and Yitzchak's was *Minchah*, the afternoon prayer, just before the evening. So his mentality for finding a place worthy for prayer was to go out to the field, a place of solitude.

How do you plow a field? Maybe exactly like Yitzchak, with prayer, which requires a lot of introspection. He poured out his heart to God. That is how he plowed his spiritual field. The field that is not plowed is a desolate field.

So the lowest level of human being in this *mishnah* is a boor. He has nothing: not Torah, not *mitzvot*, not even *derech erez*. Even a non-Jew in this sense would be better than him in his ability to interact with people. So he's the opposite of the Yitzchak of holiness.

## **Esau, the man of the field**

Another connection that Yitzchak and field is that he had two sons, a tzadik, Yaakov, and the evil one was Esau. The very first time Esau is described, he's described as "a hunting man, a man of the field" (אִישׁ יוֹדֵעַ צֵיד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה). He apparently plows his evil field by hunting. So that's just to get into the literal meaning of this word. We haven't yet explained what it means to be fearful of sin, but a boor cannot be so.

## **The *Am ha'aretz***

The Bartenura continues to explain the *mishnah's* words, "And an *am ha'aretz* cannot be a *chassid*" (וְלֹא עִם הָאֲרֶזֶן חָסִיד). Right away, we notice that *am ha'aretz* is a collective term, which suggests that he is already part of the people—literally, the people of the earth. Every person who is an *am ha'aretz* is like a collective. So he is definitely part of society. And the *mishnah* is saying that he can't be a *chassid*, but it's certainly possible that he be fearful of sin.

## **Fear as sensitivity**

This concept of fear needs to be explained, especially in the context of being fearful of sin. We have explained many times in the past that the psychological abstraction of fear is sensitivity (רְגִישׁוּת). Some of the best examples and applications of this psychological abstraction appear in Pirkei Avot.

## **Fear of sin starts with being considerate of other people**

What is the *mishnah* telling us here? It is saying that a person who is an *am ha'aretz*, even though he can't be a *chassid*, but he definitely can be a *yerei cheit*, he can certainly be sensitive (and thanks to his sensitivity, he can be fearful of sin, sensitive to sin). How so? Because, says the Bartenura, he is fluent in the ways of negotiation (מְשָׂא וּמְתֵן). He is a social person, who has good relationships with people. As soon as you have this, good relationships and you're part of society, you automatically acquire sensitivity to what is right and what is wrong. The beginning of sin is to be inconsiderate of other people. If you're not considerate of your friend, or your spouse, then you can't be considerate of the Almighty, your Creator.

Yet, as much as the *am ha'aretz* is sensitive (and we'll come back to his social sensitivity in a moment), he cannot attain the level of a *chassid*, because without deep Torah learning and understanding, you can't be a *chassid*. All this is the Bartenura.

## **3. *Tosafot Yom Tov's* definitions for boor and *am ha'aretz***

Now let's look at the *Tosafot Yom Tov*, the commentary on the Bartenura. He simply wants to deepen our understanding of these terms. The Bartenura did not give us the definition of a *chassid* at all. Perhaps he relies on the fact that a *chassid* is someone who goes over and beyond the letter of the law, and that is a well-known definition. A *chassid* is a philanthropic soul that helps other people. You might think that that is a

native attribute of the soul, but it turns out that you have to be learned. In any case, he doesn't define *chassid*.

The Tosafot Yom Tov, in his commentary on the Bartenura, says to look in the next chapter to understand the definition of a *yerei cheit*—someone who is fearful of sin. We already extracted the idea that it has to do with sensitivity—or at least begins with it. And if you want to better understand the meaning of *am ha'aretz*, then look in chapter 5 *mishnah* 10. So first let's look at chapter 3, *mishnah* 9 to see what *yerei cheit* is. This *mishnah* is already from what we'll learn this coming Shabbat.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says, one whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom is sustainable, but one whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom cannot be sustained. Sustain here does not just mean "to keep." It means, as we will see, that one's wisdom is applicable and productive. In this *mishnah* it says that fear of sin is the foundation of productive wisdom. If you want your wisdom to be sound and also productive, then you have to first have fear of sin, but if you don't then your wisdom will dissipate and you will eventually lose it all, *chas veshalom*.

### **Fear of sin motivates learning**

The Bartenura on this *mishnah* writes: I heard a very interesting interpretation (and it's the only one that he brings here), that to have fear of sin precede wisdom means that when one opens the book, the motivation for learning is to become someone who fears sin. It's not two separate things. You might think that there is fear of sin, and if you have that, when you learn it will last. But, he says that no, the fear of sin is an explicit thought you should have before you begin to learn. Why are we having this class? Why did I open this book? But, the best reason is that we are doing it to become fearful of sin. If we have this in mind when we begin learning, that the learning is in order to merit fear of sin, then what we learn will be good, sound and firm and will as he will now say, productive. Meaning, that you'll be able to act and accomplish things in life thanks to your wisdom. Your wisdom will be productive for what you're doing in life.

Then he says that this reminds us of another famous saying, "The end of action begins with thought" (סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה). Meaning, that what comes out at the end, depends on the very beginning of what your thought was even before you began to learn what you were learning in order to act. If the beginning of your thought is that you want to learn to fear sin, then the end of your action will be good. Everything in the middle is your learning process. Because thought brings one to what one's heart desires. The thought in the beginning makes the wisdom potent to realize the innermost desire of the heart. And one will have true satisfaction then from one's wisdom. And if the opposite is the case, that his wisdom precedes his fear of sin, meaning that he is not learning in order to do, not in order to practice, then his wisdom has no potency.

### **Wisdom without fear of sin becomes one's enemy**

In other words, this is how to learn: fear of sin is the sensitivity to why the wisdom was given to me in the first place. For what purpose? Since his heart does not push him to become fearful of sin, his wisdom will not be potent, since his wisdom now prevents

him, it actually tells him to follow his heart. The message wisdom is really trying to convince him to be fearful of sin. So if a person does not have fear of sin to begin with, he and his wisdom are actually enemies, and the wisdom, which was meant to go against the grain of your heart's desires. When a person has fear of sin, it reinforces his soul to agree with the wisdom that wants to go against his natural state, which is to follow and pursue his desires. So you're learning something that you're not going to follow. Wisdom again is trying to prevent the person from following his heart's cravings and therefore in the end, regardless of how much he learns, he in his essence hates the wisdom. It's like learning about your enemy, you can be profoundly knowledgeable about him, but the only way that the wisdom can be integrated is if a person has a willingness to gain fear of sin.

### **The am ha'aretz's take on society**

Now, he brings the definition of *am ha'aretz*, which the Tosafot Yom Tov said is in 5:9. There it says: There are four character traits, or types of people. The one who says "mine is mine is mine," this is an intermediate level and there are those who say that this was the archetype of Sodom, which is very negative. The second type says, "mine is yours, and yours is mine." This is an *am ha'aretz*. So in chapter 5 this term *am ha'aretz* appears here again. An *am ha'aretz* says you can take anything you want from my house, and I can take anything I want from yours.

This is interesting, because we said that an *am ha'aretz* has a good relationship with others. This sounds like... [a kibbutznik]. Yes, that's the reason we wanted to learn this tonight. We said before that an *am ha'aretz* can be fearful of sin, but he can't be a *chassid*. So how is this learnt from this *mishnah*. By saying yours is mine and mine is yours, he gives and takes equally. It doesn't just mean that anyone can come into his house and take whatever he wants, rather that he wants equality. As much as I give, I should receive. We should benefit each other equally. This is an *am ha'aretz*, he's a people of the earth type. And says the Bartenura, this is what civilizes the earth.

### **The Torah's take on society**

But, he doesn't know what the Torah says. For just civilization this works, but the Torah says, that a person who wants to live should hate receiving gifts (שׂוֹנֵא מִתְּנוּת יְהִיָּה), don't take anything from other people. To give and take equally on the one hand civilizes the world, but on the other hand, he doesn't know the verse in Tanach that states that one should hate receiving gifts. This is the meaning of the term *am ha'aretz*. He wants to civilize the world, but he doesn't know Torah.

In passing, let us mention that there was a great person, Samuel the prophet, who never took anything from anyone. There was on the other hand, Elisha the Prophet, who was willing to accept gifts. The sages say that there are two different levels of *tzadikim* in terms of being able to accept gifts. But, here the Bartenura is saying that the conduct of Samuel is preferable to that of Elisha.

### **A politician is an am ha'aretz**

Now, he says, whenever you see this term in the sages, an *am ha'aretz*, the meaning is someone who truly and sincerely wants to rectify society. This is pertinent because there can be a politician that really wants to do good for the country that he lives in. But, he has not the wisdom to know how to go about doing this properly. There are people who truly and sincerely want to do good for society but they don't have the wisdom to know how to do this. So all the laws they pass in the Knesset, it is all out of good intentions, but they don't have the wisdom to do it according to the Torah. Because they don't know how, they make mistakes.

### **Only chassidim can truly rectify society**

If we go back to our *mishnah* then it means that a person who knows what the proper rectification of society, that is a *chassid*. Because before the *mishnah* says that the *am ha'aretz* cannot be a *chassid*. So from this we learn that the *chassid* is a Torah-based leader.

Now we can look at the end of the first *mishnah* and understand how it is related to the beginning: In a place where there are no leaders, you have to be a leader. Every Jew has leadership properties. What does it mean in a place where there are no people? According to this it means that there can be many well-intentioned politicians, but they don't know how to rectify society. This is exactly our situation today. Again, the *mishnah* has nothing against an *am ha'aretz*, but stresses that he will always make mistakes in leadership.

## ***4. The Komarna's definitions for boor and am ha'aretz***

Now we'd like to see how everything in the Torah is relative. We learnt the more literal meanings of boor, *am ha'aretz*, and a *chassid*. The *chassid*, as we just saw, is the leader who knows how to truly rectify society. If we all want to be Chassidim of the Ba'al Shem Tov and of the Rebbe, it means knowing how to rectify society. We'll take the Komarna's commentary on the *mishnah*. This particular section of his commentary is very indicative of how the Komarna understood things—his interpretation is typically very extreme.

### **The boor is a static individual**

Up until now we've understood that a boor is an unplowed field. But, the Komarna writes that a boor is one who has no fountainhead, no wellspring within him. He is connecting being a boor more with the concept of an empty "pit" than with the unplowed field. The pit is empty because it is not a well. When the pit is full of water it's because it has a wellspring inside, there is a renewal of water in its depth. Here too we find our patriarch Yitzchak. His Divine service was to dig wells. A wellspring indicates an infinite outflow. An individual who has no inner flow, no inner innovation—he's our empty boor that cannot possibly be fearful of sin. This is very strong. According to the

Komarna Rebbe, if a person doesn't have an inner flow, he cannot be fearful of sin. Why?

A person who does not renew continuously remains static. He remains today as he was yesterday. If a person is not dynamic in his life and his today is the same as his yesterday, he is a boor. Because the Komarna's measuring stick is relative—he sets the bar much higher than the Bartenura, we will see that a boor can be the definition of even the greatest Rabbis in the generation. At the same time, the term *am ha'aretz* can be used to define even a great Rebbe, who has not yet attained the level of a *chassid*. It is all relative.

### **Sin as lack; the boor as a self-content individual**

So again, the boor has no self-renewal, and his psyche is thick and coarse. The sign of being a coarse individual, a *grob* in Yiddish is that all your days are the same. This individual can never conceive the pleasure, the *geshmak* in Yiddish, the pleasantness of *Hashem*. Such a person cannot be fearful of sin, because, and this is the same throughout Chassidut, the word sin means a "lack." As we explained, fear is sensitivity to something, and the boor is not sensitive to his own lack. He cannot feel that his actions are lacking. For all his actions seem perfect in his own eyes.

So a boor is someone who is self-content, because he has no inner flow of living waters. For example, the Komarna Rebbe writes in his commentary: He got up early in the morning to read *Kriyat Shema* on time, he donned *tefilin* on his head and his arm like stones, and he chirped some *Tehilim* (like a bird chirps), and he even went on to learn a chapter of *mishnah*, and even learned some *Gemara*, and then he had a *chiddush* in the *gemara*, and he feels that there is no *tzadik* like him in the world. All this, says the Komarna Rebbe, is a description of a boor.

### **The *am ha'aretz* is a *tzadik***

So now we continue to read what for the Komarna is an *am ha'aretz*, who cannot be a *chassid*. Since he moved everything over, the whole measuring stick, the *am ha'aretz* is as follows. The sages say that the *am ha'aretz* (which is actually a plural form, as we noted earlier, it is a collective noun) are the people for whom the earth was created. God created the earth for them. The *am ha'aretz* is the purpose of creation, the dwelling place below for the Almighty. Following this definition, the Komarna writes that "the *am ha'aretz* is a true *tzadik*, holy and pure, happy is he. He clings to God, to Hashem, and he learns Torah for its own sake. The Almighty decrees and he annuls it—he has tremendous power in his prayer. He decrees from below and the Almighty fulfills his decree from above."

### **The *am ha'aretz* still lacks absolute selflessness**

Who can be better than this? The *am ha'aretz* according to the Komarna Rebbe is the greatest *tzadik* you can ever imagine. If a person is fluent in the Komarna's writings, he can already guess where he's going to go with the statement that such a *tzadik* cannot be a *chassid*. Obviously the *tzadik* who is an *am ha'aretz* doesn't hold from himself, but what

doesn't he have? Says the Komarna that he has not yet reached the level of absolute nothingness, which is absolute selflessness. He has no pride, arrogance, etc., but he has not yet reached that level of absolute nothingness. So a *chassid* is someone who has reached this level. He's actually implying that a *chassid* is beyond the absolute nothingness. To be a real *chassid* you have to already have that level, and then you can become a *chassid*.

### **Absolute selflessness, a prerequisite for being a chassid**

Who then is a *chassid*? He's really nothingness, and after all the levels that he's gained he feels like nothing and he is like the dust of the earth, and he has no craving nor will. After all his tremendous insights of Torah, he is absolutely null. He has no independent or individual will. He wants nothing. To be truly nothing and then to be a true *chassid* after that, one has no independent will, except that God's Name be sanctified and glorified. That is the only thing that brings him to act and to do something. It's all coming from this one motivation. But, he himself has no will whatsoever.

In other places in his commentary, the Komarna explains even more what it means that a *chassid* is infinitely devoted to every single Jewish soul who you consider to be infinitely more important than yourself. You are totally in this sense out of yourself. All of this was the first part. We took this very simple and well known *mishnah* and looked at the Bartenura's pshat and then at the Chassidic reading of the *mishnah*.

## ***5. Elkanah – Samuel's Father – A man where there are no men***

### **Jerusalem Talmud on Pirkei Avot**

Now we'll go on and conclude with the end of the *mishnah*. We already saw in the Bartenura, how the end connects with the beginning. The end of the *mishnah* states, "In a place where there are no people, you should strive to be a person."

The tractate of *Avot* has no Talmud on it, neither in the Bablyonian or the Jerusalem Talmuds. Therefore, some 100 years ago, someone compiled an anthology of teachings from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds on *Pirkei Avot*. On this *mishnah* he brings the following passage from the Jerusalem Talmud:

"Do not despise your old mother" (a verse in Proverbs). Said Rabbi Ze'ira: If your nation, your people, has become old and weak (mother means nation), do not despise her, but rather get up and strengthen it (גודדק).

For instance in our generation, the Jewish people seem to be old and weak. Get up and strengthen it. If you see that your people are old and weak, pull it together. Take Elkanah, the father of Samuel the Prophet, Channah's husband, as a role model for how this is done.

## Samuel's greatness

The sages state that Samuel the prophet is equal to Moshe Rabbeinu and his brother Aaron together. Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel: Saul and David. The whole anointment, the messianism of the king of Israel, comes from him. His mother Channah was barren. She poured out her heart to God in the Tabernacle in *Shilohh* and God gave her Samuel. When Samuel was 2 years old and weaned, his mother brought him to *Shilohh*, to the Tabernacle and placed him in the care of the priests, because she had made a vow that the son born to her would be dedicated to God.

Now the question is: How did she merit giving birth to such a great son—the source of Mashiach, the one who anoints? You have to have tremendous merit. There are many things about her merits, but now we'll hear about Samuel's father, Elkanah. Of course there are two people, mother and father, that have to merit such a great son.

## Elkanah's story in Tana Devei Eliyahu

First of all the *Yerushalmi* tells us not to despise our nation if it's weak. Strengthen it, fence it and take your example from Elkanah. What did Elkanah do? He taught and led the Jewish people to make the pilgrimages to the Tabernacle on the festivals. In the Bible there's very little said about Elkanah, but one of the things it does say is that he had a custom to go to *Shilohh*, to the Tabernacle every year. The sages had an exact tradition of who Elkanah was and what merited his having such a great son. The *Yerushalmi* here doesn't give the whole story behind this man. But in the *Tana Devei Eliyahu* in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, it brings his story in length. Again, Elkanah is the role model for someone who takes the leadership role and strengthens his whole generation.

## Four pilgrimages a year to the Tabernacle in Shilohh

Elkanah made the pilgrimage to *Shilohh*, to the place of the Tabernacle, 4 times a year. Before the Holy Temple was built in Jerusalem by King Solomon, God's Presence manifest in the desert Tabernacle, which once the Jewish people entered the land of Israel made its way to *Shilohh*, where it stood for 369 years. Now, making the pilgrimage 4 times a year is very strange because there are only 3 festivals. We've never heard of a requirement to go 4 times. The festivals are the time of pilgrimage.

## Elkanah's consciousness of God's place

Elkanah (אֱלְקָנָה) equals "place" (מְקוֹם). "Place" equals 186, or 6 times 31, the value of God's Name, *Kel* (אֱל), or "to" (אֵל). One of the explanations therefore of God's Name *Kel* is that it is like a vector driving you "to" a certain place. The first two letters of Elkanah's name are "to" (אֵל), so the rest of his name's letters, קָנָה equal 155, or 5 times 31. What this teaches us is that Elkanah has a very strong relationship with spatial-consciousness, he is constantly aware of the "place." One of God's connotations is the place (הַמְּקוֹם). God is the place, the space of the universe. God is everywhere, but the consciousness of God is only revealed openly in His special place, in the Tabernacle in the desert and later at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. When you take *Havayah* and square each letter, the sum

comes also to 186, the value of “place” (מָקוֹם). This is one of the two *kavanot* in Kabbalah regarding the word “place.”

### **Properly adding to one’s special mitzvah**

So Elkanah is very aware and devoted—his whole life is devoted—to bringing the Jewish people to the place. This is like the saying “with what *mitzvah* did your father most shine brilliantly” (בְּמַאי הָיוּ אֲבוֹתָי זְהִיר טָפִי). The “father” here is now Samuel’s father. Elkanah merited Samuel because of his most brilliant *mitzvah*—making the pilgrimage to see God and be seen at the Tabernacle. His campaign was to bring the entire Jewish people to the place.

The first thing that we now see is that he used to go 4 times a year. Why 4 times? 3 from the Torah and 1 more that he took upon himself as a present (נְדָבָה) to God. When something is your *mitzvah*, then you have to be a *chassid vis a vis* your *mitzvah*, and you have to do it more than the letter of the law requires. So he took it upon himself, he volunteered to go not 3 but 4 times. The sages don’t say when this was. But, as we’ll see later on, there must be some mathematical principle behind when he decided to make his 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage.

Now, sometimes in the Torah it is forbidden to add a *mitzvah*—in this case though it is permissible. You can go every day to the Temple. Not only is it ok, but it’s a sign that you’re a *chassid* who again does more than what the Torah requires of him. It was not an oath, but a present that he gave out of his heart. The sages learnt that he went 4 times a year from the verse, “And the man [Elkanah] would ascend from his city, as was his custom, to bow down and bring sacrifices to the God of Hosts in *Shilohh*” (1 Samuel 1:3). He went from time to time to fulfill his vows and bring sacrifices at the Tabernacle. It’s not clear though how the sages learnt from this verse that he went 4 times a year.

### **Elkanah’s pilgrimage**

Now, here is what the *Tana Devei Eliyahu* tells us about Elkanah’s pilgrimage. Elkanah went with his wife and his children. He never traveled alone. He took his entire household and his sisters and all his relatives. He paid all the expenses of course, and told them: Learn from the Canaanites, the native pagans. What can you learn from them? In our generation we can learn this from the Arabs. What can we learn from them? They are our enemies. We can learn from their sense of devotion to their pagan temples. Learn this from them, that even though their faith is empty and vain, yet still they make pilgrimages to their temples. All the more so that we should go up before the Ark of the Covenant, the place of the Ever-living God, may He be blessed for ever and ever.

Elkanah instructed his family to learn from the non-Jews, look at the religious non-Jews who devote themselves to emptiness and vanity. All the more so that we should devote ourselves to go to God’s place, the place where it is manifest that God is the place of the whole universe. Meaning, that after you go home, you retain the consciousness that God is the place you are in, wherever you happen to be.

## **Caring for one's fellow Jews**

When they were on the way, it took a few days, and wherever they camped, they camped in the middle of the street. In every city they visited on their way there were inns, but they slept in the marketplace, the whole family. The 3 festivals are when they are, because it is difficult to travel during the winter. (It also means that the fourth time he added, could not have been in the winter). He made sure that all the men and women were separated when they went to sleep. Since they were sleeping in the marketplace, all the men of the community came to be with his family's men, and all the women would gather round the females in his family. Each woman would choose a woman to talk to and each man would choose one to talk to—this is pure *mitzo'im*.

There were also adults whose task was to speak with the children. Obviously, all the children came out to see Elkanah and his family and so it was like a youth movement. In this manner, the longer it took to reach *Shiloh* the better, because they would farbreng all night long. The entire country was excited. They would ask them of course: Where are you going? They would answer, "We are going to the House of God in *Shiloh* from whence Torah and good deeds go out to the entire world. Why not join us and we'll go together." Immediately people began tearing. Other Jewish people never dreamt of going to *Shilohh*, when they heard the sincerity of these people and saw their self sacrifice, they immediately decided to join them.

Even though Elkanah only made the pilgrimage to *Shilohh* 4 times a year, it took him all the time in between his travels to plan each time. The first year it was only his family that went with him. In the second year, there were 5 households that accompanied him (his relatives, etc.), apart from the people that joined him on the way. In the third year, there were 10 households. In the fourth year, the emotion and power of his pilgrimage grew geometrically, and 60 households went with him. He had it all planned out, so that the path that he took one year, he didn't repeat the next year. Every time he went through new towns. Until, eventually, all of Israel made the pilgrimage to *Shilohh* in his merit. His campaign was a total success.

In this manner, Elkanah brought the entire Jewish people to merit. He educated the entire Jewish people in *mitzvot* in this way, and many were purified thanks to his virtue. The Almighty who sees man's innermost feelings said: You brought merit to the entire Jewish people, and you educated them in *mitzvot*, and many have merit in your virtue, by your life [God's oath], I will give you a son who will bring merit to the entire Jewish people and do the same, he will educate them in *mitzvot*, and bring them merit. Thus, the *midrash* concludes, the reward for Elkanah's actions was Samuel.

## **Elkanah and Samuel: Run and return**

The interesting thing in the end is that God says, just as you did 3 things: you merited the entire Jewish people, and you educated them in *mitzvot*, and in your virtue—the people merited to perform *mitzvot*, likewise, you will merit having a son who does these same 3 things. It appears that Samuel is just a copy of his father. But, in practice, Samuel was very different. He made a circuit of the entire country once a year, and judged the people where they lived. He did not at all do the same thing as his father.

And yet, he accomplished the same 3 things. Elakanah aroused “run” (רָצוּא) in the heart’s of the people, and then Samuel inherited that merit and turned it into a state of “return” (שׁוּב). Samuel grew up in *Shiloh*, he was there fulltime, but then his life was devoted to take the light from the Tabernacle and to bring it to all the people.

In *Hayom Yom*, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the Torah’s revealed dimension attracts people without fear, therefore they are drawn to it naturally. But, Chassidut is like fire, so it causes fear. That is why to spread Chassidut you have to go out yourself and bring it to them.

## ***6. The mathematics behind Elkanah’s conduct and success***

### **Geometric growth in expansion**

Now, let’s see the progression. From 1 family to 5 families to 10 families to 60 families. This implies that we can continue to series infinitely. The base of the series is 44. The growth her is geometric, meaning that the each number is multiplied by a constant, but unlike a simple geometric series where the growth is based on a single constant, we here have 3 constants used in succession. This is an ideal growth pattern.

First of all it teaches us that nothing happens overnight. You have to be devoted for years and years. From the fact that the geometric constants (the multipliers) are 5, 2, and 6, we learn that growth has ups and downs. You expand greatly the first year, then it goes down the next year, and then it really starts growing. That in itself is a very important insight in and of itself. So in the fifth year there would have been 300, and then 600, and then 3600. Since, 5, 2, and 6 multiplied are 60, it means that every 3 years, you multiply by 60.

### **Greatness and growth**

The numbers 5, 2, 6 form the word “give” (הָבֵן). The most important verse in the Torah with this word is, “Give greatness to our God” (הָבֵן גְּדֹלָ לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ). This is the verse that best describes growth in the *Tanach*.

In the first three years, there were 1, 5, and 10 households, the value of the word “Where?” (אֵימָה), like in the *Kedushah* of the *Musaf* prayer on Shabbat, where we repeat the question asked by the angels, “Where is His place of glory?” Again, alluding to the notion of “place” that Elkanah was so aware of.

Now, if we add the numbers from 1 to 3600, we get 4576. 4576 is a multiple of Havayah (there is only a 1 in 26 chance for this to happen), it is 176 times 36. or 8 times 22 times 26. 176 is a number that alludes to growth and greatness in Torah. It is the number of verses in the longest *parashah* in the Torah (Nasso); it is the number of verses in the longest chapter in Psalms (119); and, it is the number of pages in the longest tractate in the Talmud (Bava Batra).

## When was Elkanah's fourth pilgrimage?

Now let's go back to our question of when was Elkanah's fourth pilgrimage. The answer can only be found if we first understand the relationship between the dates of the regular 3 festivals. Again, this is not brought anywhere, but is an example of how mathematical logic, applying our understanding, can help us understand how to serve God.

The 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan is Pesach, Shavu'ot is the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, which is 50 days after Pesach, and Sukkot is on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei. Elkanah had to find a clue as to when would be the most appropriate time to make his 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage, the one he volunteered on his own. When a person adds something, he has to find his innovation from the Torah, even though it's his.

Now the length of time between Shavu'ot and Tishrei is much greater (more than twice) the time between Pesach and Shavu'ot, so it seems logical that the 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage should be conducted sometime between Shavu'ot and Sukkot. As we said, from Pesach to Shavu'ot there are 50 days. From Shavu'ot to Sukkot there are 127 days. We should select a day that would make an arithmetic progression. How should we divide 127 so that we add the same number of days plus a constant to the date of the 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage and then add the same number of days plus twice the constant to get to Sukkot? The answer is easy to find: the constant is 9. Therefore, if we add 59 days from Shavu'ot, we arrive at the 6<sup>th</sup> of Av. Then we add 59 plus 9 more days, or 68 days, and we indeed arrive at Sukkot. So the series of differences between the 4 dates is a simple arithmetic series: 50, 59, 68. It must be then that the 6<sup>th</sup> of Av is the best time of the year to sleep outside. We can have a new *minhag* (custom) commemorating Elkanah's 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage.

## More on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Av

Another thing that is even more amazing: If we add this date, then we have that the pilgrimages were on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the dates of the festivals become symmetric: 15-6-6-15.

Each of the festivals is 7 days, and Shavu'ot which is only 1 day has 6 days following it during which one can make up sacrifices that were not brought on the festival itself. Now, if we add all the dates on which the 7 days of Pesach occur, we have 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21, which equals 126 (7 times the middle date, 18). What happens if you add the dates of Shavu'ot and its 6 days of make-up? They are the numbers from 6 to 12, whose sum is 63. But, 63 is exactly half of 126. So a holiday that begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> is double a holiday that begins on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

The sum of all the dates of all four pilgrimages together equal 378 (126 times 2 plus 2 times 63), the value of "*chashmal*," and also the triangle of 27. But, on Sukkot you stay another day, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tishrei. So the final sum comes to 378 plus 22, or 400, the consummation of the entire alphabet, Rebbe Nachman's favorite number, or 20 squared.

## **The fourth pilgrimage sweetens Tisha B'av**

Now, what about Tisha B'av? It is the middle point of Elkanah's holiday. So he was already sweetening the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. The 6<sup>th</sup> of Av is usually the week in which Tisha B'av occurs, which according to our customs is the greatest time of mourning. If everyone would follow his custom, there would be no destruction of the Temple. The Alter Rebbe's wedding day is on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Av.

## **Elkanah's efforts and the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

One final concluding thought. How do we understand Elkanah's *mitzvah*. He is our prime example of how in a place that there are no people—which he would read as in the place that God dwells there are not enough people. In our time, there are no people on the Temple Mt. only foxes stray there. What *mitzvah* of the Rebbe resembles this? The Rebbe said that this place that I'm sitting in here, at 770 Eastern Parkway, it is like the *Beit Hamikdash* in our times. He said to the *shluchim*, just bring as many Jews as you can to me. He needed an Elkanah figure that would arouse the people to cry and decide to come to him.