

Pirkei Avot 3:7

Only God

Rabbi Elazar of Bartota would say: Give Him what is His, for you and whatever is yours, are His. As David says: "For everything comes from You, and from Your own hand we give to You."

This *mishnah* provides us with a double approach as to how man should stand before God. All of a person's possessions are actually God's, "**whatever is yours, are His,**" as in the words of the sages on the verse in Job 41:3, "Who has given Me anything beforehand, that I should repay him,": "Who praised Me before I gave him a soul? Who made a mezuzah for Me before I gave him a house? Who made a lulav for Me before I gave him money?"^[1] In our *mishnah*, Rabbi Elazar adds to this thought and says that the person himself belongs to God: "...**for you, and whatever is yours, are His.**"

There are two main foundations in the service of God: *Bitul* (nullification) and *shiflut* (lowliness). Nullification is the feeling that 'I am nothing before God.' It is ascent and cleaving to the infinite. Lowliness, on the other hand, is the feeling that I, myself, am lowly and lacking everything, like an empty vessel void of the presence of God. This is how we can understand Rabbi Elazar's words, "**You are His.**" This refers to nullification when a person is drawn into the light of God's countenance. "**Whatever is yours, is His**" refers to the service of lowliness, when a person understands that he has nothing from himself and that all that he has is from God.

The name of the Rabbi in this *mishnah* is Rabbi Elazar the man of Bartota. The final letters of his title in reverse order spell out the word "*ashrei*". The root of the word "*ashrei*" is "*asher*," which means to walk on the straight path, as in the verse, "Happy (*Ashrei*) is the man who did not go with the counsel of the wicked and on the path of the sinners he did not stand and in the seat of the scornful he did not sit."^[2] By means of the service of lowliness and nullification, a person ascends from strength to strength on the path of separating himself from evil (by employing lowliness) until cleaving to God (by employing nullification).

There are two figures in the Bible who represent the service of nullification and lowliness. Moses is the personification of the service of nullification and cleaving to God. He is called "the man of God."^[3] The sages comment on this that "from the midpoint down, he was a man and from the midpoint up he was God"^[4] Moses cleaved to God to the point that the sages said about him the "the Divine Presence speaks from his throat."^[5]

King David, on the other hand, personifies the attribute of lowliness, as he testified about himself, "And I would be lowly in my eyes"^[6] after he danced with all his might before God. As Rabbi Elazar sums up his words in this *mishnah*,

“As David says: "For everything comes from You, and from Your own hand we give to You." This verse expresses the service of “what is yours is His,” the service of lowliness – “For everything comes from You.”

[1] *Vayikra Rabah* 27b.

[2] Psalms 1:1.

[3] Deuteronomy 31:1.

[4] Quoted extensively by the sages, as per the Zohar 3:232 and in *Shemot Rabbah* 3:15 and more.

[5] *Devarim Rabbah* 11:4.

[6] Samuel B, 6:22.