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The Right Balance

The *Mishnah* teaches (3:12):

R' Yishmael said, be *kal* (light/swift) to the *rosh* (head), affable to the *tishchoret* (young) and receive everyone with happiness.

What does this *Mishnah* mean and what is *R' Yishmael* teaching us?

The *Bartenura* explains that the focus of this *Mishnah* is interpersonal relationships. The *Abrabanel* explains that earlier we learnt that "Anyone who is pleasing to his friend is pleasing to *Hashem*" while the same is true in the reverse. The *Mishnayot* that followed dealt with characteristics and actions that impact negatively on relationships. *R' Yishmael* therefore follows with those things that foster good relationships.

When someone encounters a "head", an important person, the *Bartenura* explains that one should be light and swift to attend to their needs. Similarly the *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that one should consider themselves as being like light dust and not consider themselves as being amongst his peers. One could however meet a *tishchoret*. The *Bartenura* explains that this refers to someone who is young (whose hair is still *shachor* – black) and one should be patient and easy to towards them. The *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that the word *tishchoret* means tax. Consequently even when one engages with someone of a lower level, even if he need pay you tax, you should treat him with love and be humble in his presence.

There are a number of interpretations that maintain that the *Mishnah* has a very different focus. The

Midrash Shmuel cites *R' Yisrael* who maintains that the "Rosh" in the *Mishnah* refers to *Hashem*. Consequently the *Mishnah* begins by teaching that one should swift to fulfill the word of *Hashem*. The *Mishnah* however continues, that sometimes life may be difficult and dark. Nevertheless one should be still be calm and worship *Hashem* with all his heart. Finally the *R' Yishmael* warns that if someone approaches you, even in the difficult times, you should receive him with happiness.

The *Magen Avot* explains that the *Rosh* refers to one's spiritual interests. The word *tishchoret* is associated with the word *shachvar*, meaning captain. This refers to the body, whose needs being satisfied, supports the soul. Consequently the *Mishnah* teaches that one should primarily be swift to satisfy his spiritual needs and temper his physical ones. Despite the weighting, one should nevertheless accept "*kol adam*", both spiritual and physical pleasure with happiness.

The *Magen Avot* provides another explanation in a similar manner. *R' Yishmael* had argued with *R' Shimon ben Yochai* regarding whether to combine *Torah* with *Derech Eretz* with *R' Yishmael* arguing in its favour. Here *R' Yishmael* elaborates on his position. The prime focus should be *Torah* which impacts on the head, the spiritual needs. Material needs however, should be considered relaxed and secondary in focus. He finishes that one should accept everyone with happiness, even those engaged in work, for work is what we are a meant to be doing.

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