

“What Does God Ask of Me?”

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Congregation Beth Torah

Rabbi Vered L. Harris

Introductory Text - Mishnah Kiddushin 1:10 (BT Kiddushin 40b)

כָּל שֶׁמִּשְׁנֵהוּ בַּמִּקְרָא וּבַמִּשְׁנָה וּבִדְרֹךְ אֶרֶץ, לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה הוּא חוֹטֵא, שְׁנֵאֲמַר:
(קהלת ד) וְהַחַיִּט הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק.
וְכָל שֶׁאִינוֹ לֹא בַּמִּקְרָא וְלֹא בַּמִּשְׁנָה וְלֹא בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, אֵינוֹ מִן הַיָּשׁוּב:

Anyone involved in the study of Scripture and Mishnah and in following *derech erez* will not readily sin, as it is stated: *The three-ply cord is not easily severed* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). And anyone not involved in the study of Scripture or Mishnah or following *derech erez* is not a citizen of society.

Explanation of *The three-ply cord is not easily severed*.

The obligations of man fall into three categories:

- (1) *Faith* - belief in God, the primary source of which is Scripture
- (2) *Deeds* - observing mitzvot, which one learns how to do from Mishnah
- (3) *Character* - refining one's character, which stems from *derech erez*

In this study guide:

Micah and both Isaiah translations copied from *Machzor Eit Ratzon* (www.newsiddur.org) with permission of the author.

Mishnah Kiddushin and Brachot 17a translations from *Talmud Bavli*, The Schottenstein Edition (Artscroll 1999).

Mishnah Pe'ah translation is my own.

Machzor Eit Ratzon and The Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud are available as reference books in the Sader-Shimkin Library.

Hevruta Text #1 - Mishnah Pe'ah 1:1(A)

אלו דברים שאין להם שעור. הפאה, והבכורים, והראיון, וגמילות חסדים, ותלמוד תורה.

These are obligations for which there is not a set quantity required in order to fulfill your obligation of doing them:

- Leaving the corners of one's field unreaped for the poor to harvest for themselves (*pe'ah*),
- and dedicating the first-fruits of the harvest to God (*bikkurim*),
- and appearing at the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot (*re'ayon*),
- and practicing loving kindness (*gemilut hasadim*),
- and learning Torah (*talmud Torah*).

1. According to this text, what is required of you?
2. Take an inventory of yourself: To what degree are you fulfilling each of these five obligations?
3. For each of these obligations, where are you strong and where are you weak? Why?
4. What would be the outcome if all Jewish people followed this text? If all people followed it?
5. How does this text relate to being a citizen of the Jewish people?

Hevruta Text #2 - Mishnah Pe'ah 1:1(B)

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא. כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם:

The following are the things for which a man enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains for him in the World to Come:

- Honoring father and mother (*kibud av v'em*),
- and the practice of loving kindness (*gemilut hasadim*),
- and bringing peace (*shalom*) between a person and his or her friend,
- and the study of Torah (*talmud Torah*) is equal to them all.

1. What does this text ask of you?
2. What is the reward for observing the four mitzvot in this text?
3. What challenges you or makes you uncomfortable about this text?
4. Suggest why Torah study is equal to the other three mitzvot in this mishnah.
5. How does being a citizen at Beth Torah support what God wants from you in this text?

Hevruta Text #3 - Isaiah 58:13-14

(13) If you refrain from ordinary activity on Shabbat, from carrying on your business on my holy day, and if you understand the Shabbat as a delight, a day sanctified to God's honor, and if you honor it by abstaining from your work, from seeking profit and conducting business.

(14) Then you will find delight in Adonai. I will transport you beyond earthly boundaries, and I will nourish you with the spiritual heritage of your ancestors. This is what I do promise.

(13) אם תשוב משבת רגלך
עשות חפצך ביום קדשי
וקראת לשבת ענג
לקדוש יהוה מכבוד
וכבודתו מעשות דרכיך
ממצוא חפצך ודבר דבר:
(14) אז תתענג על יהוה
והרפתיד עלי בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ
והאכלתיד נחלת יעקב אביך
כי פי יהוה דבר:

1. Is this text about Faith, Deeds or Character?
2. What is the challenge proposed in this text?
3. What is the reward for meeting the challenge?
4. Is this a reward that has value in your life today?
5. In what ways does being a citizen that shows up on Friday nights at Beth Torah enable you to do what God asks for in this text?

Hevruta Text #4 - Micah 6:8

You have been told, human, what is good, that is, the traits that God expects of you - acting justly, a passion for loving-kindness, and walking humbly with your God.

הגיד לך אדם מה טוב
ומה יתוה דורש ממך כי
אם-עשות משפט ואהבת ה'סד
והצנע לכת עם-אלהיך:

1. Is this text about Faith, Deeds or Character?
2. What in this text challenges you, or causes you to feel uncomfortable?
3. What in this text do you consider to be an obvious part of being Jewish?
4. Give specific examples of how you exemplify each of the expectations presented in this text. How do you enact justice? Passionately pursue loving kindness? Demonstrate humility before God?
5. How does being a citizen at Beth Torah relate to what God wants from you in this text?

Hevruta Text #5 - Isaiah 58:5-7

(5) God might respond:

"Is this the kind of fast that I wanted,
a day whose focus is self-affliction?
Do I really want you to bow your head like a
bulrush,
to wear sackcloth and ashes?
Is this what you mean by a fast,
a day to obtain God's approval?

(5) הֲכֵזָה יְהוָה צוֹם אֲבֹתָיו

יּוֹם עֲנוֹת אָדָם נַפְשׁוֹ

הִלָּכָה בְּאֵמֶן רֹאשׁוֹ

וְשָׁק וְאֶפֶר יַצִּיעַ

הַלְזָה תִקְרָא-צוֹם

וַיּוֹם רָצוֹן לַיהוָה:

(6) הֲלֹא זֶה צוֹם אֲבֹתָיו

פִּתְחַ הַרְצָבוֹת רָשָׁע

הַתֵּר אֲגָדוֹת מוֹטָה

וְשַׁלַּח רִצּוּצִים הַפְּשִׁים

וְכָל-מוֹטָה תִּנְתְּקוּ:

(7) הֲלֹא פָרֶם לָרֹעֵב לֶחֶמֶךָ

וַעֲנִיִּים מְרוּדִים תִּבְיֵא בֵּית

כִּי-תִרְאֶה עָרֶם וְכִסִּיתוֹ

וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

(7) Share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless into your house;
provide clothing for those who lack it,
and do not turn away from those in need."

1. Is this text about Faith, Deeds or Character?
2. What is your reaction to this text on a gut level?
3. What do you do that responds to the demands in this text?
4. What challenges you or makes you uncomfortable about this text?
5. In what ways does being a citizen that shows up on Friday nights at Beth Torah encourage you to do what God asks for in this text?

BT Brachot 17a

After studying together the Sages would say to one another:

May your heart ponder and achieve understanding,
may your mouth speak wisdom
and may your tongue bring forth song.
May you have a straightforward understanding of Torah,
may your eyes be enlightened by the light of Torah
and may your face shine like the brightness of the sky.
May your lips express knowledge
and your insides rejoice in righteousness,
and may your feet run to hear the words of the Ancient of Days, the Holy God.