

Perpetuating the *Masorah*  
Halakhic, Ethical, and Experiential Dimensions





Rabbi Professor Yitzhak Twersky,  
The Talner Rebbe

PERPETUATING  
THE MASORAH

HALAKHIC, ETHICAL,  
AND EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS

**Essays in Memory of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

EDITED BY  
Carmi Horowitz  
and  
David Shapiro

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*In memory of*  
**Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Asher (Isadore) Twersky זצ"ל**

*Those who had the zekhut of interacting with  
him could not help but be awed  
by the moral force of his personal example, his towering intellect,  
and his personification of "vehalakhta bidrakhav."  
These memories fortify and inspire me almost  
daily, twenty-five years later.*

*Donny and Shana Feldman and family*



לֹא בְרוּחַ ה'; וְאַחַר הַרוּחַ רֵעֵשׁ, לֹא בְרֵעֵשׁ ה'.  
וְאַחַר הָרֵעֵשׁ אֵשׁ, לֹא בְאֵשׁ ה'; וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמַמָּה דְקָה.  
(מלכים א' יט, יא-יב)

*In memory of our beloved Rebbe*  
**Rabbi Yitzhak Asher Twersky זצ"ל**

*Nahum and Rina Felman and family*



*In grateful appreciation of*  
**מורנו ורבנו**  
**Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky זצ"ל**  
*teacher, friend, spiritual guide, moral exemplar.*

*Steve and Sybil Levisohn*



וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ בֵינָהּ לְהַבִּין וְלְהַשְׁכִּיל לְשִׁמְעַת לְלַמֵּד וְלִלְמֹד לְשָׁמֵר  
וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וְלִקְיָם אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרַתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.

*In memory and appreciation of our beloved Rebbe,*

**Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky זצ"ל**

*who was and remains a role model for us in the way  
of serving Hashem with both our hearts and minds.*

*Albert and Batsheva Ruback and family*



*In honor of my beloved cousin a"h  
a person of giant intellect, moral integrity,  
and personal family commitment,  
who integrated philosophy, Halakhah, and Hasidut*

*Nahum Twersky*



*In Loving Memory of Our Parents*

**Abraham and Sylvia Wintman**

אברהם צבי בן יצחק חיים  
שרה בלומא בת קלמן מרדכי הכהן

*Our parents' lives together devoted to family, community,  
and Klal Yisrael, and the especially close relationship  
our parents maintained with the Rav,  
have been a wellspring of inspiration to our entire family.*

*Kenny Wintman and Sandy Welkes*





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## Preface

The first four essays in this book were originally delivered orally from 1994 to 1996 by Rabbi Professor Yitzhak Twersky, the Talner Rebbe, in memory of his father-in-law Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.<sup>1</sup> The last essay of the book was written by R. Twersky and published in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* in a special memorial issue dedicated to the Rov (vol. 30, no. 4, Summer 1996) and was newly edited for this volume.

The recordings of the first four chapters of the book were transcribed by Yehuda Galinsky. Chapter 4 was then edited by Carmi Horowitz and published in the *Torah U-Madda Journal*, vol. 8 (1998–1999) under the editorship of Jacob J. Schacter. In preparing this volume, the

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1. Most of the original oral *shiurim* were delivered close to the Rov's *yahrzeit*, which is 18 Nissan. They do not appear in this volume in their original chronological order but rather in thematic sequence.

Chapter 1, "Raise Up Many Disciples," was delivered on April 5, 1994 at Maimonides School.

Chapter 2, "From God's Torah to the Scholar's Torah," was delivered on April 14, 1996 at Maimonides School.

Chapter 3, "The Sages and Their Students," was delivered on June 14, 1994 at a Convention of the Rabbinical Council of America, where most of the attendees were former students of the Rov.

Chapter 4, "Make a Fence Around the Torah," was delivered on April 23, 1995 at Maimonides School.

transcriptions of these four chapters were reviewed by Menachem Jacobowitz and edited by Carmi Horowitz and David Shapiro. In some cases, insertions were made from R. Twersky's own notes for the *shiurim*. In translating the spoken word into the written medium, rhetorical repetitions and similar aspects of the oral delivery were eliminated, although the editors tried to preserve to the best of their ability R. Twersky's voice.

All five chapters contained many Hebrew sources, only some of which were translated or paraphrased by R. Twersky. When R. Twersky translated, he would at times interpolate comments while translating; the editors preserved those interpolations in parentheses and italics when presenting his translation. In order to make this volume accessible to English readers, all Hebrew sources that were not translated orally were translated by the editors in the body of the text, and the original Hebrew was placed in footnotes. When translating, the editors consulted existing standard translations, but modified them when appropriate.

The footnotes in these articles serve several purposes in addition to presenting the Hebrew texts. Full documentation for all sources is provided. At times R. Twersky referred to ideas or texts in an aside, and in order not to break the flow of the *shiur* we relegated those to footnotes. The footnotes also contain cross-references added by the editors to other chapters in the book and to some of R. Twersky's other writings. Occasionally the editors felt the need to clarify in order to enhance the reader's understanding; brackets were used to indicate editorial insertions. In chapter 5, the original published text contained untranslated Hebrew sources. In this volume we have translated all of the Hebrew in the text and have put the original Hebrew in footnotes. In addition, R. Twersky had provided his own footnotes to his essay in *Tradition*. The footnotes of chapter 5 thus contain the original Hebrew texts of the chapter as well as R. Twersky's own footnotes.

Shortly before R. Twersky passed away on 11 Tishrei 5758, one of the editors (C.H.) discussed with him the publication of these *shiurim* and was urged to give them priority. Indeed, as mentioned, one of the *shiurim* was published shortly after his passing, but only recently was progress made in editing the others.

The other editor (D.S.) is continuing to prepare R. Twersky's *divrei Torah* for publication. *Torah of the Mind, Torah of the Heart: Divrei*

*Torah of the Talner Rebbe – Bereishis, Shemos*, edited by David Shapiro (Urim, 2020), will soon be followed by the volume on Vayikra through Devarim, and the publication of other *shiurei Torah* by R. Twersky is planned.

All translations from the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Hamadda* were taken from a new translation by Bernard Septimus (a student and colleague of R. Twersky at Harvard University), to be published by Yale University Press. We thank him as well for his help in cutting a number of Gordian knots for us. We thank Ora Wiskind for her careful editing of the introduction to this book, and we thank Jeffery Saks, editor of *Tradition*, for permission to reprint R. Twersky's appreciation of the Rov (chapter 5).

We want to express our thanks and gratitude to Matthew Miller, publisher at Koren Publishers Jerusalem and its imprint Maggid Books, to Rabbi Reuven Ziegler for his welcoming of this volume to Koren, and to the editors Ita Olesker, Debbie Ismailoff, and Efrat Gross, who provided us with expert editorial advice both stylistic and substantive. Thanks, too, to indexers Marc Sherman and Nachum Goldstein. OU Press was generous in accepting this book under their aegis as well, and we thank Rabbi Menachem Genack and Rabbi Simon Posner for their help and support.

We feel privileged to be able to present these *shiurim* to the wider public.

Carmi Horowitz

David Shapiro

Jerusalem

February 2023/ Shevat 5783



## Introduction

**P***erpetuating the Masorah* is an unusual document in the history of religious-spiritual literature. It is a collection of essays on aggadic, halakhic, ethical, and spiritual themes by Rabbi Professor Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky (1930–1997)<sup>1</sup> dedicated to the memory of his father-in-law, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Prof. Twersky, a world-famous, world-class academic, was the Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard University, who founded and headed the university's Center for Jewish Studies. He was considered one of the outstanding Maimonidean scholars of his time and a master of medieval Jewish intellectual history with a specialty in the relationship between Halakhah and Jewish spirituality. His books and his articles became classics in his

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1. For a detailed account of his life and his scholarly contributions see, Carmi Horowitz, "Halakha and History, Intellectualism and Spirituality: Prof. Isadore (Yitzhak) Twersky's Academic-Religious Profile," in Meir Soloveichik, Stuart Halpern, Shlomo Zuckier, eds., *Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity* (Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought and Maggid Books, 2015), 249–280. An expanded Hebrew version of this article appeared in Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky, *Kema'ayan Hamitgaber: Law and Spirit in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Heb.), edited by Carmi Horowitz (The Zalman Shazar Center, 2020), 29–58. An earlier biographical article, idem, "Professor Yitzchak Twersky – The Talner Rebbe z"l: A Brief Biography" appeared in the *Torah U-Madda Journal*, vol. 8, 1998–1999, 41–58.

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lifetime, and they continue to be studied and quoted. His magnum opus, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*, is a brilliant and innovative study of Maimonides' Code of Law. His writing is effervescent, teeming with insights and new understandings of Maimonides, in both the text of the book and the incredibly rich footnotes, which gesture to myriad potential new directions in the study of Maimonidean thought. In addition, a volume of thirty-one of his academic articles was recently published in Hebrew, entitled *Kema'ayan Hamitgaber*.<sup>2</sup> Those collected essays showcase the breadth and depth of his thought, including new studies on central themes in Maimonidean thought; the complementary relationship between Halakhah and meta-halakhic disciplines, such as philosophy, Kabbalah, works on ethics and Hasidism, that provided the spiritual-intellectual underpinning of Halakhah; studies of major halakhic figures, and of commentators to the Bible and to *aggadot Hāzal*; and incisive essays on some important contemporary themes.

Simultaneous with his career at Harvard University, R. Twersky succeeded his father, R. Meshulem Zusha Twersky, as the ḥasidic head of Beit Hamidrash Beit David in Brookline, and served there as the Talner Rebbe. There he prayed, taught Torah, and guided the congregants. R. Twersky was deeply committed to his role as the Rebbe, and while he dispensed with some of the externalities of ḥasidic garb, he saw himself as a link in the chain of ḥasidic tradition. He was as punctilious in preserving ḥasidic customs as he was in his halakhic observance, and was a compassionate leader who cared for and took close interest in his congregants. And just as he praised his father-in-law for his bountiful *hesed*, his own *hesed* was extensive and sensitive, yet covert and concealed.

The essays in this volume reveal one more facet of R. Twersky's legacy, and that is the profound impact that his father-in-law the Rov, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, had upon him. R. Twersky writes in the introduction to his book on Maimonides how he "repeatedly benefitted from his [father-in-law's] immense and genuinely effervescent learning... [he] has given me so much over the years that it would be folly to assume that formal acknowledgement would be fully expressive." The first four

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2. See previous note. Of the thirty-one, seventeen were translated into Hebrew from the original English; the other fourteen were originally written in Hebrew.



chapters in this volume were *shiurim* by R. Twersky in tribute to the Rov; they were not intended to be a *hesped*. However, the “presence” of the Rov is felt in all of them, either explicitly or implicitly. The themes that are developed were important to both of them, and in *Perpetuating the Masorah* R. Twersky is also perpetuating the legacy of the Rov. The chapters of this volume offer insight into the Rov’s influence on him, notwithstanding his own independent and original thinking and writing.

R. Prof. Twersky’s academic writing was as profound as it was all-encompassing. Although he ostensibly dealt with historical and conceptual issues in the detached mode of a Harvard scholar, the discerning reader can sense an undercurrent of identification, of passion, of an almost experiential fusion with the topics and personalities that concerned him.

That the (understated) ardor and passion were truly there could be corroborated by the personal experience of davening at the Talner *beit midrash*, by meeting the Talner Rebbe and hearing him deliver a classic *shiur* in Talmud, short and incisive *divrei Torah* at *seudah shelishit* at the Talner shul,<sup>3</sup> and at times longer, fully developed *shiurim*, all of which were blended with original, creative understanding of Torah verses, of talmudic discussions, and of aggadic homilies and narratives. The readers of the essays in this volume will get a glimpse of all of the above. These are not intellectually detached scholarly essays but rather edited transcriptions of his carefully crafted oral *shiurim*. Commitment to the *masorah*, the passion and love of Torah, the excitement of understanding *penimiyut hatorah* – the inner spirituality of Torah – all flow from the words and from between the words of these essays.

The essays in this volume all relate to the content of the *masorah*, the tradition of the Written and Oral Law revealed at Sinai, and its preservation and transmission throughout the generations. Some of the topics are: the teaching of Torah and its goals; how one becomes a Torah scholar; the prerogatives of Torah scholars as well as their responsibilities and obligations; the ways in which Torah should be taught; the qualities of teachers of Torah as well as of students of Torah; and,

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3. See Harav Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky, *Torah of the Mind, Torah of the Heart: Divrei Torah of the Talner Rebbe – Bereishis, Shemos*, ed. David Shapiro (Urim, 2020).

finally, the uniqueness of Jewish tradition. The *masorah* emphasizes the centrality of law, which included its observance as well as the heavy intellectual demands of its study, while simultaneously giving a place of preeminence to religious spirituality, and to moral and ethical living. This fusion of law and spirituality was a central focus in Prof. Twersky's scholarly writings, but for him the topic was not solely academic. It lay at the very heart of his own religious consciousness, his own spiritual commitment to a life of *kedushah*, holiness. It was a cherished and honored feature of the spiritual legacies he had inherited: the ḥasidic tradition he received from his father, and the intellectual-spiritual heritage he received from his father-in-law.

#### **HALAKHAH AND AGGADAH, LAW AND SPIRITUALITY**

One of R. Twersky's central goals in these collected essays is to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Halakhah and Aggadah. He stated that goal explicitly in the opening of the oral version of chapter 1: "The decision I reached... was to combine the two areas of Halakhah and Aggadah, starting with a halakhah found at the beginning of *Pirkei Avot*, *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*, 'raise up many disciples.'" Take note that R. Twersky defines that maxim as "Halakhah," although generally the statements of *Hazal* in *Pirkei Avot* are considered aggadic. This puts into sharp relief R. Twersky's goal of perceiving Halakhah and Aggadah as two complementary realms.

The significance of the close relationship between Halakhah and Aggadah in R. Twersky's thinking goes beyond the connections between two genres of rabbinic literature. It is part and parcel of his understanding of the relationship between law and spirituality. The cluster of concepts "spirituality," "intellectual-spiritual," "religious," "moral," and "ethical" are in fact a leitmotif in the chapters of this book, evoking fundamental ideas and ideals of his thought. Their importance and centrality concerned him not only in these *shiurim*, but in his scholarly writings as well.

In his academic writings, Prof. Twersky describes Halakhah as "the indispensable manifestation and prescribed concretization of an underlying and overriding spiritual essence, a volatile, magnetic and incompressible religious force designated as Judaism." According to this view, one cannot separate the legal-halakhic norms, which are the

external manifestation of Judaism, from the “internal sensibility and spirituality” that is at its core. Halakhah “is a means for the actualization and celebration of ethical norms, historical experiences and theological postulates.” It is accompanied by a “spiritualizing speculative quest, in philosophic, mystical or pietistic terms” which ensures “that action is reflective and deliberate, that the religious performance is both an expression of as well as stimulus to experience, deep and rich, full and fresh.”<sup>4</sup> The theme of Halakhah and spirituality reverberates throughout the generations, and Prof. Twersky pays close attention to its dynamics in the chapters of the book.

R. Twersky’s modes of teaching and writing varied, as did his style and goals. His scholarly works were written within the orbit of his position as professor at Harvard University, and his readers were students, professors, and scholars of Jewish studies. R. Twersky strictly adhered to the objective rigor required of such writing, and his published writings were all intended for an academic audience. Yet his Torah teaching, his *divrei Torah*, his *shiurim*, delivered in the mode of classic Torah study, were also of great importance to him. As mentioned in the Preface, he encouraged us to publish these *shiurim*. Despite the difference in mode, for him there was no dissonance between his academic writing and his Torah teaching. In that context, the late Prof. Ezra Fleisher eloquently formulated his perception of his close friend Yitzhak Twersky’s harmonious persona. The following excerpt is from a *hesped* for R. Twersky at a *shloshim* in his memory held at the Israel Academy for Sciences.

Yitzhak Twersky was a man of inner harmony, a great believer in the holistic nature of the human spirit and the fundamental unity of existence. He was at peace with his contradictions and amused by (what seemed to our commonplace vision to be) the paradoxes that seemed to define his being. Whoever came in contact with him found all this puzzling; he himself never ceased to be puzzled by their puzzlement. Indeed, at lofty heights apparent opposites reveal their true nature as varied manifestations

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4. The phrases in quotation marks in this paragraph are taken from Isadore Twersky, “Religion and Law,” in *Studies in Jewish Law and Philosophy* (Ktav, 1982), 69–70.

of a single wondrous unity, while only the small-minded and myopic are still pained by their dissonance. Those heights were Yitzhak Twersky's natural, chosen vantage point. He considered the objects of his scholarly research, each in its particularity, from that vantage point and, with generous regard, perceived our nation's history in all its complexity. His eyes were too pure to see contradictions. The harmonious wholeness of his own refined spirit enabled him to discern the same in our history, and to understand the mystery of its hidden unity.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, while the student and the reader may still be struck by the changes in register between R. Twersky's academic mode and his mode as a teacher of Torah, he himself glided easily between them.

## **OVERVIEW OF PERPETUATING THE MASORAH**

### **Chapter 1: Raise Up Many Disciples**

The first chapter focuses on a maxim in the opening mishnah of *Pirkei Avot*, "raise up many disciples." As an introduction to *Pirkei Avot*, R. Twersky discusses two elements of Jewish ethics: the first is the inseparability of the ethical norm from the act of faith, and the negation of a self-sustaining secular ethic; the second is how ethical and moral principles have no rigid boundaries and are dependent upon each individual's knowledge, sensitivity, and determination.

"Raise up many disciples" is a principle crucial for the preservation and perpetuation of the *masorah*, for it sets the context of ensuring that disciples will continue the *masorah*. There are two traditions in the history of teaching Torah: one restrictive and elitist, the other expansive and egalitarian. The halakhic ramifications of this principle concern whether Torah should be taught to all without any supervisory control, or whether strict limits on who enters the classroom may be set. Halakhic decisors in codes and responsa deal with the issue.

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5. Ezra Fleisher, "Hesped," in *A Memorial for Yitzhak Twersky: Addresses on the Occasion of Thirty Days After His Passing* [Hebrew] (The Israel Academy for the Sciences, 1997), 8.

R. Twersky elucidates the qualities of the ideal teacher of Torah and, as is true of many ethical and moral principles, these qualities are of an open-ended nature. He notes three qualities: *hesed*, kindness, the willingness to share wisdom with others; *tzniut*, humility, which enables the teacher to communicate effectively with all who are eager to acquire learning; and the need to instill self-confidence and independence in students, giving them the ability to develop intellectually and spiritually.

The teaching of Torah with comprehensiveness, precision, and clarity is crucial for the preservation of the *masorah*, and hence an important facet of “raise up many disciples.” Comprehensiveness is realized not only through intellectual communication but also by imparting the *nishmat hatorah*, the inner essence of Torah, the excitement and exhilaration of the encounter with God that accompanied and continues to accompany the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot.

### **Chapter 2: From God’s Torah to the Scholar’s Torah**

The preservation of the *masorah* is guaranteed by scholars who commit themselves to the study of the Torah. In this chapter R. Twersky presents a rabbinic homily on a verse in Tehillim that describes the process a student of Torah must undergo in order to acquire deep and extensive knowledge of Torah and transform God’s Torah into *Torah dilei*, his own Torah. A series of halakhot consequent to the homily follow; they deal with the status and privileges of one who acquires knowledge of Torah, now considered a scholar, as well as the responsibilities and obligations of that scholar.

The obligations of the Torah scholar are all rooted in spiritual and intellectual integrity and demand a life of commitment to the transmission of Torah to all students, with special emphasis on the very young. Among those responsibilities are sustaining high ethical and intellectual standards, and possessing impeccable scruples in one’s relationship with other scholars. All of this while internalizing moral and ethical integrity and humility as guiding principles in all of one’s activities.

### **Chapter 3: The Sages and Their Students**

This chapter continues the theme of the perpetuation of the *masorah* through an explication of discipleship and its implications. R. Twersky

addresses the questions: Who is a genuine student of a *ḥakham*? What are the qualities of mind and soul that a student must possess to be considered a student of the wise? Becoming a *talmid* requires attentiveness to the teacher's instruction and to his behavior. True discipleship is defined as correctly understanding the core teachings of a *talmid ḥakham*, not blurring the uniqueness of his Torah by utilizing inappropriate categories and concepts foreign to Torah.

A detailed discussion carefully defines the nature of *shimush talmi-dei ḥakhamim*, serving and aiding scholars, as well as its halakhot, extending its responsibilities beyond the concrete and material help a student may give. *Shimush ḥakhamim* includes both learning an oral tradition and acquiring wisdom by observing scholars. The inward, experiential fulfillment of the mitzvah of *shimush* is to be in the company of Torah scholars – to see the wise as they are, in order to learn from their actions.

The teacher's responsibility toward his students is not only to transmit knowledge. He must be a paragon of ethical behavior, and thereby convey those values to others. He must also share the emotional and experiential components of his religious commitment, and project his own spiritual yearning. In this multifaceted pedagogic approach, he touches his students with his faith and enthusiasm.

#### **Chapter 4: Make a Fence Around the Torah**

The perpetuation of the *masorah* is realized not only in the qualities and attributes of the transmission, but in the way that the *masorah* is understood, absorbed, and practiced, and particularly in the way in which the *masorah* inspires, excites, indeed kindles a flame. This chapter is devoted to these aspects of preserving the *masorah*.

At first glance, the notion of “making a fence around the Torah” does not make the *masorah* seem particularly inspiring; *seyag*, a fence, ostensibly guards, protects, and prevents. Yet R. Twersky insightfully shows that *seyag* can be understood not only as restrictive, but as expansive and innovative as well. One example is the concept of *seyag* as leading to the enhancement of the Shabbat by converting it from a day of rest, a day of prohibited work, to a day of the positively experienced holiness. In a second example, he shows how the concept of *seyag*

when applied to speech enhances the structure, the effectiveness, and the impact of speech.

R. Twersky goes on to show how *seyag* must be guided by the overarching principles or super-categories of Halakhah, concepts that are not mitzvot in and of themselves but rather shape or sculpt all mitzvot. Examples of those principles are *kedushah* – sanctity, and *temimut* – the joining of the intellect with the Torah. The mitzvah of *vehalakhta bidrakhav*, walking in His ways, functions in many ways as a super-category – it is a principle that triggers individuality, spirituality, and creativity. The goal is the development of religious yearning and sensitivity, and mindfulness of the mitzvot of experience, emotion, love, attitude, and perception. This enables a development of *penimiyut* – inwardness, which should be made an integral part of the religious experience of Modern Orthodoxy.

### Chapter 5: The Rov

The last essay of the book was originally written by R. Twersky and published in a memorial issue of *Tradition* dedicated to the memory of the Rov, his father-in-law, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik. It is an appreciation of the Rov, though its soaring poetic beauty perhaps warrants the term “an ode to the Rov.” The picture that emerges of the Rov is that of the *hakham hamasorah*, the sage of tradition, par excellence.

As a halakhic scholar, his knowledge in all Torah disciplines was all-encompassing; this erudition, coupled with his creativity, powers of analysis and interpretation, insight and intuition, eloquence and charisma, gave him the extraordinary ability to communicate ideas and insights, and thus to become a trusted, thoughtful transmitter of the *masorah*. His method of teaching, the use of abstract conceptualizations of halakhic sources which sought to identify and analyze the concept that undergirds the many apparently disparate facts, was original and profound, intellectually exciting and religiously uplifting.

The other major aspect of his teaching was his unceasing, inspired preoccupation with *penimiyut hatorah* or *nishmat hatorah*, the inner spirituality of Torah. For this the Rov drew extensively on the entire range of traditional Jewish thought, to which he added insights drawn from

## *Perpetuating the Masorah*

his sovereign mastery of the Western philosophical tradition – concepts and categories that he used critically and constructively in analyzing and clarifying aspects of the *masorah*.

As one of the great *ḥakhmei hamasorah* of his time, he devoted endless energies serving as a religious and educational leader during a critical period in Jewish history, setting up and supporting educational institutions for children, serving as a communal rabbi who manifested great *ḥesed*, and assuming national leadership roles as well.

This portrait that R. Twersky paints places the Rov among the great *ḥakhmei hamasorah* of the Jewish people.



העמידו תלמידים הרבה

## Chapter 1

# Raise Up Many Disciples

### **PIRKEI AVOT: OPEN-ENDED ETHICAL PERFECTION<sup>1</sup>**

The mishnah at the beginning of *Pirkei Avot*, which starts with *Moshe kibbel Torah misinai*, Moshe received the Torah at Sinai, elicited a very puzzling comment from R. Ovadiah Bartenura. He addressed in a very compressed form the crucial question of why the chain of tradition was chosen to introduce *Pirkei Avot* rather than being placed at the beginning of the Talmud, before *Berakhot*, or at the end.

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1. [Rabbi Twersky opened this *shiur* with the following tribute to the Rov:

The themes of the *shiur*, which from the vantage point of Torah study stand on their own, are automatically, without any eulogistic elaboration or *ad hominem* amplification, a tribute to the Rov. His learning underlies everything that we study and analyze, and his personal piety, benevolence, and humility illustrate in the noblest and loftiest way the principles and precepts of Judaism. To the extent that all of us here understand, appropriate, and internalize the Rov's Torah, and honestly assimilate his philosophical and ethical insights – to that extent we may proclaim that the Rov is with us, for he is among the main pillars of our eternal *masorah* community.]

## Perpetuating the Masorah

This tractate is unlike all the other tractates of the Mishnah in that it is not founded upon, it does not relate to the elaboration of a single mitzvah but is rather made up entirely of *mussarim* and *middot*, ethical statements and moral programmatic insights. Gentile scholars also wrote works of ethics (*for there is a universal literature of ethics that goes back to Aristotle and his work The Ethics*), however, these works were humanly contrived, *badu milibam*, and they deal with how man should conduct himself in relation to his fellow man. Therefore, this tractate was chosen to introduce our chain of tradition, to teach us that the *mussarim* and *middot*, moral principles and ethical virtues, in *Pirkei Avot* were not invented, they were not humanly contrived, but they were also received at Sinai.<sup>2</sup>

The assertion that moral principles and ethical virtues found in this tractate are not based on any mitzvah is extremely puzzling and is almost indefensible if taken literally. Anyone would almost unreflectively ask: What about the mitzvah of *vehalakhta bidrakhav*, “and you shall walk in His ways,”<sup>3</sup> which according to the Rambam is one of the 613 mitzvot, and by the time of the Bartenura was universally acknowledged and listed in that enumeration? Furthermore, the Gemara in Shabbat understands the verse in the *Shirah*, the Song of the Sea, *zeh Keli ve’anvehu*<sup>4</sup> not in the literal sense of “this is my God, I will glorify Him,” but in the following manner: “Abba Sha’ul says: ‘this is my God and I should be like Him, *hevei domeh lo* – as He is gracious and merciful, so you be gracious and merciful.”<sup>5</sup>

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2. אומר אני: לפי שמסכת זו אינה מיוסדת על פירוש מצוה ממצות התורה כשאר מסכתות שבמשנה, אלא כולה מוסרים ומדות, וחכמי אומות העולם גם כן חִבְרוּ ספרים כמו שברו מלבם בדרכי המוסר – כיצד יתנהג אדם עם חִבְרו – לפיכך התחיל התנא במסכת זו “משה קבל תורה מסיני”, לומר לך שהמידות והמוסרים שבזו המסכת לא ברו אותם חכמי המשנה מלבם, אלא אף אלו מסיני (ברטנורא, אבות א, א).

3. Devarim 28:9.

4. Shemot 15:2.

5. אבא שאול אומר ואנהו – הוי דומה לו, מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום (שבת קלג, ב).

The question arises then, how can the Bartenura say that this tractate, which consists entirely of moral principles and ethical virtues – and he emphasize twice that it consists of moral principles and ethical virtues – how can he say that it does not relate to the elaboration of a single mitzvah, as do the other tractates of the Mishnah? Understanding these words of the Bartenura shall be our main concern.

Beforehand, however, we must take note of his emphasis on a traditional Jewish perspective on ethics; it is a very repercussive view with far-reaching implications. He says that morality must be anchored in religious axiology. Without religious values and norms, morality will erode and collapse, will not endure, and will not resist distortion. That is why the Bartenura talks of the distinction between *mussarim* and *middot*, moral principles and ethical virtues, found in Avot as opposed to *mussarim* and *middot* found in the universal literature on ethics. The latter are humanly contrived, *shebadu milibam*, a result of human imagination and speculation. The Bartenura very forcefully underscores the difference between humanly contrived mores and the theologically based mores of Avot.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the Gemara illustrates this in its own exegetical, homiletical idiom that needs to be understood. The Gemara, which is quite striking, says:

The great Ulah presented the following homily, or interpretation, at the doorstep of the house of R. Yehudah Hanasi (*note the very dramatic and public nature of the presentation*). What is the meaning of the verse “All the kings of the earth will acknowledge You because they heard the words of Your mouth”? Ulah elaborated: The verse in Tehillim does not say that they heard the *word*, the *saying* of your mouth, *in the singular*, but the *words* (*with emphasis on the plural*). When the Holy One, blessed be He, began the Ten Commandments and said *Anokhi Hashem Elokekha*, I am the LORD your God, the nations of the world (*these same nations whom the Bartenura mentions as producing humanly contrived works on ethics*) said: God is talking about His own glory; it is an act of self-glorification. (*That was the reaction of the nations of the world,*

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6. See *Torah of the Mind* (p. 3, n. 3), 149–150, where this theme is also addressed.

when they heard the beginning of the Ten Commandments.) When, however, he said “Honor your father and mother,” they reconsidered, and acknowledged the first commandments.<sup>7</sup>

What is the meaning of this? What did the *ḥakhmei umot ha’olam*, the wise men of the world, think to start with? What caused them to change their mind? And finally, what happened as a result of this change?

Initially they said, *kevod atzmo Hu doresh*, He is promoting His own glory, which means that they felt that God is not concerned with social ethics, with how man gets along with his fellow man, or woman with her fellow woman, in a universal sense. Rather His interest is confined only to Himself, to abstract, self-contained, theological axioms divorced from moral practical consequences and applications. That was their reaction when they heard the first two commandments, which are theological, which affirm the existence of God and the repudiation of any idolatrous association. When, however, they heard the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and mother,” they then *ḥazru vehodu lema’amarot harishonot*, they acknowledged the first commandments. It does not say that they realized that God is concerned not only with theological ethics but with social ethics as well. What the Gemara says is that they realized that without God there would be no fifth commandment to honor your father and mother. One cannot implement it properly, fully, without this religious base. There is no self-sustaining secular ethic. The wise men of the world acknowledged the inseparability of the ethical norm from the act of faith.

What I have suggested here is somewhat different from Rashi’s interpretation. Rashi – commenting on *ḥazru vehodu*, “they acknowledged the first commandments” – states: “All the more so is one obligated to honor God, for He too is a partner in man’s creation together with his father and mother; and his life and death are in His hands.”<sup>8</sup> This

7. דרש עולה רבה אפיתחא דבי נשיאה: מאי דכתיב יודוך ה' כל מלכי ארץ פי שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי פִיךָ (תהלים קלח, ד)? “מאמר פיך” לא נאמר, אלא “אמרי פיך”. בשעה שאמר הקב”ה אֲנֹכִי וְלֹא יְהִיָה לְךָ, אמרו אומות העולם: לכבוד עצמו הוא דורש. כיון שאמר כָּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ – חזרו והודו למאמרות הראשונות (קידושין לא, א).

8. כל שכן שחייב אדם בכבודו, שאף הוא שותף בבריאתו כאביו ואמו, וחיינו ומותנו מסורין בידו (רש”י, קידושין לא, א).

is different than seeing here the complete inseparability of the ethical norm from the act of faith.<sup>9</sup>

Let me return to the Bartenura's tantalizing assertion that *Pirkei Avot* is not founded upon, has no relation to, a single mitzvah of the mitzvot of the Torah. That is an overwhelming statement, and it seems to fly in the face of the evidence. As I said earlier, everyone would immediately point to the mitzvah of *vehalakhta bidrakhav*, "and you shall walk in His ways." The Rambam in the first chapter of *Hilkhot De'ot*, "Laws Concerning Ethical Dispositions," presents the entire system of Jewish ethics, which is so comprehensive, as founded upon this very mitzvah of *vehalakhta bidrakhav*, "and you shall walk in His ways."

We must, I think, reinterpret the comment of the Bartenura to mean the following: These *mussarim and middot*, these ethical precepts, are unlike all other mitzvot. The mitzvah of *vehalakhta bidrakhav*, of walking in the ways of God, of imitating God, is unlike eating matzah on the fifteenth day of Nissan or blowing shofar on the first day of Tishrei or entering the *sukkah*. But how are they unlike? What is the main difference between these ethical precepts, the *mussarim and middot* in *Pirkei Avot*, and the other mitzvot? They differ in that they defy quantification; you cannot write a complete *Shulhan Arukh* about *mussarim and middot*. When the Bartenura states, *einah meyusedet*, "not founded upon," I would add in brackets, not founded *completely* upon an explanation of any of the mitzvot, because these ethical precepts defy the normal method of legislation since they defy quantification. In fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah, you know exactly how much to eat – *kazayit*, the size of an olive. If you eat less you have not fulfilled the mitzvah; if you eat more there are no extra points. The mitzvah is performed in a clearly delimited, quantifiable manner. You eat a *kazayit* of matzah and in that way you fulfill the mitzvah to eat matzah on the night of the fifteenth.

Ethical perfection, on the other hand, is open-ended. It is dependent upon each individual – on one's knowledge, sensitivity, and on one's determination to remain focused on the goal and unrelentingly advance toward it.

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9. The same is true regarding Rava's statement in the continuation of the Gemara in Kiddushin.

## Perpetuating the Masorah

This principle can be demonstrated by relation to some mitzvot within the count of *taryag*, 613, which already teach us this principle. For example, the mitzvah of *tzedakah* – charity, philanthropy – cannot be uniformly quantified. *Tzedakah* is *kefi koḥo*, to the best of one’s ability, and if you do more you have performed a greater mitzvah.<sup>10</sup> Studying Torah is another example. The mitzvah of *talmud Torah* spans a tremendous spectrum; from the minimal – the saying of *kri’at Shema* in the morning and evening – to the way R. Akiva Eiger and the Sokhatchover Rebbe, the Avnei Nezer, fulfilled the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*. This mitzvah cannot be quantified; there is no way that one can say how to fulfill it. The same is true for *gemilut ḥasadim*, acts of benevolence.<sup>11</sup>

There is another Gemara in Kiddushin that can help us understand this principle. The Gemara says:

When R. Yosef would hear the sound of his mother’s footsteps, he would stand up and would say: I want to stand because the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, is approaching.<sup>12</sup>

That was his conception of how to honor his father and mother.

The Gemara continues, “R. Yoḥanan said: Fortunate is the person who never saw his father and mother.”<sup>13</sup> This is an overwhelming statement! Its explanation according to Rashi is that this is a mitzvah which is impossible to completely fulfill.<sup>14</sup>

Why then did God issue such a commandment? We know that the Torah was not given to angels but was intended for ordinary people, and everything in the Torah can be fulfilled. That was the mistake of modern Jews, to think that the Torah was not intended for the modern

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10. See Rabbi Twersky’s “Some Aspects of the Jewish Attitude Toward the Welfare State,” *Tradition* 5 (1963), 137–158, reprinted in his *Studies in Jewish Law and Philosophy* (Ktav, 1982), 108–129.

11. See below, pp. 75 and 92, for further discussion of *kefi koḥo* in other mitzvot. See also *Torah of the Mind* (p. 3, n. 3), 133–138 and n. 94.

12. רב יוסף כי הוה שמע קל כרעא דאמיה אמר: איקום מקמי שכינה דאתיא. (קידושין לא, ב.)

13. אמר רבי יוחנן: אשרי מי שלא חמאן. (שם)

14. שאי אפשר לקיים כבודם ככל הצורך. (רש"י שם)

age. The Torah was given to us, to average human beings, and everything in the Torah can be fulfilled, all 613 mitzvot.

It is thus significant that the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother was the mitzvah which, according to Ulah's homily, caused the nations of the world to reconsider and to acknowledge the true perspective on ethical theory. Not only is the mitzvah significant in and of itself, but it teaches an important ethical principle: if it is not possible to fulfill a mitzvah completely, even a fragmentary, partial fulfillment is meaningful.

There is here the concept of infinity in mitzvot; a person fulfilling a mitzvah is constantly running toward the boundary but never reaching it. You can come closer and closer, but you are only approximating what the mitzvah stands for. This itself is nonetheless a constructive, meaningful act; it is not a reason for frustration, and it should not yield a sense of futility. Futility means that you start out to do something and you do not succeed in accomplishing it. That can be so in certain material areas perhaps, but in the spiritual realm, the realm of mitzvot, even a partial fulfillment is noteworthy. The effort itself to fulfill a mitzvah is significant – *lefum tza'ara agra*, one is rewarded according to the effort expended.<sup>15</sup> This resolves the question of why this mitzvah of honoring one's parents was given at all if, as Rashi says, it is not possible to completely fulfill it. Maybe it is not possible in full measure, but as much as one does, he has fulfilled a mitzvah. The mitzvah stretches our spiritual capacity and our moral aptitude.

#### RAISE UP MANY DISCIPLES

Many of the principles in this special tractate of Avot are of this kind in that they are not subject to formal legislation and there is no resultant normative formulation. They reflect a creative, fluid dimension of one's religious regimen. Of the threefold maxim of *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly,<sup>16</sup> I have chosen to discuss the middle statement, *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*, "raise up many disciples," for it is the main pillar of the three statements.

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15. Avot 5:26.

16. הוּוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהֵעֵמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה, וְעָשׂוּ סֵיגִי לַתּוֹרָה. (אבות א, א)

## Perpetuating the Masorah

*Ha'amidu talmidim harbeh* – raise up many students, many disciples. This idea – teach many students – seems so simple, so straightforward that we could end our *shiur* right now. And yet it is extremely complex and elusive. Already in *Avot Derabbi Natan* we find recorded a controversy between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel.

Raise up many disciples: Beit Shammai says, one should only teach a person who is wise, humble, of distinguished pedigree, and affluent (*it is a very restricted, aristocratic, view*). Beit Hillel says, teach everybody (*because the redemptive, cathartic power of Torah is tremendous and unpredictable*). There were many sinners, many people who had gone astray, who were then brought close to the study of Torah; they became upright people, people of great integrity and great piety.<sup>17</sup>

One thing is clear: Beit Shammai did not feel bound by the halakhah of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*. When we read their statement *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*, “raise up many disciples,” we understand it as a halakhic decision, something that makes its way into the *Shulḥan Arukh*. But Beit Shammai still felt that they could so restrict and reinterpret the statement that there is very little resemblance between what they said and *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*, and hence one of the basic controversies between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai could emerge.

It is interesting that even after this disagreement between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai – and one would assume that the halakhah would have been decided like Beit Hillel – the Gemara in *Berakhot* tells us that these divergent views surfaced again in the dramatic confrontation between Rabban Gamliel and his critics represented by R. Elazar ben Azaryah. The Gemara describes the uprising in the *beit midrash* against Rabban Gamliel, and it was because of this issue, whether the view of Beit Hillel or that of Beit Shammai in *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh* should be followed. The Gemara tells us:

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שבית שמאי אומרים: שאל ישנה אדם אלא למי שהוא חכם עניו וכן אבות ועשיר. בית הלל. 17. אומרים: לכל אדם ישנה, שהרבה פושעים היו בהם בישראל ונתקברו לתלמוד תורה ויצאו מהם צדיקים, חסידים וכשרים (אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א, פרק ג).



That very day they removed the guard (*the person who checked credentials*). The doors were thrown open and whoever wanted to study (*whoever was thirsting for dvar Hashem, the word of God*), could find his way in to the *beit midrash*. For Rabban Gamliel's position had been that any student about whom we see that *ein tokho kevaro* was prohibited from entering the *beit midrash*.<sup>18</sup>

Permission now was given to these many potential students who were eager to learn, to enter the *beit midrash*. That symbolized the victory of R. Elazar ben Azaryah and his associates over the aristocratic view of Rabban Gamliel.

Rabban Gamliel's approach had been restrictive. The term *she'ein tokho kevaro* means "about whom there is any ambiguity." There may be some discrepancy of which we are not aware, between what strikes us, what we see, and what is really the essence of this person. Since Rabban Gamliel wanted to avoid that kind of ambiguity, he would not allow them to enter; the credentials had to be carefully examined. There was a very rigorous admissions policy.

This now changed. Rabban Gamliel's policy was rejected, and on that day, the day of his dismissal and the installation of R. Elazar ben Azaryah as the *nasi*, the head of the Sanhedrin, the Gemara says, "many benches were added to the *beit midrash*." There was a dramatic upsurge in attendance. According to one report, four hundred new benches were brought into the *beit midrash*; according to another it was seven hundred.<sup>19</sup>

What is striking is that the Gemara then adds: *ka halsha da'atei derabban Gamliel*. Rabban Gamliel did not know what to make of this; he felt faint, taken aback, and said *dilma has veshalom, mana'ati Torah miyisrael*, "perhaps, God forbid, I have prevented people from studying Torah."<sup>20</sup> What does this mean? Did he not know that he was preventing people from studying Torah? There was a guard at the door who

18. אותו היום, סלקוהו לשומר הפתח ונתנה להם רשות לתלמידים ליכנס. שהיה רבן גמליאל. אומר: "כל תלמיד שאין תוכו כברו לא יכנס לבית המדרש" (ברכות כה, א).

19. ההוא יומא אתוספו כמה ספסלי. אמר רבי יוחנן: "פליגי בה אבא יוסף בן דוסתאי ורבנן, חד אמר: אתוספו ארבע מאה ספסלי; וחד אמר: שבע מאה ספסלי" (שם).

20. הוה קא חלשא דעתיה דרבן גמליאל. אמר: "דלמא חס ושלום מנעתי תורה מישראל". (שם).

## Perpetuating the Masorah

checked credentials, and only then was it possible to come into the *beit midrash* to hear the *shiur*!

The Gemara is telling us that Rabban Gamliel apparently thought there was a consensus about disseminating Torah and that he was walking in the footsteps of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*, who said, *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*. That is why he reacted and said *dilma*, perhaps I am guilty of withholding Torah from Yisrael. He was very distressed.

In fact, however, there was a radical divergence between the modes of implementing the statement of *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* to “raise up many disciples.” How is it accomplished? Who is to be admitted and under what circumstances? This is what changed when R. Elazar ben Azaryah, at least for a day, unseated Rabban Gamliel.

The Rambam sees this passage in the Gemara not just as a story, an *aggadah*, but as a source with halakhic implications. He wrote, “Torah should be taught only to a worthy student, pleasing in his deeds, or to a *tam*.”<sup>21</sup> The beginning of the halakhah sounds like Beit Shammai. But the addition of *tam* changes that. *Tam* here means someone about whom there is some ambiguity, and you give him the benefit of the doubt. The Rambam intends to say that if you are not sure whether or not he is worthy of being admitted to the *beit midrash*, admit him. By using the phrase “or to a *tam*” the Rambam reflects the view of Beit Hillel as understood by R. Elazar ben Azaryah, who changed the rule *be'oto yom*, on that well-known day on which the uprising in the *beit midrash* took place.

This divergence in the application of “raise up many disciples” continued until modern times. If you look at the development of the yeshivot in Eastern Europe, you will find that these competing views were still fighting for supremacy. There is a parallel development in Ḥasidism. Let me present a few lines of the Sfat Emet, the great exponent of the ḥasidic movement of Ger. This is an exceptional passage that I have not seen quoted elsewhere. It is a remarkable historical-philosophical characterization of two approaches which we know existed – the approaches of Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel – the elitist,

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אין מלמדין תורה אלא לתלמיד הגון, נאה במעשיו, או לתם (משנה תורה הלכות תלמוד תורה. 21. א, 7).

aristocratic, restricted view and the more exoteric, democratic view. I will paraphrase the passage.<sup>22</sup>

The Sfatai Emet said in the name of his grandfather, the Ḥiddushei Harim – the first Rebbe of Ger and a *talmid-ḥaver*, a student-colleague, of the Kotzker Rebbe – that Yosef and Yehudah represent the two types, Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Yosef was withdrawn and said that very few people will have access to this superior kind of *kedushah*, whereas Yehudah wanted to bring the *kedushah* to everybody.

And then he added the following remarkable oral historical report:

I heard him (the Ḥiddushei Harim) say that our teachers were divided on the issue; some said that there should be few Ḥasidim, but of the greatest sanctity. The others wanted piety and *kedushah* to spread among everybody even though they will be on a lesser level of perfection.

He is referring here – and I do not know whole volumes of history that say more than these two lines! – to the famous controversy that racked Poland in the years of the Kotzker Rebbe. The Kotzker Rebbe withdrew and said: “Give me ten people who will follow me into the wilderness and we will build a unique spiritual community.” Not everybody could take that approach, that rigor. In particular, the Izhbitzer Rebbe broke away and said: “I want to bring this message of *kedushah* to thousands of people.” It is to this controversy that the Sfatai Emet, in his terse way of writing, is referring.

The goal of Torah is *kedushah*. That is why I mention this remarkable report by the Sfatai Emet as a link in the chain of interpretations of that original statement of *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah, ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*. We see it in the disagreement of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, Rabban Gamliel and R. Elazar ben Azariah, and on through history.

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22. יש לומר על פי מה שכתב אדוני אבי זקני מורי ורבי וצלה"ה, כי בחינת יוסף היה להיות קדוש ונבדל בלתי ה' לבדו כמו שכתב נזיר אֶחָיו, ובחינת יהודה היה להביא הקדושה גם בעניני עולם הזה כמו שאמר וְאֵל עֲמוּ תְּבַאֲנֶנּוּ. ושמעתי ממנו כי בזה היו מחולקין גם רבותינו נשמתן עדין, כי מהם רצו שיהיה מעט חסידים ויהיו קדושי עליונים, ומהם רצו להיות מתפשט החסידות בין רוב עם אף שיהיו פחותים במדרגה (שפת אמת, וישב, תרל"א).

## Perpetuating the Masorah

If one looks at the thirteenth-century commentary of Rabbeinu Yonah on *Pirkei Avot*, he refers to the *maḥloket* between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. Apparently he felt that it was still a wide-open issue, an open-ended question.

*Ha'amidu talmidim harbeh* is a very challenging and demanding mitzvah to fulfill. If indeed it is a *halakhah pesukah*, a codified halakhah, it is as difficult as it is important, as rigorous as it is indispensable for *Klal Yisrael*.

It may be helpful to note some prerequisites, both ethical and intellectual, for fulfilling this halakhah enunciated by the *Anshei Kneset Hagedolah*.

### PREREQUISITES FOR RAISING UP MANY DISCIPLES

#### *Ḥesed*

The first prerequisite is *ḥesed* – compassion, kindness, benign involvement in the development of others. In order to fulfill *ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*, one must believe in the people who are listening, in the people who are studying, in the people who are eager to learn. One must feel that they are worthy, that they are receptive, and that it is a proper investment of time and energy to share Torah with them and to expose them to Torah.

In a remarkable passage, the Gemara in *Sukkah* says:

R. Elazar said: What is the meaning of the verse in Proverbs, “and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue”? Is there a Torah of kindness and a Torah that is not of kindness? ... there are those who say that Torah which is studied in order to teach others is a Torah of kindness; Torah that is studied not in order to teach others is not a Torah of kindness.<sup>23</sup>

The Gemara is saying that the verse cannot mean that there is such a thing as Torah that is not characterized by kindness, that is not related

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23. אמר ר' אלעזר: פיה פתחה בְּחִכְמָה וְתוֹרַת חֶסֶד עַל לְשׁוֹנָהּ, וְכִי יֵשׁ תּוֹרָה שֶׁל חֶסֶד וְיֵשׁ תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵינָה שֶׁל חֶסֶד? ... אֵיכָא דְאָמְרֵי תּוֹרָה לְלַמְדָּה זֶה הִיא תּוֹרָה שֶׁל חֶסֶד, שֶׁלֹּא לְלַמְדָּה זֶה הִיא תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵינָה שֶׁל חֶסֶד (סוכה מט, ב).