

## YOSEF HIRSH z.l., about altruism and the love of fellow person

*Pirkei Avot*, also known as Ethics of the Fathers, is a section of our legal text devoted to providing ethical insight and moral advice. It was compiled and published by Rabbi Judah Hanassi around 200 CE. The moral and ethical lessons brought down in *Pirkei Avot* have been passed down and studied for thousand of years and continue to be learned and practiced by Jews today.

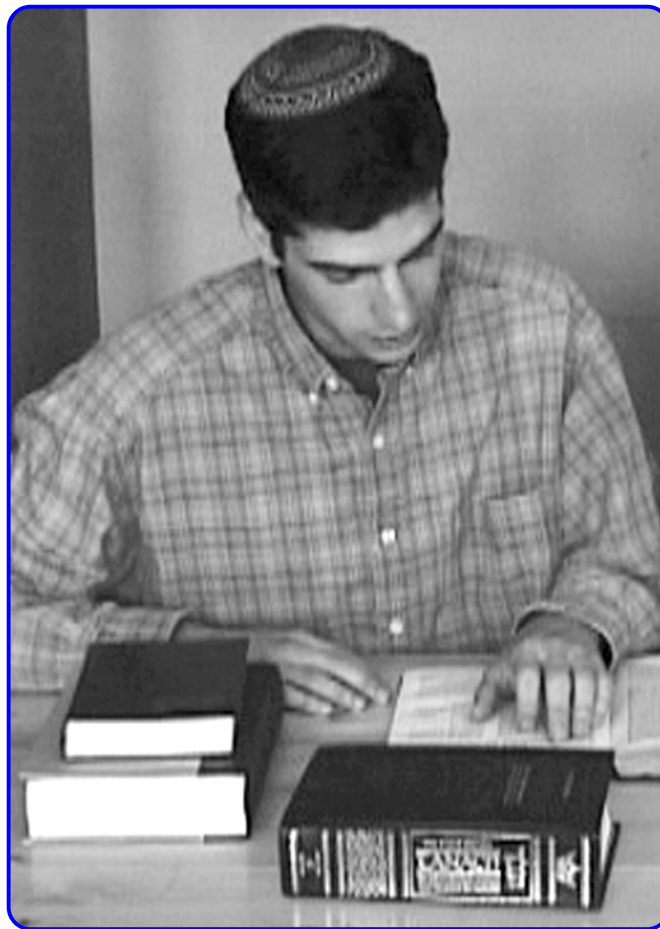
In the 6<sup>th</sup> *Perek* (chapter) it is taught “do not seek greatness for yourself and do not long for honor, beyond your learning, act, and do not long for the table of kings, for your table is greater then theirs, and your crown greater then theirs; and trustworthy is the employer who pays you the reward for your work”.

The *Mishna* (tractate) opens with the statement „Do not seek greatness for yourself”. Why not? Isn’t greatness a great thing? Why shouldn’t we pursue it? The *Mishna* means we should not exclusively be wrapped up in our personal subjective agenda. Instead we should balance the time we have to live between our own personal goals and the needs of those around us. The truth is when we focus only on our own objectives and attempt to gain external recognition, we miss our goal of gaining the maximum in happiness out of our life. We end up living and working for the futile and fruitless goal of boosting our own egos and/or people pleasing.

A person exclusively wrapped up in his own image, fame and “greatness” makes a very small package. A person has to be concerned with helping others. People who view their self as supreme are in fact fighting against

themselves. They miss out on the most meaningful and rewarding part of life which comes when people’s motivation stems from only pleasing and impressing others. In the pursuit of „honor”, they are in fact depending on others to decide for them what is worth pursuing in life. Such a person doesn’t think clearly or for himself. A person has to find a balance

you know your capacities, strengths and weaknesses, before you can help others, it is essential that you can learn and study before you take action. However, study and action are important goals that have to be balanced and not exclusively pursued. You can’t complete one and then the other. The two both have to be pursued simultaneously. In a



where he can develop and enhance his own life while at the same time contributes to others, his community and society.

Learning and study have always been a central aspect of Judaism. However, studying, like self interest, is not an exclusive goal. Rather it must be complemented by deeds and concrete action. Just as it’s important to be occupied and concerned with yourself in order that

lifetime you can only comprehend a fraction of the amazingly complex world. If you want to know everything before you take action and/or changing your conduct, you will never change. Similarly, if you are absorbed entirely with perfecting yourself and making it big before helping others, you will never get around helping others.

Often people devote a substantial amount of time

to being accepted by the crowd. Those in society who are famous or considered prominent and important are viewed like literally idols. Those who devote their lives reaching higher levels of social status in the company of the wealthy in a higher income bracket or the famous, are missing importance and value of their own lives.

Ultimately our lives are about more than the exclusive acquisition of recognition, honor, knowledge and prestige. These are all superficial goals in life that on their own don’t provide meaning and fulfillment. Tradition, values, community and God are often seen as a taboo, outdated, as one of my friends pointed out “uncool”.

However a person who lives a life that is connected to higher ideals, a firmly rooted tradition and a rich ethical system, has the opportunity to live a fuller life enriched by community and their ancestral past. They connect with not only a continuous chain that links them to values and a tradition lived by their ancestors for hundreds of generations, but with a community they can identify with, be supported by and with whom they can share an extraordinary approach to life. Living a life that isn’t steered of vanity offers a person a happier and more rewarding life.

So “do not seek greatness for yourself and do not long for honor, beyond your learning, act, and do not long for the table of kings, for your table is greater then theirs and your crown greater then theirs; and trustworthy is the employer who pays you the reward for your work”.