

B”H
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To Be A Man!

A Message for Men and Women

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
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***“Hillel ... would say,
“No empty person can fear sin,
no common person can be pious,
no one bashful can be learned,
no one short tempered can be a teacher
and no one over-occupied with business will become wise.
In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man!”
(Pirkei Avot 2:6)***

Hillel here outlines for us five types of people and their inherent shortcomings. This list is far from arbitrary. The five types of people are in ascending order. Not only are they different types of individuals, they are also personality traits to be found within each of us.

An empty person, (Bor) is one who, like a pit, has nothing inside. This is a reference to one who is morally bankrupt. Rudimentary learning of the important principles in life is essential if one is to have a basic sense of right and wrong, here referred to as a fear of sin. One who acts without a sense of inherent right and wrong is called a Bor, meaning an empty pit. This is one of the worst insults levied in Mishnaic times. Simply stated one who is morally bankrupt will never do that which is right or just, because such a one lacks the inner compass to steer him/her through the difficult choices that life presents.

A common person is one who is on a higher level than a Bor. A common person is referred to in Hebrew as an Am HaAretz, which literally means “people of the land.” In most contexts this phrase is interpreted to also be an insult, meaning someone who is ignorant. However, in this context the correct interpretation of an Am HaAretz is one who does have a proper moral compass, yet lacks the education necessary for higher levels of religious observance.

As a moral and decent human being, the Am HaAretz makes time in his busy life for the study of Torah. However, as a common man who has to work for a living to support a family the Am HaAretz lacks the time to excel in learning. He does not choose to sacrifice his standard of living in order to acquire greater wisdom. The Am HaAretz observes what he can and what he knows. He cannot be a Hasid (pious) which was the

Mishnaic term used to describe those who went beyond the minimal requirements of observance as required by Divine Law because he does not have the know-how or the time. The majority of people fall into this category; therefore, they are called the “people of the land.” They are the followers, but never the leaders.

Someone who is bashful and for whatever reasons is shy in interacting with others will never become truly learned. This is because in Torah circles, learning is done in groups instead of in private study. Torah students never sit in quiet studying their lessons. Instead, together in groups they would discuss their studies with each participant adding something to the discussion and thus broadening the topic of learning and the depths of which it is understood.

One who is shy will not participate in this form of study/debate and therefore will never be able to express his own views. As such one will never hear what others have to say about his thoughts. One who is shy will never receive any positive feedback or any constructive criticism, both of which are necessary for positive psychological growth. Such a person may have a good sense of morality and may even be intellectually gifted, but unless one is able to express these things, they will lay dormant and undetected.

In order to be a teacher, one must be able to deal with all types of students, be they Bors, Am HaAretzes, or the silent shy type. Patience is the key to reaching difficult students. Even those with otherwise refined moral attributes and who are learned and outgoing must not allow impatience to act as the cancer to undo the good that their other characteristics have built up. Even though there are apparently good reasons for one to lose his temper, one who’s job it is to teach must learn that to be impatient with one’s student is the way to fail to teach. This is applicable for one teaching others and for when one is teaching oneself.

Next Hillel speak about over-indulgent businessmen and warns them that due to their over-emphasis on making a living they will never take time for themselves to learn the ways of wisdom. Although one may possess all levels of exemplary moral character, have a decent education, outgoing personality, patience with the public and proper alignment of priorities in life, one may still fall short in the most important area of them all: faith in G-d.

Most everyone is required to work hard in order to provide the necessary financial support for oneself and one’s family. Yet, there is a fine line as to how much work is enough and how much work is too much. In other words, work and making a living is an absolute necessity. Nonetheless, like everything else in life, this too can be overdone, much to the individual’s own hurt. One who over-works is in essence saying that he/she does not have enough faith in G-d to provide for them their needs.

Many believe that if “I” do not help myself, then no one else will. This is both true and false. For while we should never depend exclusively upon the help of our fellow men, faulty like ourselves they be, we should on the other hand always rely upon the help of G-d, for without it none can stand for even a fraction of a moment.

Therefore, although one be an otherwise all around good human being and Torah faithful Jew, unless one's faith in G-d is shown in one's actions, he/she will ultimately loose out in the end by not achieving the final goal and human accomplishment, which is the acquisition of wisdom.

Mystically speaking, wisdom, Hokhma, is the acquisition of intuitive, psychic mental abilities, i.e., the faculties of mind that enable one to perceive the reality of the spiritual world surrounding us at all times. Without such an awareness, one is as if blind and lost, not knowing and not being able to know what direction in life one is to follow for one to find their fulfillment and destiny.

Therefore, to cut back on one's efforts in making a living is a supreme statement of faith in G-d, as long as one is using the extra time for the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot. When one accomplishes this, then he/she has acquired the final and best of the good attributes: courage to act for G-d.

This is why Hillel concludes this saying with a reference to being a man. Mind you, this statement is as applicable to women as it is to men. For being a man, as Hillel means it, is a metaphor for standing up with courage and doing the right thing, especially in the face of opposition, the worst kind being apathy.

Today, Torah Judaism is under a many faceted attack from its enemies worldwide. These attacks take the form of attacks on Zionism, on the State of Israel, on Jewish patriots now referred to as Settlers (the inference being settlers in "Palestinian" lands), and in the form of attacks on religion, morality and on Jews in general.

Do not lie to yourselves to think that all these things are unrelated. In the minds of the haters of the Jews, it does not matter if it is Zionism, Israel, Torah, Hasidim or secular Jews, all are hated with equal passion. A weak minded Jew refuses to see the connections and thereby does not act to defend his own best interests. A Jew, however, who walks in the ways of Torah and who has faith in his/her G-d rises up to be a leader, to be a voice of conscience and inspiration in his/her community. This is the voice of passion and patriotism; the voice that does not compromise or weaken when attacked.

Today Hillel's advice cries out to us ever so loudly. Jews and Judaism are under attack from so many different facets of our same old enemy. Unfortunately, our age-old enemies are not Amalakites, Nazis, or even Arabs. Our age-old enemy is our own weakness and lack of focus on our own best interests. For only one with wisdom can properly focus and foresee what is best not only for oneself but also for ones community.

Only one with real tested and proven faith in G-d will acquire the necessary wisdom to be a leader. Be he a man or woman, "to be a man" means to be a community leader motivating the community to recognize and pursue their own best interests, to stand up for what it means to be a Jew, an Israeli, a citizen of the People of Israel.

Of course, such boldness puts us into direct opposition with the forces that seek to destroy the Torah and the State of Israel. Our enemies seek to confuse our minds and weaken our resolves. They have been successful with many, especially with many in the Orthodox religious communities. Well, enough is enough! In a place where there are no men, no voices of conscience and patriotism, one must rise up and become that voice. One must rise up to become that man, be he a male or female, for the Jewish people at large need such leadership.

The help wanted signs are up. Seeking patriotic, courageous G-d fearing leaders to direct the Jewish people in their struggles against self doubt and world condemnation. Applicants needs simply apply through prayer to G-d and then to take up their mantle with faith – and be a man.

This is a non-sexist position. Indeed, some of the best “men” today are women. Men, please take note!