



Shabbat Table Discussions

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PATIENCE

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A father was very excited to take his two pre-teen children on a fishing trip. After a twenty minute drive to the lake, the father told his kids to turn off their electronic devices and leave them in the car. He showed them how to attach bait to the hook and he cast the line into the water. Within a few seconds, one of the children said "Dad, why didn't we catch any fish yet?"

We live in an age where "instant" is becoming more and more desirable. We have instant access to information; food items are being produced so that the food is ready to eat as quickly as possible; even items used for observance of mitzvot are marketed so that no preparations are required to observe the mitzvah (e.g. oil lamps for Chanukah, pre-packaged charoset). Instant access to everything can make us more productive and finish projects at a quicker pace. However, a recent Pew study of technology experts showed that one of the concerns of instant access to everything is that it leads to a lack of patience.¹ Let's consider the following questions:

QUESTION ONE	While we may value patience, when we are patient, we may not perform tasks as quickly and won't accomplish as much. How do we balance the two values?
QUESTION TWO	If we are helping a friend or relative learn how to do something and they are not able to figure it out, at what point can we give up and stop? How do we know if we are lacking patience or the matter is beyond the comprehension of the person we are trying to teach?
QUESTION THREE	How do we decide whether to prepare for a mitzvah ourselves, purchase a pre-packaged item or have someone else do it for us?

Let's Examine the Sources

The very first lesson of *Pirkei Avot* is about patience:

[The Men of the Great Assembly] said three things: Be patient in judgment, teach many students and create safeguards for the Torah.

Pirkei Avot 1:1

הם אמרו שלשה דברים: הוּוּ מְתוּנִים בַּדִּין
וְהֵעִמְדוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה וְעָשׂוּ סִיג לַתּוֹרָה
אֲבוֹת א':א

Question for the Table:

While the simple interpretation of this statement is directed towards rabbinical judges, what universal lessons about patience can we learn from the Mishnah?

Patience in Our Actions

In the Shabbat Table Discussion on *zerizut* (acting with promptness), we noted the comments found in the anonymously written *Orchot Tzaddikim* about balancing *zerizut* with patience:

Although promptness is very positive, one should make sure not to rush in one's work too much. One who rides [a horse] too quickly is likely to get hurt and one who runs very quickly will fall. One cannot complete a task properly if it is rushed; doing something properly requires patience. This is why our rabbis stated "be patient in judgment." Promptness is to be awake, alert and ready to act, but never to rush what one is doing. These issues require great wisdom to determine when one should act quickly and when one should act with patience.

Orchot Tzaddikim, Sha'ar HaZerizut

A similar idea is presented by R. Aharon Levine:

Although patience is praiseworthy and there is no greater trait, this is only while one is contemplating whether a specific action is proper. However, once one decides that it is proper, patience is no longer a good idea ... If a person is quick in one's actions and swift in one's ways before thinking about the virtues of it, then this is not promptness but rather haste and sloppiness that one should avoid whenever possible. However, if a person is quick in one's actions after contemplating and recognizing that the action is good and proper, then this type of promptness is praiseworthy and the reward is great.

HaDerash VeHaIyun, Parashat Re'eh, no. 211

אף-על-פי שהזריזות טובה מאוד, יזהר שלא ימהר בעבודתו יותר מדי כי הרוכב במהירות הוא קרוב מאוד להיכשל. וכן מי שהוא רץ במהירות הוא נופל. ולא יתכן לתקן מעשה מתוקן בבהלה, אבל במתון יתקנו העניינים. וכן אמרו רבותינו: "הוו מתונים בדין" (אבות א, א). והזריזות - שיהא ניעור לבו ויקיץ מחשבותיו ויקלו איבריו למלאכתו, אך לא ימהר בשום עניין. וכל אלו העניינים צריכים חוכמה גדולה, מתי ימהר ומתי יאחר.

אורחות צדיקים שער הזריזות.

האומנם משובחת היא המתינות ואין לך מדה טובה ממנה, אכן זה רק כל עוד שלא התבונן האדם ולא בא לידי הכרה, כי טוב הדבר אשר בדעתו לעשות ונכון לעשותו. אבל לאחר שבא לידי הכרה הזאת, אז לא טובה עוד המתינות ... אם האדם זריז במעשיו ונחפז בתהלוכותיו, בטרם התישב בדעתו ועמד על חקר הדבר, אז אין זאת זריזות רק מהירות ופחזות, שיש למנוע מהן בכל היכולת. אבל אם האדם זריז במעשיו אחרי התבוננו ואחרי הכירו כי טוב הדבר ונכון לעשותו, אז הזהירות הזאת משובחת ושכרה הרבה מאד.

הדרש והעיון, פרשת ראה, ס' ריא

Questions for the Table:

- 1) *Orchot Tzaddikim* interprets "be patient in judgment" as referring to patience in our actions. How does patience in our own actions relate to the patience required of judges?
- 2) *Orchot Tzaddikim* states that one should act quickly to begin an activity but patient when one carries out the activity. R. Levine states that one should be patient while deciding whether to engage in an activity and then quick once the decision is made. Are the two ideas contradictory or complementary?

Patience With Others

R. Menachem Meiri, based on the comments of *Avot D'Rabbi Natan*, extrapolates a different lesson from the first Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot*:

In Avot D'Rabbi Natan they added that being patient is not only applicable in judgment but that a person should be patient in everything and shouldn't be quick to get impatient because one

באבות של ר"נ פ"א ד' הוסיפו בדבר שלא בדין לבד נאמר כן אלא שיהא אדם נותן מתון בכל דבריו ולא יהא נמהר להקפיד על דבריו שכל

who gets angry will inevitably forget things (i.e. make mistakes).

Beit HaBechirah, Avot 1:1

הכועס סוף שהוא משכח את דבריו.

בית הבחירה, אבות א:א

R. Meiri's comments focus on the *bein adam lachaveiro* (interpersonal) aspect of patience. A lack of patience can sometimes lead to taking our frustrations out on others. R. Yisrael Tausig quotes his father-in-law, R. Yosef Pressburger, who explains the Mishnah's connection between this type of patience and teaching many students:

The three ideas [in the Mishnah] are all connected: If you are patient and interact with people with a positive disposition, not with impatience, you will merit teaching many students and through them you can create safeguards for the Torah ...

Beit Yisrael, Shemot 3:5

שלשה דברים אלו תלויים זה בזה: אם תהיו מתונים ותקבלו כל אדם בסבר פנים יפות, ולא תהיו קפדנים, תזכו להעמיד תלמידים הרבה ועל ידיהם תוכלו לעשות סייג לתורה ...

בית ישראל, שמות ג:ה

Questions for the Table:

- 1) How can "teach many students" be applied to those who are not teachers by profession?
- 2) Based on R. Meiri and R. Tausig, why is it important for everyone (not just judges and teachers) to have patience for others?

Patience and Experiencing the Process

Have you ever made something yourself rather than buy it ready-made? Did the fact that you made the item yourself impact your experience of using it? The Talmud relates how R. Chiya prepared educational materials to teach his students:

R. Chiya said: I make sure that the Torah is never forgotten from the Jewish people. I bring flaxseed and plant it and then weave nets from the plant to trap deer. I feed its meat to orphans and with its skins I prepare scrolls and head to a place where there are no school teachers and write the Five Books of Moses for five different students and I teach the Six Orders of Mishnah to six students and tell them "teach what you have learned to your fellow students."

Ketuvot 103b

א"ל ר' חייא אנא עבדי דלא משתכחה תורה מישראל דאייתנא כיתנא ושדיינא ומגדלנא נישבי וציידנא טביא ומאכילנא בישראל ליתמי ואריכנא מגילתא ממשכי דטביא וסליקנא למתא דלית בה מקרי דרדקי וכתיבנא חמשה חומשי לחמשה ינוקי ומתנינא שיתא סידרי לשיתא ינוקי, לכל חד וחד אמרי ליה אתני סידרך לחברך.

כתובות קג:

Questions for the Table:

- 1) Why did R. Chiya go through all of the preparatory steps to attain the scrolls? Wouldn't it have been a better use of his time to purchase the scrolls from a professional?
- 2) Why do you think R. Chiya excluded the children from the initial preparations?

R. Azriel Hildesheimer explains why R. Chiya went to such an extreme to prepare everything personally:

The commentators all wondered: Why was it necessary for all of these peculiar preparations from planting the flax, [making the] nets, trapping, preparing the parchment and writing the scrolls with an effort that had no limits? Why didn't he just purchase

כל המפרשים תמהו למה לי כל ההכנות התמוהות הללו מזריעת הפשתן, מכמורות, צידה תיקון הקלפים וכתובת המגילות ביגיעה בלי שיעור ולמה לא היה לוקח ה' חומשים ושיתא סדרי משנה כתובים?

written versions of the Five Books and Moses and the Six Orders of Mishnah? This is very puzzling! ... [One can answer] in a simple and logical way that if a student sees how much effort the teacher exerted on behalf of the student, the student will be more interested in listening.

Novellae of R. Azriel Hildesheimer, Ketuvot 103b

אתמהה... בדרך נגלה והשכל הפשוט מצד
עצמו אמת ונכון דאם התלמיד רואה כמה
יגיעות יגע המורה בהכנות בעדו יטה לו
יותר לב ואוזן.
הדושי רבי עזריאל הלדסהיימר, כתובות
קג:

R. Chiya's students had a greater appreciation for the process involved in production of the scrolls that they learned from and it greatly enhanced their experience. At the same time, R. Chiya specifically did not involve the children in the beginning stages of the process; they only participated in its final stages. Perhaps he felt that they didn't have enough patience to go through the entire process and instead of appreciating it, they would have resented it. R. Chiya's method allowed his students to reap the benefits of connecting to the process by ensuring that they had an appropriate and balanced level of involvement.

Questions for the Table:

- 1) R. Hildesheimer's comments focus on the impact that R. Chiya's actions had on his students. What impact do you think these actions had on R. Chiya?
- 2) What are some factors to determine whether it is reasonable to perform a specific preparation personally?

Patience, like all traits, is an especially valuable characteristic when we learn to balance it with other traits and values. We can benefit greatly from patiently weighing decisions and carrying out our actions with precision as long as our patience doesn't become an excuse for indecision or procrastination. When we help others, we should be patient and understand that not everyone has the same talents and abilities. If one is truly patient, it will be easy to determine when we can no longer help someone else with what he/she needs to be taught. Whether teaching others or doing something ourselves, we should realize that the more patience we have for the experience, the more we will appreciate it.

Compiled by Rabbi Josh Flug, Director of Torah Research, CJF

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF AUTHORS CITED

Orchot Tzaddikim was written in the 14th or 15th century. The author is unknown. The book discusses many different character traits and is often quoted in discussions on ethics and values.

R. Aharon Levine (1879-1941) was known as "The Reisha Rav," after the community he led in Reisha, Poland. His *HaDerash VeHaIyun* is a collection of his sermons. He was a member of the Polish parliament before the outbreak of World War II and was murdered by the Nazis in 1941.

R. Menachem Meiri (1249-1306) was a French scholar. He is most well-known for his *Beit HaBechirah*, a commentary on the Talmud. He was heavily influenced by the teachings of Rambam.

R. Yisrael Tausig (1889-1967) was born in Hungary and moved to Jerusalem in the 1930's. He was the rabbi of the Batei Ungarin community in Jerusalem, a community built for Hungarians who moved to Israel. His *Beit Yisrael* is a collection of comments on the Torah portion.

R. Azriel Hildesheimer (1820-1899) was a German rabbi who served a number of communities and founded a yeshiva. He is most well-known for modernizing Orthodox Judaism in Germany.

ⁱ "Millennials will benefit and suffer due to their hyperconnected lives," Pew Research Center study, February 2012, available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Hyperconnected-lives/Overview/Overview-of-responses.aspx>.