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'Iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens the wit of their friend.'

Proverbs 27:17



Introduction

Welcome to the fifth week of this Alyth Chavruta Project course on Pirkei Avot. This week, we approach the fifth chapter of Pirkei Avot, which you can find (in abbreviated form) on pages 720-723 of the RJ prayer book. We have selected one Mishnah that deals with the nature of love, and another that speculates on the life trajectory of a human being.

The text itself can be found here in both Hebrew only and Hebrew with translation. For those with some knowledge of Hebrew, we encourage you to attempt your own translation, but there is absolutely no expectation that you engage with the Hebrew. As usual, there is also no requirement to get to the end of the pack – we have provided more than you can get through in an hour of study, and we encourage you to focus on understanding a small amount rather than becoming confused by a greater amount.

Further resources and advice on how to get the most out of chavruta can be found in our [revised FAQs](#). We look forward to seeing you on Thursday to share our learning with each other.

As we will be studying during the Omer, we will include the blessing for counting the Omer at the beginning of each text pack, as well as the blessing for study as usual.

Blessing for Study

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו, וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, whose commandments make us holy, and who commands us to devote ourselves to the study of Torah.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu la-asok b'divrey Torah.

COUNTING THE OMER

The 49-day period from the second night of Pesach up to Shavuot is known as the Omer. Because of a longstanding dispute about when the Omer is supposed to begin, it became necessary to count the days out loud every night with a blessing. We have included the Hebrew and English formulae here so that you can count the Omer together with your partner when you meet. According to the Shulchan Aruch, it is possible to count the Omer at any time of day, though the blessing is only said between sunset and sunrise – if you count the Omer after this point then it is customary to do so without saying the blessing.

Blessed are You, our Living God,
Sovereign of the universe, whose
commandments make us holy and
who commands us to count the Omer.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר:

Baruch attah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidd'shanu b'mitsvotav v'tsivanu al s'firat ha-omer.

For Friday Evening/Shabbat

Today is day 28, making four weeks of
the Omer.

הַיּוֹם שְׁמוֹנֶה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שָׁהֵם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת לְעֹמֶר

For Saturday Evening/Sunday

Today is day 29, making four weeks and
one day of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם תְּשַׁעָּה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שָׁהֵם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וַיּוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמֶר

For Sunday Evening/Monday

Today is day 30, making four weeks and
two days of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שָׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה
שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁנַיִם יָמִים לְעֹמֶר



For Monday Evening/Tuesday

Today is day 31, making four weeks and three days of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם אֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שָׁהָם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

For Tuesday Evening/Wednesday

Today is day 32, making four weeks and four days of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שָׁהָם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

For Wednesday Evening/Thursday

Today is day 33, making four weeks and five days of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשָׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שָׁהָם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וַחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

For Thursday Evening/Friday

Today is day 34, making four weeks and six days of the Omer.

הַיּוֹם אַרְבָּעָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שָׁהָם
אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁשֵׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

**Selections from Pirkei Avot, Chapter 5, the Hebrew text
(translation begins on page 5)**

יט כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר, בטל דבר, בטל דבר, בטלה אהבה. ושאינה תלויה
בדבר, אינה בטלה לעולם. איזו היא אהבה התלויה בדבר, זו אהבת
אמנון ותמר. ושאינה תלויה בדבר, זו אהבת דויד ויהונתן:

כד הוא היה אומר, בן חמש שנים למקרא, בן עשר למשנה, בן שלש
עשרה למצות, בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד, בן שמונה עשרה לחפה, בן
עשרים לרדוף, בן שלשים לכח, בן ארבעים לביתה, בן חמשים לעצה,
בן ששים לזקנה, בן שבעים לשיבה, בן שמונים לגבורה, בן תשעים
לשיח, בן מאה כאלו מת ועבר ובטל מן העולם:



5:19

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, בְּטֵל דְּבָר, בְּטֵלָה אֲהָבָה. וְשִׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ
בְּדָבָר, אִינָהּ בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם.

אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה הַתְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבַת אֲמֹנּוֹן וְתָמָר.

וְשִׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבַת דָּוִד וַיהוֹנָתָן:

Any love that depends on a thing, when the thing disappears, the love disappears. But when it does not depend upon a thing, it never disappears.

What love is it that depends upon a thing? The love of Amnon and Tamar.

And what love is it that does not depend upon a thing? The love of David and Jonathan.

Questions

- Read the story of Amnon and Tamar from 2 Samuel 13 (you can find the version on Sefaria [here](#)). On what does this love depend?
- Read the story of David and Jonathan from 1 Samuel 18 (you can find the version on Sefaria [here](#)). How is this love different to the love Amnon feels for Tamar?
- How does a reading of the commentary from Isaiah Horowitz (on page 7) develop our understanding?

הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא, בֶּן עֶשֶׂר לְמִשְׁנָה, בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְמִצְוֹת, בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְתַלְמוּד, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה לְחִפָּה, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרְדוּף, בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לְכַח, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה, בֶּן חֲמֵשִׁים לְעֶצֶה, בֶּן שִׁשִּׁים לְזִקְנָה, בֶּן שִׁבְעִים לְשִׁיבָה, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגְבוּרָה, בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים לְשׁוּחַ, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאֵלוֹ מֵת וְעֵבֵר וּבָטַל מִן הָעוֹלָם :

He [Yehudah ben Teima]¹ used to say, ‘At five years old, [one is ready] to study Scripture; at ten, to study Mishnah; at thirteen years old, for the commandments; at fifteen for the Talmud; at eighteen for the *chuppah*; at twenty to pursue; at thirty for power; at forty for understanding; at fifty for counsel; at sixty for old age; at seventy for the hoary head; at eighty for special strength; at ninety for bending; at 100 it is as though one has died and disappeared from the world.’

Questions

- Why do you think specific ages are deemed appropriate for encountering certain texts? Do you agree?
- What ages and what life experiences might be missing here? How would you add to the list?
- How does this list compare with Shakespeare’s (on page 9)?

¹ This is the only mention of Yehudah ben Teima in the entire Mishnah, and it is difficult to know much about him, except that he lived in the Land of Israel, probably in the 2nd century CE.



SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, *Sh'nei Luchot HaBrit*

**ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו ורבקה אוהבת את יעקב. בכאן רומז
הא דתנן כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל הדבר בטל כו', וכל שאינה
תלויה בדבר האהבה מתקיימת. על כן יצחק שאהב את עשו בשביל
ענייני עולם הזה, כתיב ויאהב לשון עבר, כי כשלא הביא ציד בטלה
האהבה. ורבקה אוהבת את יעקב בשביל עולם הבא הנצחי, אומר
אוהבת, שאוהבת תמיד ולא פוסק: **ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו
ורבקה אוהבת את יעקב.****

'Isaac loved Esau because he put game in her mouth, and Rebecca loved Jacob' (Genesis 25:28). From here it alludes to the teaching: 'Any love that depends on a thing, when the thing disappears etc.' and any love that does not depend on a thing, that love will endure. Thus, Isaac who loved Esau because of the things of this world, it is written 'he loved' (*vaye'ehav*) – in the past tense – for when he no longer brought game, his love would disappear. But Rebecca loved Jacob because of the world to come that endures. It says 'she loves' (*ohevet*) [in the present tense] – that she loves always, and will not cease.

Bartenura, commentary on Pirkei Avot 5:24

**בן חמש שנים למקרא. מערלה ילפינן, דכתיב שלש שנים יהיה לכם
ערלים וגו' ובשנה הרביעית יהיה כל פריו קדש הלולים, שאביו מלמדו
צורת האותיות והכר הנקודות. ובשנה החמישית תאכלו את פריו להוסיף
לכם תבואתו, מכאן ואילך ספי ליה כתורא:**

'At five years old, [one is ready] to study Scripture' – We learn this from *orlah*,² as it is written, '[When you enter the land and plant any tree for food,

² *Orlah* is the prohibition on eating fruit from a new tree.

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you shall regard its fruits as forbidden.] Three years it shall be forbidden for you [not to be eaten.] In the fourth year, all its fruits shall be set aside for jubilation before the Eternal; (Leviticus 19:23-24) – that a parent should teach their child the shape of the letters and recognition of the vowels, ‘and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit – that its yield to you may be increased: I the Eternal am your God’ (Leviticus 19:25) – from here and onward, stuff him like an ox [tora].

בְּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרֵדָף. אַחַר מְזוּנוֹתָיו. לְאַחַר שְׁלֵמַד מְקַרְא מְשִׁנָּה וּגְמָרָא וּנְשָׂא אִשָּׁה וְהוֹלִיד בָּנִים, צָרִיף הוּא לְחֹזֵר וּלְבִקֵּשׁ אַחַר מְזוּנוֹת. פְּרוּשׁ אַחַר, בְּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרֵדָף אוֹתוֹ מִן הַשָּׂמַיִם וּלְהַעֲנִישׁוֹ עַל מַעֲשָׂיו, שָׂאִין בֵּית דִּין שֶׁל מַעֲלָה מַעֲנִישִׁין פְּחוֹת מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים:

‘At twenty to pursue’ – after their sustenance. After they have learned Scripture, Mishnah and Gemara, and they have married, and born children, they need to return and seek sustenance. Another explanation: at twenty one is pursued from heaven to punish for one’s deeds, for the heavenly court does not punish below the age of twenty.

בְּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לִפְתָּח. שֶׁהַלְוִיִּם הָיוּ מְקִימִים אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּמְפָרְקִין וְטוֹעֲנִין אֶת הָעֲגֻלוֹת וְנוֹשְׂאִין בְּפִתְחָם מִבֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וּמַעֲלָה:

‘At thirty for power’ – for the Levites would set up the Tabernacle and load the carts and carry on their shoulders from the age of thirty and upwards.

בְּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה. שֶׁלְאַחַר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבָּר אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא נָתַן ה' לָכֶם לֵב לְדַעַת וְעֵינַיִם לְרֹאוֹת וְאָזְנִים לִשְׁמֹעַ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

‘At forty for understanding’ – since after forty years the Israelites were in the wilderness, Moses said to them, ‘And the Eternal did not give you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to ear, until this day’ (Deuteronomy 29:3).



William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2 Scene 7

JACQUES: All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

The Mishnah is a Jewish legal code from approximately 200 CE, containing legal rulings and disputes of the sages which are written down there for the first time. It is the first part of what is called the 'Oral Law', which for traditional Jews is just as authoritative as the Written Law (the Tanach). The Mishnah is divided into six 'orders', and each order is divided into tractates. Pirkei Avot is included in *Seder Nezikin*, which deals with the laws of damages (tort law).

One of the foremost commentaries on the Mishnah was written by the **Bartenura** (Ovadia ben Abraham of Bertinoro) in the fifteenth century in Italy. Since the Mishnah was first printed in the mid-sixteenth century, rarely has it appeared without his commentary.

Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (1555-1630) began his life in Germany and died in the town of S'fat in the Land of Israel. As a biblical commentator and mystic, Horowitz's most famous work is *Sh'nei Luchot HaBrit* (*The Two Tablets of the Covenant* – *Shelah* for short).

The playwright and poet, **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616) is perhaps the most famous of writers in the English language. His comedy *As You Like It* is believed to have been written in 1599 and the monologue quoted here is from Jacques, a melancholy noble exile.