

Toldot Shimshon

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Chapter V – Mishnah 20

הוא הִזָּה אומר, בְּן חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא, בְּן עֶשְׂרִי לְמִשְׁנָה, בְּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְמִצְוֹת, בְּן חֲמִשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְתַלְמוּד, בְּן שְׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה לְחַוְפָּה, בְּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרִדּוּף, בְּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לְכֶסֶם, בְּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה, בְּן חֲמִשִּׁים לְעֵצָה, בְּן שִׁשִּׁים לְזִקְנָה, בְּן שִׁבְעִים לְשִׁיבָה, בְּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגִבּוּרָה, בְּן תְּשַׁעִים לְשׁוֹחַ, בְּן מֵאָה כְּאִילוֹ מֵת וְעֵבֶר וּבְטֹל מִן הָעוֹלָם.

He¹ used to say: At five years old the study of Scripture; at 10 years old, the study of Mishnah; at 13 years old, subject to the commandments; at 15 years old, the study of Talmud; at 18 years old, the bridal canopy; at 20 years old, for pursuit [of livelihood]; at 30 years old, the peak of strength; at 40 years old, wisdom; at 50 years old, for [giving] counsel; at 60 years old, old age; at 70 years old, fullness of years; at 80 years old, the age of “strength”; at 90 years old, a bent body; at 100 years old, like a dead man and gone completely out of the world.

עֲקֻבוֹת הַמִּשְׁנָה הַזֹּאת בְּזִמְנֵן זְמַנָּם וְזְמַנֵּיהֶם, נוֹדְעוּ לְבָאִים בְּסוּד ה'. וְאֲנַחְנוּ נַעֲלֶה בְּמִסְיֵלָה הָעוֹלָה בֵּית אֵל, לְפִי פֶשֶׁטֶן שֶׁל דְּבָרִים. וּמִתְחַלֵּה קִשְׁיָה עַל הַכֶּלֶל כְּלוּ, לְמַה קוֹדֵם עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה—חֵלֶק הַזְּמַנִּים מִחֲמֵשׁ לְחֲמֵשׁ, וּמִעֶשְׂרִים וְהַלְאָה—לְעֵשְׂרִיּוֹת.

The footsteps of this Mishnah,² in the time, their time, their times,³ are known to those who enter into the esoteric secrets of G-d.⁴ We will ascend by the way that ascends Beth El,⁵ according to the simple understanding of things.

Question 1: First, there's a question on the entire rule: Why prior to 20 years, is it divided in 5-year terms [i.e., 5, 10, 15, and 20; and also 13 and 18], but from 20 years and onward, it is divided in 10-year terms?

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¹ In our edition, the previously mentioned Tanna was Judah ben Tema. In other editions of Pirkei Avot, this Mishnah is placed at the end of the chapter, with the previously mentioned Tanna being Ben Hay Hay.

² Cf. Ps. 89:52, “in the footsteps of the Messiah.”

³ Cf. Megillah 2a, discussing whether there is any significance in the difference between the terms “the time,” “their time,” and “their times.”

⁴ The term appears in a few places in Isaiah HaLevi Horowitz, *Shnei Luchot haBrit* (1698), including Torah Shebichtav: Bereishis, Torah Ohr 98; Lech Lecha, Torah Ohr 2; Shelach, Torah Ohr 5 and 42 and Shaar HaOtiyot, Lev Tov 8.

⁵ A common term in Rabbinic literature, such as found in *Igerot haRambam*, Chiddushei haRambam 122.

ויובן, בְּמַה שֶׁכָּתַב הַרְמַב"ן ו"ל בְּפָרֶשֶׁת בְּהַעֲלוֹתָהּ, שֶׁכָּל אָדָם נוֹתֵן לְבוֹ בַּעֲשִׂירֵי יוֹתֵיו, כִּי יִשְׁתַּנּוּ בָהֶם הַטְּבָעִים, וְיִדַע בְּהִגִּיעוֹ לַעֲשָׂרִים אוֹ לְשָׁלוּשִׁים, כִּי יִדַע בּוֹ שְׂכִינּוֹ וּקְרוֹבָיו וְיִזְדַּעְזְעוּהוּ. אָבָל בְּהִגִּיעוֹ לַעֲשָׂרִים וְחָמֵשׁ, לֹא יִרְגִישׁ בּוֹ כָּל כָּף. עַכ"ל. אָמְנָם קוֹדֵם עֲשָׂרִים, עֲדִיין הוּא קָטָן, וּמוֹנִים הִדְשִׁיו וְשָׁנָיו, וּמְרַגִּישִׁים בּוֹ טְבַע אַחֵר, מְחַמֵּשׁ לְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים.

Answer to Question 1: **It will be understood, by what the Ramban of blessed memory wrote in parashat Beha'alotecha, that: "Each person pays attention to [the passing of] his decades, since his [physical and emotional] nature changes [at these stages]. He will know when he reaches the age of 20 or 30; for even his neighbors and relatives will notice [these changes] and inform him of it. But when a person reaches 25, they do not notice it so much."**⁶

Indeed, prior to 20, he is still small, and counts the months and years, and feels a different nature, every five years.

אָבָל עֲדִיין קוֹשֶׁה עַל הַפָּרֶט, דְּבִשְׁלֵמָא הַבְּבוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת וְהָאֲמֻצָּעִיּוֹת, יֵשׁ בָּהֶם אֵיזָה חִידוּשׁ, שֶׁבֶן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה וְהִגִּיעַ לְשָׁנֵי הַהוֹרָאָה, וּמִבֶּן חָמֵשִׁים רְאוּי לַעֲצָה, וְכֵן הַזְקָנָה וְהַשִּׁיבָה רְאוּיִים לְהַתְּכַבֵּד. אָבָל הַשְּׂמִי בְבוֹת הָאֲחֵרוֹנוֹת, בְּפָרֶט כֵּן תִּשְׁעִים לְשׁוּם, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאֵילוֹ מֵת, מֵאֵי קָא מְשַׁמְעֵ לֵן, וּמָה בָּא לְלַמְּדֵנוּ.

Question 2: **But there's still a question about the details, because granted, the associations given for the first and middle ages have some novelty, e.g., for "at 40 wisdom" and arriving at the years of instruction, and from 50 years-old suitable for [giving] counsel, and similarly "old age" at 60 and "fullness of years" at 70 deserve to be respected.**

But regarding the last two ages, specifically, a 90-year-old having a bent body, and a 100-year-old, like a dead man, what is he teaching us?

וְגַם זֶה יוֹבֵן, בְּמַה שֶׁכָּתַב הַרְמַב"ן בְּפָסוּק "אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ", שֶׁנִּי תִי"ו מְכֻוֹנִים זֶה כְּנֶגֶד זֶה, וּפְנִיָהּ אִישׁ אֶל אַחֵיו. תִּי"ו שְׁלֵמָעֵלָה, רוּם הַשָּׁמַיִם. תִּי"ו שְׁלֵמָטָה, עוֹמֵק הָאָרֶץ. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר "שָׁמַיִם לְרוּם וְאָרֶץ לְעֹמֵק". וְעַל כֵּן, אַחֵר שֶׁהִזְכִּיר "הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ", הִיפֵךְ וְאָמַר "אָרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם", לְלַמְּדָהּ, כִּי הַמְּצִיאוֹת כְּלוֹ עֲנָן אֶחָד, שֶׁל מַעֲלָה פּוֹנֶה לְמַטָּה, וְשֶׁל מַטָּה פּוֹנֶה לְמַעֲלָה וְכוּ'. עַכ"ל.

This will be understood by what Rabbeinu Bahya wrote on the verse, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth:"⁷

The two [letters] *tav* [in the word *toldot*, "generations"] are in opposition, facing each other, the upper [first] *tav* [represents] the heights of heaven, the lower [second] *tav* [represents] the depths of the earth. This is the meaning of what is said, "Like the heaven in its height, like the earth in its depth."⁸ Therefore, after [Scripture] mentions "the heaven and the earth" [at the beginning of the verse], it reverses and says "earth and heaven" [at the end of the verse], to teach you, that all creation are one matter, of the upper [heaven] facing the lower [earth], and of the lower [earth] facing the upper [heaven], because thus the generations of both will be bound.

- Rabbeinu Bahya on Gen. 2:4

⁶ Ramban on Num. 8:5.

⁷ Gen. 2:4.

⁸ Prov. 25:3.

ואף אנו נאמר, שֶׁהַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהַגּוּף, הֵם הַעֲגִיבֵי שְׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ מִמֶּשׁ, וְלִכּוֹן בְּשָׁנִים הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת שֶׁל אָדָם, הַנֶּשְׁמָה פּוֹנֶה לְמַטָּה, לְהִשְׁפִיעַ לַגּוּף. וְהַגּוּף פּוֹנֶה לְמַעְלָה, לְהִגְבִיר כּחוֹ וְשִׁכְלוֹ וְתַבּוּנָתוֹ. וְכָל זֶה הוּא בִימֵי הַקִּיּוּם שֶׁל הָאָדָם, כְּדִכְתִּיב "יִמֵּי־שָׁנוֹתֵינוּ כְּהֵם שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה וְאִם בְּגִבּוֹרֵת" וְכוּ'. וְכֵן הֵם הַשְּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, כֹּל יְמֵי קִיּוּמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם. אָבֵל כְּשִׁיגִיעַ זְמַנָּם לְהִתְבַּטֵּל, יִתְחַלְשׁוּ מְעַט מְעַט, כְּמוֹ הָאָדָם בְּסוּף יָמָיו, כְּדִכְתִּיב "שְׁמַיִם קָעֲשׂוּ וְהָאָרֶץ כִּבְגָד תִּבְלָה", דְּהֵינּוּ לֵאמֹר, כְּדָרַךְ הָעָשׂוֹן וְכִלְיֵי הַבְּגָד. שְׂאֵז הַשְּׁמַיִם אֵינָם פּוֹנִים עוֹד לְמַטָּה, אֲלֵא אֲדַרְבָּה, מִתְפָּרְדִים מִן הָאָרֶץ, וְכֵן הָאָרֶץ מִתְפָּרֶדֶת מִן הַשְּׁמַיִם. וְכֵן הוּא הָאָדָם, בֵּן תְּשָׁעִים לְשׁוֹת, כְּלוֹמֵר, שֶׁהַגּוּף אֵינוֹ עוֹד מִתְעַלֶּה לְמַעְלָה, אֲלֵא אֲדַרְבָּא, שֶׁחַ וְיִוָּרֵד, בְּשִׁבִיל שֶׁהַנֶּשְׁמָה מִתְפָּרֶדֶת וְעוֹלָה. וְכֵן מֵאָה קָאִילוּ מֵת לְגַמְרֵי, קָאִילוּ קָבֵר נִתְפָּרֵד וְנִעְשָׂה עָפָר כְּשִׁהְיָה.

We will say that the soul and the body are both a matter of heaven and earth, and therefore in the first years of a person, the soul turns downward, to influence the body. The body turns upwards, to increase its strength and intelligence. All this is in the days of man's existence, as it is written, "The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years."⁹ Thus these are the heaven and the earth, all the days of the existence of the world.

But when the time comes for them to be abolished, they will weaken little by little, like man at the end of his days, as it is written, "the heaven should melt away like smoke, and the earth wear out like a garment,"¹⁰ which is slowly, as the way of smoke and the wearing out of the garment. For then the heaven won't turn downward any more, rather to the contrary, it will separate from the earth, and likewise the earth separates from the heaven.

Answer to Question 2: Thus too is man: at 90 years old a bent body, as if to say, that the body no longer ascends upward, but to the contrary, slumps and descends, because the soul separates and ascends. At 100 years old, as though he's completely dead, as though he's already separated and become dust, as it was.¹¹

The Toldot Shimshon now draws parallels between the ages of man and the days of Creation:

וּלְפִי דְרָכֵינוּ הַנֶּזְכָּר לְעֵיל, הַפּוֹנֶה קְדָמִים לְיָמֵים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים שֶׁל הַבְּרִיאָה, הַמְשָׁנָה הַזֹּאת סוֹדֶרֶת סְעֻדָּה מוֹל יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי הַקָּדוּם, שֶׁבּוֹ נִבְרָא אָדָם. וְיָדוּעַ שֶׁהָאָדָם הוּא תְּכֵלִית הַבְּרִיאָה, שְׂאִם אֵין אָדָם, אֵין עוֹלָם. וְהָאָדָם אֵינוֹ בָּא לְכָלֵל חֲשִׁיבוֹת לְהִיּוֹת נִמְנָה בְּכָלֵל אֲנָשִׁים, עַד שִׁיְהִיָּה בֵּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה, וְכֵן אֵין חֲלָקֵי נִשְׁמָתוֹ מִשְׁתַּלְמִים בּוֹ, עַד שִׁיְהִיָּה בֵּן עֶשְׂרִים, כְּנֹדָע לְחַכְמֵי הָאָמֶת.

According to our way of understanding mentioned above, which refers to the first days of Creation, this Mishnah arranges its supports corresponding to the original sixth day of Creation, when Adam was created. It's known that man is the purpose of Creation, that if there were no man, there would be no world. The person does not come to be of any importance to be counted among the people at all, until he is 20 years old. Likewise. the parts

⁹ Ps. 90:10.

¹⁰ Isaiah 51:6.

¹¹ Cf. Eccl. 12:7.

of his soul are not completed within him, until he is 20 years old, as is known to those wise in the truth, i.e., the Kabbalists.¹²

ולכן הנשׁש מעלות—בטְהרת האדם—הראשונות שֶׁבאוּ במשנה, הן מכוונות לימי הבריאה. שְׁהרי ביום הראשון אף על פי שֶׁנִּבְרָא בוֹ האור, הִנֵּה הָאֲצִילוֹת מְעוֹרָב, וְלֹא נִבְדַּל דָּבָר מִדָּבָר, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ רַשִׁ"י עַל פְּסוּק "יְהִי מְאֹרֹת", כִּל תולדות שְׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ נִבְרָאוּ בְיוֹם רֵאשׁוֹן, וְאַחֵר כָּה, כִּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נִקְבַּע בְיוֹם שְׁנֵגֶזַר עָלָיו וְכוּ'. וְכֵן הִנְעַר, כִּשְׁקוּרָא הַמְקַרָא אִינוּ מִבֵּין וְאִינוּ מִבְּחִין, כִּי "וַעֲזַר פְּרָא אָדָם יוֹלֵד", וְהַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְכַתֵּב צְרִיכָה לַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבַעַל פֶּה, וְזֶהוּ בֵּן חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנַיִם לַמְקַרָא.

Therefore, the first six degrees—in the purity of man—the first ones that came in the Mishnah, are directed at the days of Creation. After all, on the first day, even though the light was created on it, the Atzilut (“the world of emanation”) was mixed and there was no separation of one element from another,¹³ as Rashi explained on the verse, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night,”¹⁴ “all generations of heaven and earth were created on the first day, but each of them was set [in its place] on that day when it was so commanded.”¹⁵ So too with the youth, when he reads the Bible, he does not understand and does not distinguish, for “An empty man will get understanding, when the colt of a wild ass is born as a man.”¹⁶ The written Torah needs the oral Torah, and this is the meaning of “at five years old the study of Scripture,” a 5-year-old will start with the Scripture, but a deeper understanding won’t come until he is older and begins to learn the Talmud.

בְּשָׁנַיִ "יְהִי רְקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיִהְיֶה מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם" כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתְבוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים, שְׁנֵתָן סִימָן בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם לַפְּעוּל הַפְּעוּלוֹת בָּהֶם, כְּאָדָם הַבּוֹנֶה חֲרֻבָה, וְהוּא מְסַמֵּן, זֶה חֶדֶר וְזֶה עֲלִיָּה. וְאִף כָּאֵן בְּלִימוּד הַמְּשֻׁנָה, יֵשׁ לוֹ סִימָנִים לְבִיאוֹר הַמְּקַרָא לְגוֹף הַהֶלְכוֹת, אֲבָל עֲדַיִן אִינוּ יוֹדַע הַדְּבָרִים עַל בּוֹרְיָיִן, שֶׁהַעוֹסְקִים בַּמְּשֻׁנָה אֵינָה מְדָה טוֹבָה כְּמוֹ הַתְּלִמּוּד, שְׂאִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהוֹרוֹת הַלֵּכָה מִן הַמְּשֻׁנָה. וְזֶהוּ בֵּן עֶשְׂרִי לַמְּשֻׁנָה.

On the second day of Creation, “G-d said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.’”¹⁷ This is as the commentators wrote, “that it gave a sign in the midst of the water to initiate an activity with them, like a man who builds a ruin, and he marks, this is a room and this is an attic.”¹⁸ Even here, in the study of the Mishnah, he has signs for the clarification of the Scripture for the body of the halachot, but still doesn’t know all the matters in their totality, for engaging with the Mishnah is not a good trait such as engaging with the Talmud, for it is impossible to teach halacha from the Mishnah. This is the meaning of “at 10 years old, the study of Mishnah.”

¹² *Ma'avor Yavok*, Imrei No'a, chapter 10.

¹³ Rabbeinu Bahya on Gen. 2:7.

¹⁴ Gen. 1:14.

¹⁵ Rashi on Gen. 1:14.

¹⁶ Job 11:12.

¹⁷ Gen. 1:6.

¹⁸ Rabbeinu Bahya on Gen. 2:7.

בַּשְּׁלִישִׁי נתגלית הארץ ונצטייירה, שנאמר "ותראה היבשה". ואף האדם הזה בן שלוש עשרה שנה למצות, שהן מכוונות לאיבריו וגידיו, שנצטייירו באדם הזה.

On the third day of Creation, the earth was revealed and created, as it is said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” Even this person, “at 13 years old, is subject to the commandments,”¹⁹ for they are directed to his limbs and sinews, which was created in this person.

בְּרִבְעִי "יהי מארת". והוא בן חמש עשרה שנה לתלמוד, שהוא מאיר עיניו של אדם בתורה, והנשמה שנקראת "אור", משתעשעת באור הפלפול של התלמוד.

On the fourth day of Creation, “G-d said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years.’²⁰ This is likewise the meaning of, “at 15 years old, the study of Talmud,” for it brightens the eyes of man in Torah, and the soul—which is called “light”—delights in the light of the debate of the Talmud.

בַּחֲמִישִׁי כתיב "פרו ורבו", ובן שמונה עשרה לחופה.

On the fifth day of Creation, “G-d blessed them, saying, ‘Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.’²¹ This is the meaning of, “at 18 years old, the bridal canopy.”

בַּשֵּׁשִׁי נברא אדם, ואיתא בבראשית רבה על פסוק "עפר מן-הָאֲדָמָה", אדם וסנה, כבני עשרים שנה נבראו. וזהו בן עשרים לרדוף, דהיינו לרדוף אחר המצות, כדאיתא בסוף שבת, האי מאן דבמעלי שבתא, יחא גבר סדרן במצות.

On the sixth day of Creation, man was created, and it is brought in Gen. Rabbah on the verse, “The L-rd G-d created man from the dust of the earth:²² “Adam and Eve, were created around 20 years old.”²³ This is the meaning of “at 20 years old, for pursuit [of livelihood],” which is to pursue after the mitzvot, as is brought at the end of tractate Shabbat: “One who was born on the sixth day of the week will be a seeker. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said he will seek out mitzvot [as people are busy in Friday preparing for the Sabbath].²⁴

¹⁹ Gen. 1:9.

²⁰ Gen. 1:14.

²¹ Gen. 1:22.

²² Gen. 2:7.

²³ Gen. Rabbah 14:7.

²⁴ Shabbat 156a.

ועוד בכמה פנים פירשוהו המפרשים, נאלו ונאלו דברי אלהים חיים.

Also, the commentators interpret in other ways, and all these are words of the Living G-d.

האמת הוא שכן עשרים שנה יוצא צבא בישראל, ולפי שבשבע מדות שמנו לחכמים, יש בכללן הכח, וזה הכח אינו גיפר בכל ימי האדם, כמו הנזיר והעושר וכו'. לכן אמר בן שלשים לפתח, שאם יהיה לו הכח בהיות בן שלשים, נקרא שזכה למדה זו של הכח שהיא טובה לו, כמו שכתב המדרש שמואל על מתניתין דהנזיר והכח, שפמה מצות אי אפשר לעשותם מי שאין לו כח, ועי"ש.

The truth is that a 20-year-old goes out into the army in Israel. According to the seven measures that the sages listed, there is included strength.²⁵ This is the strength that isn't evident in all the days of man, such as beauty and riches, etc. Therefore, he said, "at 30 years old, the peak of strength," for if he has strength at 30 years of age, he is said to have merited this trait of strength, which is good for him. This is as *Midrash Shmuel* wrote on the Mishnah of beauty and strength, i.e., Pirkei Avot 6:8, that for several of the mitzvot, it's impossible for one who does not have strength to fulfill them, and see there.

ואחר כך מונה והולך, בן ארבעים לבינה וכו', וכמו שביארנו למעלה.

Afterwards, he continues counting, "at 40 years old, wisdom;" etc., and as we explained above.

* * *

²⁵ Pirkei Avot 6:8: "Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: Beauty, strength, riches, honor, wisdom, [old age], gray hair, and children are becoming to the righteous, and becoming to the world."